

Orit Krug: For People Who Have Experienced Trauma, Dance/Movement Therapy Can Promote Healing – and Improve Relationships - in Ways That Talk Therapy Can't.



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Interview conducted by:
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CEO CFO: Ms. Krug, what is the vision behind Orit Krug, Inc?

Ms. Krug: I help individuals and couples heal from past trauma and revive stagnant relationships using my unique neuroscientific approach to Dance/Movement Therapy. The bigger vision is that when more people heal their trauma and are able to give more love and receive more love, they can then spread it to their children, to their children's friends, and to other people around them. When we are stuck with unresolved trauma and fear, it spreads more fear, but when we are able to love, it spreads more love.

I work with clients from around the world, delivering online-based programs and destination retreats, so I am working to reach as many people as possible for this mission.

CEO CFO: What is the definition of trauma in your world?

Ms. Krug: The definition of trauma is when a certain event, or number of events, creates dysfunction in the nervous system. This means that the nervous system becomes rewired to detect fear and danger when it may not actually be there. This overstimulates the fear sensor in our brain to protect ourselves from becoming hurt again, or from experiencing the trauma again, even when there is no real physical or emotional threat.

CEO CFO: Is that medically agreed upon? Would you tell us a little bit more about the science, and where it stands today?

Ms. Krug: More than ever, research is showing how trauma is stored in the nonverbal parts of the brain and body, including the amygdala and hippocampus, and not just the cognitive brain, or prefrontal cortex. This outdated research, which many people still believe today, states that we can talk through trauma and access old memories through words and traditional talk therapy. However, new research is showing us that we need to have an embodied, somatic approach in order to access and release the full spectrum of memories. That is because when we experience trauma, those memories get stored inside the nonverbal brain as well as the nervous system.

In sum, research on how trauma impacts the brain (which is executed through brain imaging and mapping) shows us that the higher-functioning part of our brain, the one that dominates logic and verbal language, "goes offline" during chronic stress or traumatic events. That is why talk therapy is often limited in helping people resolve their trauma, even through cognitive awareness, mindfulness, or positive thinking.

CEOFCO: *When and how did you make the connection?*

Ms. Krug: I experienced trauma through my childhood and beyond. I went through a long and frustrating healing process, in which I spent over \$10,000 and several years in talk therapy, only to find myself still stuck in self-sabotaging patterns. At that point, my now-husband had broken up with me, and I was ready to give up on my healing and love life. However, I had just graduated with my Master's in Dance/Movement Therapy, and I decided to join the dance therapy program, thinking, "Okay, maybe this will work for me." It changed everything for me. I went from sabotaging the best relationship that I never thought I deserved, to really embracing and allowing in my husband's love.

That is my personal story on how I realized that, without including my body - without a process through movement to heal my trauma - I would not have been able to heal my trauma and let in the amount of love, joy, and pleasure that I experience today within my marriage and family.

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CEOFCO: *How does Dance/Movement Therapy work? Does it depend on the person, the situation, history? What are some of the variables in how a program would work for any individual or group?*

Ms. Krug: There are phases to the process that make Dance/Movement Therapy an incredibly powerful and effective modality to heal trauma; connecting to the body in a safe and gentle way is the most important first step. That's because trauma often makes us dissociate and disconnect from our bodies to protect us from the intense pain that we experienced during trauma. This is a common coping mechanism that the nervous system automatically carries out before we can even think about how we want to respond to a situation.

When I begin to move with my clients, it inevitably stirs up old memories stored in the nonverbal part of their brain. These memories and emotions come up very quickly because I guide them to move their body in a new and unplanned way, in a way that may have been impossible for clients to reach, even through years of talk therapy or by doing planned movements like yoga. As soon as I see my clients accessing old trauma, I can see it in their bodies. I see their micro-movements and micro-body signals that indicate they are about to go into a fear response, much like they do in their real world. That's a crucial moment in the process: instead of them reacting to that fear through repeating patterns of repressing or numbing the fear, I help them stay regulated in their nervous systems and connected to their bodies as we move together.

When my clients have repeated experiences of moving through their fear, while staying present in their own bodies and the therapeutic relationship with me, it allows them to regulate through conflict in relationships in their outside world, without overreacting or sabotaging. Because we do it in session together first, it's much easier to carry that new behavior into their real world, which eliminates that common struggle of talking about what they want to do differently but not actually seeing the change happen.

