



ESTABLISH & OPTIMIZE YOUR OWN HOLISTIC BUSINESS

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Introduction

The field of holistic health is still growing! As people are becoming increasingly aware of their options in health care, more and more of them are turning toward natural means of achieving wellness. Leading educational institutions, like the [Global College of Natural Medicine](#), are helping people prepare to take part in this natural health care revolution.

While some of our students are primarily interested in learning about holistic health for their own benefit and use at home and with family, GCNM is proud of the fact that many of our graduates can and do open their own holistic health practices. At present, it's both wonderful and (I think) slightly remarkable that many aspects of holistic health education and practice can be pursued and achieved with relative freedom. Now, that said, there are certain practical matters that should be considered, not the least of which are the legalities of maintaining a holistic health practice.

My goal here today is to help inform you of some standard steps you may need to take in order to establish a practice. And if you're already in practice as an holistic health care practitioner, I hope to present you with a few ways you can optimize your business, including how to network like a pro.

So let's begin!

The Basics

There are many different ways to go about starting a practice, from "trying something out" and spreading it around friends, to putting together a formal business plan, spending lots of money up front, renting a space, and investing in product, advertisement and employees. For our purposes here today, we'll discuss how to set up a home-based holistic health practice. This will give us a general understanding of some good ideas and things to keep in mind which can be applied to other ventures down the line (such as joining a wellness center, etc.).

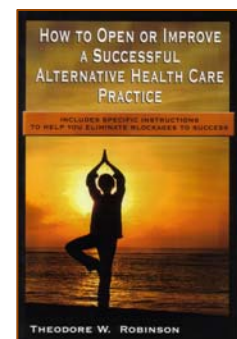
One of the first steps is to determine the structure of your business. Will it be a Sole Proprietorship, a Partnership or a Corporation? Each has its strengths and weaknesses and you would be best off to seek the advice of an attorney to decide which will best meet your

particular needs. All the same, here are some brief descriptions of these three types of business structures:

Sole Proprietorship: This is usually the least costly and easiest way to start a practice. It means that you are the practitioner and the sole owner at the same time. You form it by filing a business or practice name certificate with your local county clerk's office. With a sole proprietorship, you own everything and reap all the profits. However, you're also completely legally responsible for all debts and liabilities that occur while you're in practice. That means that if something happens in your practice that results in harm to another person, your business assets **and** your personal assets (i.e., personal checking and savings accounts, etc.) are equally at risk. Strengths include the easiness and low cost of start-up for this type of business; you have complete control and earn 100% of the profits, and it's easy to dissolve your business if you need to. Weaknesses include the risk to not only your business assets but personal assets in the event of legal troubles. Also, this kind of practice may limit your potential for future funding from banks, such as lines of credit, etc.

Partnership: There are actually different kinds of partnerships (known as General Partnerships, Limited Partnerships, and Partnerships with Limited Liability). Basically, in a partnership, you have a business partner (or several) with whom you share the costs, risks and profits of your business. General partnerships tend to be fairly even, cut down the middle with equal shares of all aspects. A "limited" partnership is one in which partners limit their liabilities to the extent of their investments and therefore have limited input in most management decisions. Some strengths of partnerships include: They're fairly easy to establish (but you should certainly use legal documents; partnerships sealed with handshakes typically lead to trouble down the line); it tends to be easier to fund the business when there are more people involved; and partners provide different skills sets, which can really round out a practice. Weaknesses include: All partners are jointly responsible for the actions of each other (if one does something illegal or wrong, you're *all* responsible); all profits and all losses must be shared; some benefits may not be legally deductible from business income on tax returns (such as medical insurance); and the partnership can end abruptly upon the withdrawal or death of a partner.

Corporations: According to attorney and holistic health practitioner Theodore Robinson (who authored the book *How to Open or Improve a Successful Alternative Health Care Practice*), forming a corporation can be the best insurance you can buy in many circumstances. Doing so makes your personal assets exempt from attack for any liability that might arise from your practice. You can incorporate relatively quickly and easily with the help of an experienced attorney. But there are different kinds of corporations, such as "C" or "S" Corporations. Each has special tax benefits that would be best explained by an accountant. But it is worth saying that an "S" corporation



is very similar to a sole proprietorship, but with more protection of your personal assets. And a Limited Liability Company (or LLC) is also very similar to a sole proprietorship in regards to income, while also offering increased risk protection. Advantages to incorporating include: Limited liability for the corporation's debts or judgments against it; corporations can deduct the cost of fringe benefits such as medical insurance, IRAs, 401ks, etc. Weaknesses include: It takes more time, money and energy to incorporate; corporations are closely monitored by federal, state and local agencies; and it may result in overall higher taxes.

