# Kevin Frank

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Kevin Frank is an Advanced Certified Rolfer and Rolf Movement Practitioner. His work focuses on articulating and integrating Hubert Godard's tonic function model of structural integration, and he has authored articles on this topic. He and Caryn McHose are the co-authors of *How Life Moves: Explorations in Meaning and Body Awareness* and are co-founders of *Resources in Movement*, a center for movement and consciousness inquiry in Holderness, NH.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (http://relationalimplicit.com).

*The following is a transcript of the original audio. Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.*

*Serge Prengel: You describe your work as being a Rolfing / Structural Integrator. What is this about?*

Kevin Frank: Well, the Structural Integration story starts back in antiquity probably, but in our modern world it started with Ida Rolf, born in 1895, who was interested in posture and she was a yoga practitioner. She later became interested in esoteric phenomena and she made a splash in the 20th century with her structural integration work which became later known as "Rolfing." She was talking about the plasticity of connective tissue and how we can revive health in people by speaking to the connective tissue system. At the same time, she made some provocative remarks that there is no psychology when it comes to the body if we really see the way in which posture is happening in someone, and if we work with transforming their way of meeting gravity…that in fact, we don't need to delve psychology analysis. It was a provocative remark but that and other things put her on the map.
I became interested in this because I had an enduring and persistent set of pains from physical work I had done,. But when I first received the work, it struck me as a wonderful context for being present with another person, a wonderful laboratory for seeing how we are attending and how we are able to meet each other, a place where I feel listened to at many different levels and at the same time some of my issues get addressed in a way that is fundamentally different from from a strictly emotional or cognitive point of view.

*S P: So, the way you describe your experience with it reminds me in part that your history has been Zen meditation and other forms of meditation and practices. So is this something that is a logical continuation of that? How does this relate to these practices?*

K F: That's an interesting question. I think there is something about sitting and becoming present and allowing the body process to revive itself that is an element you find in both of those inquiries, Rolfing inquiry and Zen meditation inquiry and I think you find it in many practices. There is also something I think aesthetically simple about the Zen approach to meditation, perhaps compared to maybe some other forms, and I think the Rolfing/Structural Integration process has certainly a reputation. In some ways, it has a somewhat simple and direct aesthetic as well.

*S P: So, I want to come back to what you were saying earlier about the "provocative" statement, ignoring psychology in a way. I guess the similarity with meditation is that you don't do psychology the way one traditionally does psychology, but something happens psychologically. So could you maybe address what happens psychologically through the Structural Integration?*

K F: Yes. I think, first of all, having been a practitioner of Zen meditation I found when I got into Structural Integration there was a whole bunch of domains that I felt really needed to be addressed at least in me and they did affect my psychology. Then, it comes down to (what it took me maybe quite a while to understand in a theoretical way, I think I sensed it right away), the value of speaking to the postural system. When a conversation becomes possible between, let's say, "You are my practitioner and I'm your client" and you start to work with me in this way, what we are calling "structural" meaning, making a lasting shift in how I stand in the world or how I move to do a task. If we start to have that conversation in a way that elicits the interest of my postural system, that's a very interesting conversation It's going to take me into territory that I don't know and so you as my practitioner are going to need to offer me some reassurance, and help me find resource. You are going to need to pace me, you are going to need watch for the signs of that I am adrift, too adrift, and have that conversation with my postural system in a way that is comfortable for me. But at the same time, it's a very exciting thing to have something touched within me that I intuitively know is there and to feel some rather deep shift in my coordination. It doesn't have to have a dramatic catharsis. And at the same time we know a higher level of structural integrity when we start to feel movement that has less effort and more effectiveness in our coordination, for instance. Even before we think about it, our body recognizes it as something that is an improvement, as something intelligent. It's something that feels like coming home.

*S P: So what you are describing is a conversation with posture and some of the words that you use--posture, how you stand, how you move, how you task--are very physical in some ways, but are also metaphors that we use all the time to describe the psychological attitudes of how we meet the world and we react in it. So how much of what you are saying is interplay between the literal parts of posture, standing and moving, and the metaphors that it evokes?*

K F: Well, let me see if I can…

*S P: Maybe one way to deal with it is to give an example of some of the things that might happen in a given session so that somebody who hasn't seen one might have a sense of relating to these concepts.*