CEOFCO: *Without using any names, can you provide a specific example of how this might work?*

Ms. Krug: It's crucial to use intentional movement to break old patterns that stem from trauma, because movement is the vehicle for which we express ourselves and communicate in relationships. In my couples therapy work, we don't do that much talking, which is all left-brain action. I guide them to communicate nonverbally through movement. For example, in one couple's session, I had the partners explore physically moving further away and closer together. For both partners, in their day-to-day life, it felt detrimental when they wanted time and space away from each other. They felt guilty for wanting more independence, so they abandoned their own needs to try to match each other. This led to deep unfulfillment within themselves and hopelessness about the relationship as a whole. But when they moved further away from each other in the safety of our session, they realized it wasn't detrimental at all. My client said:

"Looking back, our conflicts weren't really disasters. It was us looking through a screen colored by past trauma. Once we healed the way we were physically reacting to each other, it changed everything for us in a way that nothing else ever had."

Because this couple had physical experiences of moving away from each other, and realizing it wasn't as horrible as they imagined, it gave them the embodied experience that it was safe to be more independent. Plus, we explored different ways they could choose to come back together. They especially loved slowly walking back towards each other and brushing up against each other's shoulders. Even six months after they finished the program, they told me they still do this particular movement which makes them laugh and feel more playful together. Plus, it's really empowering to feel in command of your body and choose how you want to connect to your partner instead of being on autopilot and going through the same old motions that don't spark excitement anymore.

Of course, this process looks different for every couple because each person brings different traumas and fears to the relationship. The couple I just mentioned clearly brought in some trauma and belief that independence in a relationship meant abandonment and failure. They had to learn a new way, and the years of couples therapy and conflict resolution exercises didn't quite hit the mark in the way they needed.

CEOFCO: *When you are dealing with a client, is it trial and error? Are you able to see things in their face, are they telling you how they feel at any given point so you can direct them towards a stronger or gentler movement? How does it work?*

Ms. Krug: That is a great question. I do have a specific process of using neuroscience with dance therapy. I also use movement analysis techniques that allow me to see certain behaviors and patterns that people demonstrate through their bodies that they wouldn't otherwise reveal through words. I wouldn't call it trial and error; it's more like learning and refining. It is a developing process where I learn about what their bodies are showing and how they typically react to stress or fear - not through the words, but through the body and through movement. For example, one couple I worked with had an incredible breakthrough in a session, where I had them embody and move the way that they typically blamed each other.

When I present this exercise in my "Deeper Love" program, it looks different for each couple. A couple might gesture aggressively towards each other, or they might get really close in each other's faces. The prompt is pretty open-ended, but by the time I introduce it in the program they know how to go with it. With this one couple, the woman was being so aggressive in her movements towards her partner that he looked legitimately frightened and started to cry. This surprised her, since it was rare for her to see him express deeper emotion. She felt horrible and realized, in that moment, that this was the way her mother acted towards her father, and she had promised herself that she would never do that.

Also, in that same moment, her partner got triggered by his childhood trauma, where he used to get blamed aggressively. As they both got triggered, I helped them move through the fear in their own bodies, together at the same time, so that they could start learning to be present with that fear, and in command of their responses even through that fear, instead of continuing to react to each other and repeating those unhealthy patterns. The trauma was hijacking their individual nervous systems, and it made them stuck - together - in the same pattern of arguments. The work that we did, allowed them to respond with so much more love and compassion versus resentment and fear.

CEOFCO: *Do you typically work more with couples, with individuals, people who have been in therapy, who have tried other programs? Would you give us an idea of the range of people you help?*

Ms. Krug: I work with couples and individuals. I have a specific pre-screening process through an application, which helps me discern if a potential client or couple is a good fit for my programs. That's because my programs are six months long, and the typical span of how long it takes people to heal trauma is usually years, even decades. So, before I accept any new clients, it's crucial that we determine if their bodies and nervous systems are ready for such a quick and deep change.

One of the questions on my application asks if they have been in therapy before. They don't know this while they are filling out the application but being in previous therapy is a requirement for us to work together. They need to already have the intellectual insight within their left hemisphere so that we can effectively integrate that with their right hemisphere and body, where the trauma is stored, and do that within six months. The fact that they have already spent

plenty of time talking about their trauma and gaining awareness puts them right at my doorstep and allows us to finally complete their healing in a way that really lasts.

