

## **10 Essentials for Success in Private Practice**

By Juliet Austin, MA Professional Coach and Director of the Canadian Office of the Institute For Life Coach Training (ILCT)

An increasing number of counsellors seem to be going into private practice. Among the reasons include recent cutbacks in the public sector, a desire to earn more and to have more independence. While building a private practice can be very rewarding, it can also be a great deal of work and requires a lot of knowledge, skill, and time. Taking time to prepare and plan as you build your practice will help you avoid costly and time-consuming mistakes. Below are ten areas to address to help ensure your success.

### **1. Get Your Life in Excellent Shape**

Counsellors know that our personal lives affect our professional lives, yet many who are struggling to build a practice fail to take this into account. Look at all aspects of your life and determine what seems to be working for you and what needs to change. Determine any activities you need to reduce or eliminate in order to have the time and energy to build a practice. Examine your lifestyle and personal work habits and

see where improvement needs to be made. The more your life is on order, the more time and energy you will have for building a practice.

### **2. Develop a Financial Plan**

Before you start your practice, assess your financial situation and make a financial plan. Make sure you have funds from other sources until your practice becomes established. Do not put yourself in a position where you are desperate to secure clients in order to pay your bills. Potential clients may sense your desperation and may not be eager to hire you. Feeling secure financially will allow you to build your practice with greater confidence and ease.

### **3. Know that You Are a Business Owner**

Most counsellors enter the profession because they want to help others and not because they want to have a business. However, you will need to start seeing yourself as a business owner. You must pay careful attention to all aspects of your business--

your revenue and expenses, how you spend your time, methods of attracting clients, and developing operating systems that allow your business to run smoothly.

### **4. Develop a Vision for Your Practice.**

It's difficult to get somewhere if you don't know where you are going. Develop a detailed vision of what you want your practice to look like in 6 months, 1 year and 5 years and write it down. How many clients do you want to have? What days and hours do you want to work? How much income do you need/want? The more clarity and specificity you have, the more likely you will turn your vision into reality.

### **5. Develop at Least One Specialization**

Counsellors new to private practice often fear that if they are too narrow in the type of services they offer, they will rule out many other potential clients. The opposite is actually more often true as people tend to want to hire specialists. The more targeted you are in your

marketing efforts, the more you will stand out from others and become known for your expertise. In addition, it's easier to market to a particular group if you know where to find them.

#### **6. Determine Any Negative Attitudes and Fears You Have About Marketing**

Many counsellors are uncomfortable with the marketing aspect of being in private practice. They see their role as to be there for others and not to promote themselves. Our repeated exposure to negative and manipulative types of marketing further contributes to the belief that marketing ourselves is somehow inappropriate. Any negative attitudes and fears you have about marketing need to be eliminated. You can and should find ways to market with integrity and authenticity. Be proud of your services and have confidence that you have something to offer people that they need and want.

#### **7. Develop a Marketing Plan**

In order to market successfully you must have an integrated marketing plan. One of the most common mistakes counsellors make is trying a few methods of marketing haphazardly, and when

the results are not immediate, they erroneously assume the techniques don't work. Flourishing practices are frequently built upon a number of marketing strategies that work together over time. To market effectively you must make yourself repeatedly visible to potential clients and referral sources so that they get to know and trust you.

#### **8. Choose Marketing Methods That Excite You**

Take some time to explore and develop marketing methods that suit your unique talents and interests. There are numerous ways to promote your practice. To get ideas, read books, take courses, ask other professionals how they built their practices, or hire a marketing consultant or coach. Marketing can be an enjoyable and creative process that provides a balance to the work you do with your clients. Find a way to take pleasure in this aspect of your business and you will be more motivated to do it.

#### **9. Make a Commitment To Build Your Practice**

Typically it can take anywhere from 1-3+ years to build a full practice. Exactly how long will

depend on several factors including the size of your current network, how effectively you market, the demand for your area of expertise, and how much time you spend developing your practice. Make a commitment to take action steps on a regular basis. It's best if you set aside a specific amount of time on a weekly basis for marketing, and try to stick to this schedule even when you become discouraged or become tempted to allow other things to take priority.

#### **10. Get Support**

Because you will be primarily working alone, you may feel isolated and discouraged at times. It's important to have people and resources you can access for support. Most successful people have consistently had other people helping them. Whether you get expert guidance from a professional business coach or consultant, or get help from your colleagues and friends, getting support, guidance and feedback on your ideas and goals is essential. The more support you get, the greater your chances of success.

Many counsellors who are having difficulty building their practices tell me the

reason they can't get clients is either because there is too much competition or because of tight economic times. While it may be true that competition for clients has increased and that financial resources are limited for many people, there will always be counsellors who do have a full practice. Competition is not going to go away and you have you don't have control over the economy. You need to find a way to develop and sustain a practice in spite of these apparent obstacles. If you act on the above ten guidelines on a consistent basis, you should have a thriving practice within a few years. Be persistent, believe in yourself, learn from your mistakes, and most importantly, get out there and be visible.

## **Bio of Author**

**Juliet Austin, MA,** Counselling Psychology, is a Life and Marketing Coach who assists counsellors and other helping professionals who are struggling to build their practice. She is a graduate of Coach U, The Institute for Life Coach Training, and a member of the Graduate School of Coaching at Coachville.

Juliet is also the Director of the Canadian Office of the Institute for Life Coach Training and leads teleclasses entitled, *How To get Started As A Coach* and *Build A Successful Practice*. In addition she is co-author of the ebook, *How To Become A Coach: A Guide for Therapists and Counsellors*.

Juliet can be reached at:  
604.730.1838  
[coach@julietaustin.com](mailto:coach@julietaustin.com)  
[www.julietaustin.com](http://www.julietaustin.com)  
[www.julietaustin.com/marktc.html](http://www.julietaustin.com/marktc.html)  
[www.how-tobecome-a-coach.com/therapist/main.htm](http://www.how-tobecome-a-coach.com/therapist/main.htm)