K F: Let me take an example. We have two girdles, two limb structures. A shoulder girdle and a pelvic girdle and both of them are connected to our axis, our spinal system; head to tail and all the stuff in between. Thinking about the hand, arm, shoulder and spine, we might be working with somebody who has issues in their neck or shoulders but also might have some issues, which they may have reported to me or may not have reported to me, regarding how they are able to maintain a sense of comfort within themselves while relating with other people. Perhaps intimately, let's say, and rather than become informed or rather than questioning them about their psychological profile in terms of "What are your relationships like?" and so on, I'm just going to be curious about "Paul." When you use your hand to press an object away from you, how do you compose that movement? How, before you begin moving, and without thinking consciously about it, how postural systems create the ground on top of which your gesture emerges. And to be very specific, I might see what do I see/feel, in that client's hand as they begin to press that object away from them or something

like that. Let's say they have a chair and they push the chair away from them, what do I see happening in that person's hand? What do I see in that person's sense of spinal orientation, meaning an orientation to that space around the person, to the sense of support allowing weight. Very simple things like that I may notice "Oh there isn't particularly a lot of what we call, 'sensory impression,'" meaning allowing the sensory experience of the object to enter in the hand, to be taken in. I am probably going to see a gesture where the preparation previews inhibited movement.

*S P: Let me stop you here, to just clarify. So, what I am hearing you say is that instead of asking questions about psychological processes, you have the client perform a physical task, like pushing a chair, and you are asking them to concentrate on what's happening, not necessarily the conscious movement but the implicit movement, what comes from inside.*

K F: The movement of perception. Yes, there is a whole perceptive movement that happens before we physically move.

*S P: So what I'm hearing is that one of the functions of what happens in a session, is helping the client concentrate and be more able to perceive this pre-movement.*

K F: Yes, I would agree with that. I probably I wouldn't use the word "concentrate" (that maybe more of an aesthetic choice) but certainly "awareness," to not only be aware of the sensations in the hand but to feel bi-directionality in the spine, and to find a place of support. All of this, of course, involves a slowing down.

*S P: To be "aware," "mindfulness"…so then, definitely one of the things that happens is that sense of experiencing it at a deeper level by slowing down and increasing awareness.*

K F: I think that's a very fair statement, yes.

*S P: Then you are saying another thing that happens in the session is that you, as the practitioner, are observing the movement and reacting to it. In terms of maybe a sense of what the "norms" are, in terms of what needs to be said, maybe expending the hurt in the pre-movement or a sense of reacting to what the movement is. And based on these reactions, you make some hypothesis or react to the movement.*

K F: Yes, to allow the client to guide my guidance. So say I see that the preparation involves a contraction of (it might be very subtle) not only muscles in front of the trunk, but also perhaps a narrowing in a not helpful way--too much focus, so that the eyes are very focused on the object. This doesn't help the movement; it's what we normally do to do a good job; we focus our perception, and we might find that it's a good skill, but in rehabilitating the movement we might find that its especially resourceful to work with a broader, more peripheral use of our eyes while bringing a sense of awareness in the hand. We might find that as we start to make a change, getting back to your original point, that in fact we have uncovered significant psychological issues. As a shift occurs in coordination, as there is more flow in the capacity to push the object with a sense of ease, in fact that improvement of coordination can be (in same way that many psychological processes can be) a little bit overwhelming or activating, if you will. When you make a shift of coordination, you are speaking to a deep part of what holds us together and what assures us we are okay in the world.

*S P: So I am noticing that you are using terms that are similar to terms that therapies, somatic experiencing or sensorimotor, would be using. Are there similarities or relationships to what you do to these therapies?*

K F: I think definitely there are, I think fundamentally we are talking about a related phenomenon, and some of the things that are similar things are involved. What allows a person to feel comfortable exploring, something in the present moment that they feel they don't know how to do yet.. Perhaps in all of these endeavors there needs to be a quality of rapport, a quality of presence, a quality of listening and a tremendous amount of embodiment, isn't there? In the practitioner, what is it that allows a person to be comfortable to do this? Somewhere there, we're holding that possibility in our own bodily awareness, and I can't speak for all the different ways in which this is done, certainly what I do is informed by Alexander's work, by Feldenkreis' work, by Peter Levine's work, by Emily Conrad's work and Bonnie Cohen's. And there are many other people who have informed this work, I think there has been a wonderful cross pollination of the last half of the 20th century. The thing that might be slightly different in the Structural Integration is we are insisting that we want to keep coming back to this business of how is movement composed, how is the postural system creating a background to the movement. I think that metaphor is an interesting one to maybe a have a discussion with different practitioners, see how they find….

*S P: I want to just repeat that phrase you were using, how the postural movement is a background to the integration. So do you want to talk more about that phrase?*

K F: Yes, no gesture…throughout the history of bodywork, there have been many body maps deposited by many practitioners, looking at this gesture, this part of the body saying this has this symbolic, or this kind of gesture, this kind of body shape has this meaning. And I think all of that has some value and I think what I'm speaking to here is that, a gesture can have a completely different meaning and my postural will hear that meaning from your postural system with the gesture being the same. For instance, I extend my hand out in a certain way, if I perceive that extension of that hand in front of me with a little bit of additional lengthening of the front of my spine or if I extend my arm out with a little bit of shortening of the front of my spine, the gesture will have a very different impact on you, the meaning of the gesture will have a very different impact. So what happens at a subtle level is that postural preparation, to do a movement, has a different message to give the world.