CEOCFO: *Why remotely? How did that start? Why is that as good, or maybe better, than being in the same room with people, or is it just this is the way of the world today?*

Ms. Krug: Yes, I started my online business after quitting my job as the Director of Expressive Therapy at a psychiatric hospital, where I led a team and worked with the same round of patients locally for many years. At the same time, I started a podcast, and I was getting emails from people in all different parts of the world, saying "Thank you so much, I really needed this information, there was no other way I could have gotten it where I live." The longer I did it, the more I felt called to reach a much wider audience, versus the very small clientele with which I was working.

I was the first Dance/Movement Therapist to do this, which led the American Dance Therapy Association to grant me the Innovation Award in 2018. When I started, I was not sure if it was going to be as effective as in-person work. However, I found that there are amazing advantages through remote work. For example, in one of my early sessions, one of my clients felt very vulnerable being in her body, moving her body, and being seen in general. This caused problems in her relationship because she would often hide instead of addressing important conflicts or topics of discussion with her partner. In order to help her nervous system tolerate being seen, she sometimes moved out of the camera's view and only used her voice to be "seen." This gave her an unfamiliar but refreshing new ability to be in command of her body; she would start moving closer to the camera, maybe showing just a hand, or half of her body, or a part of her body, or turning her back to me, and really taking charge of how much she allowed herself to be seen.

This is exactly what is required of a safe, true trauma healing. We do not push people out of their comfort zones, we do not push them into exposure. We allow them, through their physical bodies - with my help and gentle encouragement - to decide how and when to take physical action of how much they can move through their fear. This is also known as "Expanding the Window of Tolerance," which is essentially increasing your ability to tolerate and stay regulated through difficult emotions of fear.

Of course, Covid happened two years after I started my online business, and everyone had to take their practice online. There were so many people who had asked me pre-Covid, "How are you doing this work online?" I got a lot of messages from many of those same people during Covid who said, "Wow, I see now, this really does work online!" It works really well for the clients, and it works great for me personally, as we have a toddler, and we like to travel pretty regularly.

CEOCFO: *As your business grows, and more people turn to you, will you have time for everybody? Are you training people? Are you looking to train people? What are your plans for your company down the line?*

Ms. Krug: I have been through quite a few versions of my company. I have had staff work for me and provide services for a couple of years, but I recently made the decision to be the sole provider. I've also built a beautiful online community where my clients take mentor roles and help in other ways, but I'm the only one currently providing the actual Dance/Movement Therapy.

I am also going to focus more of my services on retreats in the next few months. I recently had a huge epiphany, going on my own solo retreat back in May, that I can help people in a really impactful way by taking them away from their busy lives, travel to an amazing destination, and immerse them in a life-changing, healing experience with me. That will also help me personally, as the CEO, and also the service provider, to make big impacts in a short period of time, and also have fun while doing it!

CEOCFO: *What should people take away when they read about Orit Krug?*

Ms. Krug: I like to share that trauma healing looks different for everyone. Sometimes we may have an idea of what trauma healing looks like, or what it will look like to be healed. When people ask me, "When I go through your programs, what am I going to get from that?" or "What is it going to be like when I am finally healed?" I like to share some of the most common results that my clients experience from working together, along with the disclaimer that it may or may not look similar for anyone else.

Most often my clients describe feeling a deep sense of calm and peace in their bodies, as well as more comfortable, confident and in command of their emotions and responses. They say that their relationships are much easier and more

joyful, whereas before things were constantly tense and serious, and they go from compulsively nit-picking and criticizing their partners, to feeling much more compassion, acceptance, and love for themselves, as well as their partners. My favorite piece of feedback is when clients say how the things they used to be so scared of and worried about - the things that would keep them up at night or keep them in bed during the day - now feel small and insignificant, and they do not even really register anymore. This really indicates just how much their fears were not based on true reality (at least for many of the clients that I have worked with). Instead, they lived their lives relating to their partners as well as their own bodies - through trauma-tinted glasses that made everything look dangerous and risky.

If we can really allow ourselves to go through a process in which we heal and take off those trauma-tinted glasses, we can feel much better. This is possible for any human being with a nervous system because it is all about rewiring and building new neural pathways. No matter how much trauma you have been through, no matter how many years you have already been trying to heal, it is possible simply because you are a human being!

ORIT *Krug*