Whichever business strategy seems best for you, one thing you'll need to do in order to practice legally is obtain a *business license*. This single piece of paper allows you to own and operate a business within your city or town. You can acquire one relatively easily through your local City Hall's administrative offices. You will want to contact City Hall and ask for the Business License Division. My experience is that all that is required is to fill out a form that describes your business and expected income, and pay the city for processing. This license should be framed and typically has to be kept visible somewhere in your office. It will also need to be renewed on a yearly basis, with the annual renewal fee proportionate to your annual income from your business.

Let's talk about *insurance*. If you are working out of your home, you'll want to speak with your insurance agent to be sure you're covered if someone slips and falls, for example, during a session. On the other hand, most wellness centers and day spas will have insurance policies already or will probably require that you become insured in order to work there.

There are different kinds of insurance. If you are working alone out of your home, then you will obviously not require Worker's Compensation Insurance. Business Insurance protects the contents of your business against things like fire, flood and theft. It may also cover basic liability for injuries to clients. If you are in a segment of alternative health care that is licensed (such as massage therapy, acupuncture and hypnotherapy), it's probably also wise to have Malpractice Insurance, which will protect you against any harm that clients claim is the result of your particular therapy.

If you are opening a practice out of your home, you may want to contact your homeowner's insurance company to update them and see what policy changes or additions are possible to add. Additionally, there are a handful of insurance companies that offer liability insurance for holistic health practitioners; you can find them by conducting a thorough search on the internet or contacting various holistic health membership organizations and asking for referrals.

I should probably throw in here a caveat about the importance of being very clear that you do **not** practice medicine of any kind. Stay away from diagnosing (or undiagnosing!) anything. That is, you should neither tell a client that she is suffering from a certain disease, nor should you tell him that he *isn't* suffering from one. It can be a very fine line to walk. But either can be construed as practicing medicine, and unless you're a licensed medical doctor, that is illegal.

Hands-on healing techniques such as Therapeutic Touch, Reiki and Quantum-Touch® are not modalities that require state or federal licensing. However, you never know what tomorrow brings! According to Robinson, there actually **are** laws that say, in effect, that you should keep your hands off of anyone else in a professional setting unless and until you are specifically licensed to do so, such as massage therapists, chiropractors, and nurses.

One notable exception is if you are a minister and you are ministering to a member of your congregation. Now, there has been a tendency of many alternative health practitioners to become ordained online or through mail order. Robinson actually advises against this. In fact, he says that it doesn't work and that some courts have already ruled on this and you will not actually be a minister and everything you do "as a minister" may effectively be nullified! Robinson's advice is to go out and find a church that resonates with you, join as a member, and then actively pursue ordination through that particular denomination. It will certainly take longer and require devotion on your part, but this, apparently, is what the courts want to see. (I should also add that it's good to remember that, while you cannot charge for your healing work as a minister, you can take "donations.")

Preparing Your Office

If you are going to have a home office, it is important (both for tax purposes and professionalism) that you have a room devoted solely to this purpose. You can get a more complete list of "do's" and "don't's" from an accountant, but some general advice is that there should not be a bed or television in the office (unless the television is used in your practice, as a teaching tool, for example), and the office has to be able to be closed. By that, I mean that there cannot be an open wall. Having such a space in your home specifically for your business/practice use makes the room tax deductible, allowing you to claim a portion of your utilities and rent (or mortgage) as business expenses.

Otherwise, I would suggest that you try to look at the space as your clients will. Do you have enough sitting space? Will you need a massage table (for energy work, acupressure or massage), or any other physical items? What books are in your bookcase? What is hanging on your walls? Do you have blinds or curtains over your windows and if not do you need them? Do you have a desk and if so, what is on it? Will you need a computer, printer, fax machine, copier, etc.? Some other items to consider include:

- Filing cabinet with a lock
- Files to be used for individual clients
- Intake, Disclaimer, and other forms to have clients fill out
- Water dispenser
- Throw pillows (many people find them comforting and like to hold them during sessions)
- Posters or pictures that are educational or soothing
- Receipt book

Keep in mind that the quality of your equipment and furnishings speaks just as loudly to your clients as your personal hygiene, demeanor and clothing. Your best bet, as far as furniture and office equipment is concerned, is to spend more money for quality products up front. They'll last a little longer, look a little better, and these are investments that you can write off at tax time.

