

Practice Building Secrets

Putting Heart Soul and Cashflow into Private Practice

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"I'm not in it for the money." From the lips of one of my coaching clients to your surprised eyes. I nearly choked when she said it. As I swallowed a reactive response I asked, "and why not?"

So is professional practice all about the money? I can honestly say, yes, and no. Confusing?

- ◆ Yes, unless you are independently wealthy and don't have to make a living.
- ◆ No, when it is ONLY about the money, then you will lose your heart and soul in the bargain.

"Creating a professional practice that is as good for you as it is for your clients" is the mission of the PracticesMadePerfect.com. This theme grew out of many years of experiences working in mental health clinics and state hospitals. As the years flew by I found the systems were chipping away at my heart and soul. Inadequate budgets, understaffing, and business systems that did not put the welfare of the person first, unless they were required to by law, was taking its toll.

I made the leap from guaranteed paycheck and health care benefits to private practice when I realized I could no longer survive the ordeal of going to work every day. My foundations were beginning to crack. Maybe you are ready, or have already taken the leap to private professional practice.

So what are the secrets to professional practice success? There are as many as there are successful practices.

Secret #1 - The most common theme among professionals who succeed in private practice is a passion for their work, that is congruent with who they are and the mission they have in their personal and professional lives. If you have not created, and written down your professional mission, do it now! If you are having difficulty crafting a mission statement, the Professional Practice Institute has a mini-program that helps you do just that.

Secret #2 – Don't go it alone. Private practice can be isolating. Create a circle of excellence around yourself. Include other professionals you can consult with when you need help, have a GREAT supervisor all the time, meet local business people who can help support your business, have friends who are, and are not therapists, get a dog. I think you get my drift.

Secret #3 – Keep your practice heartful. Consider what you would do if someone you worked with for awhile lost their job and couldn't pay the same therapy rate they had in

the past? I'm guessing that you'd find a way to continue their treatment until they got back on their feet. Heartfelt? Yes!

How do you feel when you observe the revolving door of community health services, clients who receive short-term treatment, destabilize, and return for that inadequate treatment over and over again? Heartbroken? Probably.

Research done on the nature of Mental Health (MH) professionals, Engineers, Accountants or Lawyers, found that the MH professionals have a greater sensitivity to the language of empathy. We hear things some others do not. How many times have you heard a client say, "I finally feel like I'm being heard here"? The beauty of it is this skill comes naturally. What I hear over and over again is that most therapists just want to apply their skills while earning an honest living.

How would you feel if EVERY person who could benefit from your expertise, and was motivated to grow and change, could work with you and/or colleagues of yours, until the heart of their problem was resolved or understood? This model is called a caring community. To realize this vision, our communities need a change of heart, and YOU are just the person to teach them how.

Secret #4 – Put Soul in your practice

Soulful work is not a new concept; words like Dharma, following one's own nature in their work, and Entelechy, the directing force in the development and functioning of an organism (Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary online <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/>) were coined hundreds of years ago. More recently soul at work is becoming more visible and desirable with the disappointments some have found in corporate America.

When you have a "soulful" counseling business, you are not doing therapy for just a living; you are living to do the work of a therapist. Our jargon rich marketplace has branded a person with a "soulful" as a Lifestyle Entrepreneur. Recent books extolling the virtues of putting your soul into your business are "Not Just a Living" by Marks Hendricks and "Soul Proprietor" written by Jane Pollak. I have met Jane personally and can honestly say she lives her talk.

I met Jane at the National Speaker's Association of New England. Jane decorates eggs, could anything be more obscure? I knew she was an accomplished speaker but had no idea how she ran her business until I read her book. Jane reflects in her book that for years she tried to cover up her feelings and her pain by playing the part of the victim, whining that life shouldn't be so hard; she shouldn't have to do this (work so hard) and this shouldn't be happening, when faced with obstacles. Jane took the high road and chose to work on herself and her relationships as hard as she worked on her business. The result is a happy, beautiful, successful businesswoman. Doing work you love, that touches your soul, will keep you doing all the hard work needed to create a successful practice.

Secret #5 – Market Authentically - I have experienced "unauthentic" marketing in my life so I know what it feels like firsthand. I'm certain you have as well. An unauthentic marketing approach is someone trying to sell you something just for the money, not caring if you really need it or not.

You may have experienced others trying to "sell" you something, and as you listen, you sense their lack of authenticity. You actually feel the excitement in the air when someone is offering something they believe in. It is much like listening to a musician who is very talented; it touches your heart and soul. Authentic marketing creates referrals!

Secret #6 – Use a humanistic business model. There are ancient and contemporary business models that are built on the principle of people first. A. Maslow (1967) wrote "Eupsychian Management" describing a way to manage people that brought the best out of the individual consequently serving the greater good of the business. The "Way of the Ronin" (Potter, 1984) shows how to reach self-mastery and excellence" in business riding the waves of change, Peter Senge (1990) in "The Fifth Discipline" sees business as a growth discipline and Michael Phillips and Salli Rasberry (1996) wrote "Honest Business", showing how to bring trust back to the marketplace. Paul Hawken (1987) wrote "Growing A Business" linking your being to the marketplace.

Secret #7 – Manage your cash flow and energy flow. There is always a dynamic tension between what I want and need financially from my practice and what I am willing to give it. When what I am putting in does not seem to equate to what I am getting out of it, the bell rings reminding me I must address the inequity or go under in more ways than one. This is when you need to sit down and explore how to reallocate resources (time and money) and look at income, your services and products. This means revisiting your practice's business and marketing plans. These should be revised yearly to keep abreast of change. The marketplace changes and your business grows developmentally. Each year you will need new solutions to old problems.

You may be noticing a trend in this report, keeping your business as good for you as it is for the clients and communities you serve.

Looking to the Future

Question - How will you know when you're successful?

Answer - When you can sit back and know you are living the life you dream of

The heart and soul of our profession has been shoved to the back of many professionals' daily experience for too long. It is time to give heart, soul and cashflow equal light. Personal growth and active exploration of our craft must be encouraged. This exploration needs to be balanced with the more structured business model to whatever degree the individual chooses.

The dynamic inner balance of soul (the silence and the flow), heart (callings, giving and receiving), and cashflow (receiving fair compensation for your work) is a constant. As you master “the practice,” you may find yourself in leadership positions, wondering how you got there. Share your insights and experiences. Then you become part of the map to help lead others into a new future for the field of psychotherapy.

Coming Full Circle

Ideally a healthy, successful professional practice exemplifies an individual who lives an examined life, grows in and through their profession, rolls with change, and passes on their gifts to others. This brings us full circle as our businesses bring heart and soul to the marketplace.

Join the Professional Practice Institute's faculty and share what you have learned with others.

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