*S P: Yes, so what I m hearing, in lots of ways of what you are talking about is certainly not just gesture as it could mechanically described but a sense of resonance and attunement so that you and I are able to pick up intuitively different layers of meaning into what happens.*

K F: this postural background activity is constantly anticipating, it anticipates when I'm going to take a breath, it prepares me so that if you want to work with a breath, we are much better off working with ingredients in that preparation to breathe than we are to try to teach someone to do a better breath. I think most experienced practitioners recognize that being something they found out. But there is postural activity going on behind all of the different activities of life, I say that is the corner that Ida Rolf staked out and I think that is a good voice in ourcommunity..

*S P: So we are talking about the community and a lot of our community is focused on the psychological aspect of things. How, as you work with posture, you work with the body, and shifting posture, how did you track any changes that might be happening inside the client psychologically?*

K F: Yes, yes…in some ways I think our tracking is similar to anyone who is tracking someone in a transformative state--looking at what their breathing is doing, what are their eyes doing? What is their perspiration doing? What is their coloration doing?--all those things and I would say again we are tracking as this person does this movement. I'm working with them on the table, I have their foot up against a board at the end of the table, so they can be working with their foot in the same way they are standing up but they are laying down. So what is like to engage one foot pressing and at the same time find a back bending of the spine, a forward bending of the spine maybe a movement of the hand with that, as I watch the person do that movement, I can see a moment where their preparation comes from sense perception, orientation--that is where they are putting their awareness. Then I can see the movement where consciously or unconsciously they try to make the movement better! They try to hedge their bets, and add a little bit of contraction to some part of their body and that of course is the mess we are all in... we are trying to fix ourselves and when we do we see that we use more effort, the movement starts to look not as interesting and usually doesn't feel as good. We may realize that this doesn't feel as good so again that would be, "Oh, the last time you did that movement, what did you sense in your body? How was that for you compared to that movement before?" Or sometimes you just go "oh, yeah, yeah, right," there is the very immediate feedback and that helps them go, "Okay, I can make that distinction, I can feel that distinction between movement that begins with awareness and presence and all these funny little sensory things that are going, or movement that starts effort."

*S P: So you do give at least some implicit feedback (and sometimes more implicit about the movement), do you at all give some feedback about the psychological underpinnings or is it for you something that happens by itself once you deal with the postural part?*

K F: You are asking whether when a psychological begins to emerge whether I give feedback about it or whether I…

*S P: Whether you elicit a discussion about it or whether you prefer to stay at the level of processing postural movement.*

K F: if someone is very psychologically-oriented, I try to keep them in a sensory mood. And if someone doesn't really like to, really likes to stay in the realm of just movement, and just want to feel and so on, I might start to ask them, "How does this feel to you?" and use words that might encourage them to be more self reflexive. I don't want make interpretation. On the other hand, I think within our scope of practice we offer people some map for what is happening to them, and I try to keep that map as grounded as possible so a person is learning to freely adapt to the situations that arise. Adaptive capacity; that is my template.

*S P: So definitely adaptive capacity, one other term that comes back to this work as I understand it, is the concept of core strength, do you want to address that?*

K F: Yes, I think that is a very meaningful question in today's world, there is a lot of popularity in practicing core strengthening exercises sort of derived from Pilates and dance world. Now it is in the yoga world and certainly "core" is also now a very used term in the psychological. Structural Integration has a contribution to make as a link between the core and physical strength, and core psychological strength, and I think it's simple. It's not necessarily easy to gain skill at, but it's very possible and I think there many of levels at which we can take it. It has to do with again, coming

back to simple gestures, like how to push the object away. If I can execute that movement, that gesture, from a place where there is a rich orientation to the things to which the movement responds very well to--the sense of directionality and space, the sensations in the extremities, in the hands and feet, that happens when we see the sensory information in the hands and feet, when we feel the two directions in the spine, we do all the things we may to become a witness to core strength that doesn't feel like something we are doing--I think that is lovely experience for people to have.

*S P: Yes, very much so. So in a way, as you are in the middle of practicing and realizing your embodied nature you also discover something that goes beyond that.*

K F: Yes, something that feels like a wonderful blessing of intelligence and effective functioning that doesn't come out of cleverness, it doesn't come from effort, it doesn't come from doing more repetitions of the exercise.

*This conversation was transcribed by Ilona Kovacs.*

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