Do you have a waiting room? Perhaps you use your living room or another sitting room for this purpose. If so, you should keep it clean, dusted and in good order. Have between 3 – 5 chairs or places to sit, depending on whether or not you see groups of people. Keep it well lit and be sure that you have up-to-date reading materials available that relate to your particular area of holistic health. I would suggest that you play calming music in the background (though not loud enough to be heard in your office when the door is closed). And you might consider investing in a small water fountain. These are easy to find and can be very soothing to many people, especially new clients.

If you do not have a waiting room, or would rather not have one, it may work well for you to keep a tight schedule that includes 10 or 15 minutes of buffer time between clients. This will virtually eliminate your need for a waiting room and you can simply escort clients directly from the door to your office and vice versa.

If you are working alone and out of your home, while you are in session, please be sure your phone's ringer is turned off and the answering machine turned down. Likewise, you'll want to switch your cell phone and pager to vibrate or, better yet, to a silent mode. You want your client to feel like he or she is getting your complete attention and focus during your time together.

Good, proper lighting is essential. Lights should never shine in a client's face or eyes. To be sure this won't happen, sit where your clients will and take in the room from their perspective. Adjust any lighting as necessary. And whenever possible, let the sun light your room. Sheer curtains over windows offer both privacy and style without blocking light.

Plants are always a good reminder of life and health. Some [plants](#) are even especially good at purifying the air in the room! The living presence of plants is truly a benefit to everyone who enters your office. So, if you are going to use plants, be sure they are live and not silk. While it does take more work to maintain a live plant, it is well worth it and clients *will* notice the difference.

Finally, if you are going to retail supplements and other holistic health items, you'll need a *Seller's Permit* (sometimes called a *Retail License*). You get this through your state's Board of Equalization. You'll also need a place to store these items and I suggest it be something like a cupboard with glass doors, kept in a cool place out of direct sunlight. This will protect the integrity of the supplements while allowing your clients to see them.

Professionalism

How you conduct business is just as important as the work you are doing. Being “professional” means different things to different people, certainly, but it’s always best to think of how a newcomer to your office and to holistic health in general will experience things. While it’s important to have a comfortable office – especially as you’re going to spend most of your time each day in there – it’s also very important to *appear to be the professional that you see yourself as being*. That means that you should dress and act professionally, being respectful to everyone who calls or comes to your office. Obviously, you should refrain from yelling, shouting or swearing. Remember that what most clients want to see is someone who is caring, patient, and respectful.

Phone manners are a *must*. Many clients – even if they initially find you via the internet – will call you to find out more information and seek a short phone consultation to see if you are a good “fit” for them. Remember that people can actually hear a frown or a smile over the phone, so before you answer the phone, consciously put a smile on your face. (Even if you don’t want to, do it. If nothing else, it releases endorphins and may help you feel better!) Remember that there’s never a second chance to make a first impression and, like it or not, many first impressions are received over the phone.

If you work from home, you’ll want to be sure that the outside of your home looks nice. Keep the walkway clear of trash, lawn clippings and leaves, and be sure your door is not covered in dust and dirt. If you have a sign or banner, be sure it is also kept neat and clean. Flags of any kind should be unfurled regularly and outside plants watered and trimmed.

Manners of dress are as individual as are people. However, it’s also the first thing that people see when they first meet you. So, while it may seem like a shallow approach, you should keep the adage “dress for success” in mind; if you are in your office, you should be dressed as a professional.

Many people who have joined the ranks of alternative health care practitioners long to be free of the suits and skirts and dresses of the “corporate world.” Robinson maintains that how you dress really does affect how potential clients judge you. So, at the very least – while you may want to conduct your sessions barefoot and in sweats – the best advice to follow is to dress well for the first time or two that you see a new client and then you may start to relax after they get to know you and your particular style of work and professionalism. Once they know you for “you,” it won’t matter much how you dress, as long as the work you do with them is good. But in the beginning, “dressing for success” can be very important for building relationships of trust.

How you present yourself to a first-time client is also very important. They will be looking to you to “run the show,” but also to listen to them very carefully. It is advisable for you to initially take control of the first visit by taking a full history or intake including where they live, family information and home life, questions about their particular health issue, where they work, diet and lifestyle choices, sexuality and personal relationships, etc.

