

Running Head: Developing Mocaccino

Developing Your Private Practice with Mocaccino

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There are a lot of Marriage and Family Therapists, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Psychologists, Personal Coaches, Palm Readers, Lawyers and Starbucks in California. How does a new therapist start a private practice and hope to compete in such a saturated market? This article will present a few timely ideas that will inspire you to think about thinking about how you might think about building your own private practice and at least trying it before you switch careers. In this article I will use the latest developments in marketing, research, self-care and mocaccinos to present a comprehensive package that is guaranteed to get your practice started, whether it survives or not. The survival part will part of another article that I hope will be published before its too late.

Getting Started

Getting started can be a major obstacle for many new therapists. Having survived 3,000 hours of indentured servitude, fears about properly completed paperwork and documentation (can my hours be in blue ink and my supervisors signature in black, or must they all match?), and two grueling licensing exams, many new therapists are relaxing with a 72 hour hold and hoping that they can use their expertise to convince the treating clinician to hospitalize them for 14 days so they can get a little more rest. Upon their release, new therapists are often over-medicated, dazed and very interested in daily goal-oriented group therapy.

Following the first goal of getting out of bed, many new therapists pursue the goal of putting to use their hard-won license.

Step 1: Get a Phone Number

Whether you've got a phone or not, you're going to need a phone number. That's how potential clients and colleagues you met in the hospital will be able to contact you. To get a phone number, call your local phone company. They've very helpful and can guide you through the process of getting your own phone number. They can even help you get a phone which will be helpful to have for when potential clients begin calling. Of course, a phone is also helpful in making that first call to the phone company.

Step 2: Market Yourself

Get people to call you. There are a number of ways to do this. One way is for you to call people, leave a message and ask them to call you back. It is helpful for you to have a phone by the time they call you back, or at least voice mail so you'll know they returned your call. Another way to get people to call you is to leave your number around where they'll find it. Usually you need to have something with the number that will encourage them to call. Some people have a business card around the number with their name and some kind of description of what they do like:

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I help people who can't help themselves

A clever little motto or saying often helps set you apart from all the other numbers and cards people might find on their windshield, door knob, shoe bottom or other business card distribution locations.

People who have offices often have their office address on the card.

Some therapists place advertisements in the phone book, in local newspapers, or on telephone poles next to lost dog posters. The general wisdom is that advertisements aren't nearly as successful in generating business as personal appearances. People tend to want to consult with therapists after they've seen them in action.

One way therapists show themselves is by doing free workshops. Workshops get a lot of people to come to see you and the general marketing wisdom is that the more people who see you, the more people who want to see you. The only problem I've had with workshops is getting people to come to see me when they don't know who I am to begin with. There's also that office space problem, and while I can perform demonstrations in the park, the response to this has usually been negative.

I have begun following a model developed by the Department of Child and Family Services: Whenever I see someone who looks like they need help, I

intervene. When I'm at the grocery store doing marketing and I see a parent having trouble negotiating with their child about which breakfast cereal has too much sugar, I step in and make parenting suggestions. I refrain from making nutritional suggestions because that's outside my scope of practice and expertise. After I have successfully treated the parent and child dyad, I give them my business card and tell them, "This first session has been free. I'd suggest you call to make a follow up appointment so we can check on your progress and keep this positive change happening."

Step 3: Know Your Niche

Once people start calling you, it is important for you to have a criteria for deciding which people you will call back. Some new therapists will call back everyone that calls them because they're really interested in building a practice and the best way to do that is to start seeing clients. Some of the calls these new therapists return, however, get them printer toner or other office supplies that they don't really need until they get an office. Often your first business calls will be from businesses whose business it is to sell other businesses business supplies.

Sometimes when I return calls to potential clients, they have already solved their problems! Some may say that were I to return my calls sooner, this may not always be the case. I prefer to appreciate the power of pre-session change, though it does negatively impact my efforts to build my practice.

Sometimes when I return calls to potential clients they want to talk about their problems. I don't let them do this because I don't do phone therapy. I tell them that if they want to talk about their problems, they'll have to make an appointment to see me and they'll have to pay me money. Getting money is the key to a successful private practice.

When a client wants to see you, you'll need an office. The thing to do then is get one.

Step 4: Your First Client

Once you've got your first client, you'll want to meet with him. Note: I'm using the masculine gender form here for convenience. This is not to suggest that women don't pursue therapy, they do. They usually pursue therapy more than men do, but I can't imagine any woman being interested in seeing me. Anyway, after you've told your client where to meet you and they agree to meet you, go meet them.

I think the hardest thing for new therapists is the "no show." It was one thing to have a client not show for an appointment when you were working for free as an indentured intern, it's another thing when you're financial future is at risk. Finding ways to cope with the no show and the ups and downs of business are good self-soothing skills for a therapist to have.

I survived a lot of initial no shows before I got an office. I'd make arrangements to meet clients at Taco Bell or Denny's and they wouldn't show. You can imagine my embarrassment, sitting there all alone, ready to do some really good work. I decided to hide my embarrassment by getting an office.

When potential clients manifested themselves into actual clients and continued to miss appointments, I learned to pathologize them, buy a moccaccino, and market myself at the local Starbucks. I usually do this with enthusiasm that increases with each dose of caffeine.

Step 5: When It All Comes Together

Once you are licensed, the State of California no longer considers you a danger to clients the way your supervisors did. You are licensed to kill, baby! You answer to no one when you're your own boss.

I specialize in empty chair work. No one I've seen once has returned. I am so good at what I do that the State of California regularly supplements my income with unemployment checks. While I've attempted to follow up with clients after treatment to check on the status of their change success, those who have not blocked calls from my phone number have not returned the many impassioned messages I've left for them. I think it is important to follow up with clients to check that the work you're doing has ongoing benefits. It's also a nice marketing technique to ask them if they've got any new troubles they'd like help with. I

refrain from creating any new troubles and following the advise of my lawyer, I do not call those former clients who have restraining orders against me.