One thing that you should always remember during an initial visit is that *they* are interviewing *you* at the same time that *you're* interviewing *them*! They're watching and evaluating you to see whether you'll be able to help them or not, so you need to instill in them a sense that you can handle their issues (assuming, of course, that you can) and help them discover what will best serve them in the work of healing.

As you listen to a client, be sure you don't have other things on your mind. To the best of your ability, withhold judgment about anything they tell you, even (or especially!) if it goes against your personal beliefs. This open attitude will convey to your clients that you are with them on a very deep level; that they don't have to hide from you and that you can be full partners in their healing journey.

Recognize where they are in their journey. While you can probably give all of your clients a litany of changes to make and reasons to make them, sometimes you just need to get to their level of understanding and motivation and work from there. It can be as easy as presenting a scaled down list of suggested changes and picking out one or two with them to start with. Using this step-by-step approach can ease new clients into a healthy lifestyle in a way that doesn't shock or overwhelm them.

A word about *time and money*. You should do your work in as little time as it takes to accomplish the goals you've set with your client. Many people will want to work with you for a set period of time before they think you've "earned your pay," even if your work is done within minutes. This largely depends, however, on how you have set up your fee schedule.

You may want to work on an hourly basis, which will allow you to meet with a very certain number of clients in a day. Or you may wish to be very open-ended with your clients, working until the issue at hand has been resolved or the work you've done needs time to "set" or "sink in." The drawback to not setting time limits is that you never know when to schedule clients! So, unless you plan on only having one client per day, I personally recommend using a timetable. (Psychotherapists have become famous for their "50-minute hour" and many people are used to that frame of reference. Give your clients a full 60 minutes and they may feel that you're being generous!)

What should you charge? Holistic health modalities vary widely, and charges for them do, as well. If you are in a licensed profession, there may be certain guidelines or expectations you can rely on as you build your fee schedule. Otherwise, what I suggest is that you find other alternative health care practitioners in your area and discover what they charge. It's typically easy to find massage therapists and hypnotherapists, so they are a good start. You might also look for Reiki healers, Life Coaches and Nutritional Consultants to get a feel for their fees. Then shoot for the middle. Charge less and you may pick up a few more clients, but they may not value your time and work as much as they would if you charged them more. It's a dance, of sorts, and you need to find out what works best for your particular demographic. There's really no right or wrong answer...

Advertising

Once you have your office space set up and you are ready to start seeing clients, you'll most likely want to advertise your practice. Advertising can take many forms and much of it depends on your ingenuity. But here are some ideas that have worked well for others, as well as visual examples of what I have used in the past:

- Business cards
- Business post cards that you mail to friends and family or give away for others to use
- Custom-printed clothing you (and/or clients, family and friends) wear around town
- Automobile decals that people see as you drive
- Brochures/Flyers
- Promotional items (be sure they have your logo/name on them or they're not tax-deductible)
- Newsletters (electronic or print)



Ryan N. Harrison, MA, HHP, NC, EFT-ADV
Certified Holistic Health Practitioner
2247 3rd Street, La Verne, CA 91750
909-455-7946
www.BeWholeBeWell.com
(By appointment only)

Be Whole. Be Well.

50% Off First Session!
(Mention card when scheduling appointment)

**Advanced Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)
Quantum-Touch® & Reiki Treatments
Holistic Nutrition & Lifestyle Guidance**

The image shows a business postcard with a blue border. The background is a soft-focus painting of a large green tree in a field under a blue sky. The text is arranged in a clean, professional layout, with the main offer in a large, bold font.

Business Post Card/Coupon

Standard Business Card



Ryan Harrison, MA HHP NC MH EFT-ADV QTP
Certified Holistic Health Consultant/Educator: AADP #93832410

"Be Whole. Be Well."
Wellness Services for Body, Mind, and Spirit

2247 3rd Street
La Verne, CA 91750
909-455-7946
Info@BeWholeBeWell.com
www.BeWholeBeWell.com

(By appointment only ~ Call for free consultation)

The image shows a standard business card with a blue border. The background is a soft-focus painting of a large green tree in a field under a blue sky. The text is arranged in a clean, professional layout, with the main offer in a large, bold font.

Locating holistically-friendly establishments and leaving business cards, brochures, and coupons with them is a great way to get to know other practitioners and natural-health resources as well as to advertise your services to a wider audience.

It's also necessary to be online. Today, people *expect* businesses to have an online presence, and your website address will be something you definitely want to have on the business card and other advertising materials. You should spend a decent amount of time and energy designing your website, because it will really speak to your potential clients. A well-designed website will give more than just information; it will set the tone of conversations that you have with potential clientele and may even help generate some income for you.

Some things to consider when putting your website together include:

- Will you have a logo? (There are companies that specialize in creating them with you. There's at least [one such company](#) online.)
- What will your website URL or "name" be? Typically, it should be similar to, if not the same as, your business name. Sometimes this is not possible, so choose wisely. You want something that is easily spelled and easy to remember, as well as something that reflects the work that you do.
- Will you have downloadable forms? If so, in what format?
- Pictures?
- Articles you've written?
- Links to other websites?
- Links to products that you endorse?
- A virtual "shopping cart" where people can buy products directly from your site?
- A "guestbook" where people can leave comments? (If you go for this option, be sure you have time to monitor it daily in case spam or something lewd or negative slips in.)
- A testimonial page to boost your reputation?
- A counter, to show how many visitors your site has had?
- How about a blog? Do you have time to support a regular weblog? (Don't start a blog if you don't have time to keep up with it. If you go weeks or months without new entries, it can look bad.)

A word about Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents. You use a trademark to protect a logo; so if you come up with one you really like and you don't want anyone else to use it, you should have it trademarked. Your trademark will be good for up to 10 years and is renewable. Patents are useful if you come up with an idea, a method or product that you can use in your practice. And a copyright protects the thoughts and ideas of authors, composers and artists. If you need to know more about these options, be sure you talk with a qualified attorney, who will be able to help you figure out what you need, and when.

Finally, consider putting together electronic newsletters (eNewsletters) that contain articles of interest, book reviews and product highlights and things of that nature. A good eNewsletter –

which by the way, won't have the word "newsletter" in its title – will be forwarded by your clients to their family and friends, which means that your potential target audience then becomes practically unlimited! However, you should remember that clients are only going to forward things to others that they think are well done and actually worth sharing. So, take your time with these. Putting out an excellent eNewsletter every quarter, for example, is much better than putting out a mediocre one every month. For some great eNewsletter examples check out [GCNM's collection](#).

Actively Recruiting

Another way to give your practice a boost is to be proactive and give presentations and workshops that speak specifically to what you do and know. Local churches are great for this kind of thing, especially if you attend or are a member of one! Offer a short workshop on natural health, nutrition, or herbal remedies and tell friends and family to bring others along. If you can, try to get your workshop advertised in the church's Sunday bulletin/program. (One note: You need to be careful to not sell anything during the workshop or on the church premises, because the church can actually lose its non-profit standing if you do.)

This same approach would work well for community centers and day spas or wellness centers. Other holistic health institutions should be happy to have you do this, because it brings people right into their space, where they can have free advertisement of their own services and goods. Just be sure that you always have enough of your own business cards and brochures to give out. You might even pass an "attendance sheet" around so you end up with a list of people's names and contact information that you can follow up on later.

Building Your Practice Through Networking

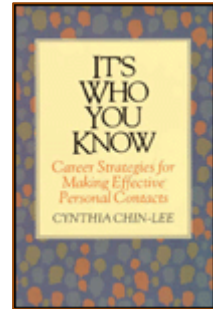
Learning how to successfully network can be a very important part of strengthening your business. Whether you're new to the field of holistic health or not, you can learn how to build strong networks with others to optimize the growth, reach and influence of your practice.

Networking is a system through which a group of people or businesses with similar interests connect for mutual assistance, for support, and for professional and business development.

Another way of saying this is that networking is about establishing personal connections and exchanging information with people who have similar ideals, businesses, etc. This is very different from a hierarchy, which has people at the bottom and people at the top...who may rarely even meet or know each other. Networking is more like a web, with each person connecting to the others in a way that makes the network strong and wide.

It's not uncommon for people to think that networking is some kind of bad word. It can conjure images of uncomfortable situations between family members and friends. Some think it relates directly to the dog-eat-dog world of business. But it doesn't have to be that way. An interesting and informative read on the subject is a little book titled *It's Who You Know: Career Strategies*

for *Making Effective Personal Contacts* by Cynthia Chin-Lee. She points out, for example, that 68% of all jobs are found through personal contacts, whereas only 15% are found through agencies, 9% through advertisements and 8% through other means. Obviously, it can be really important to make some good connections in your communities. So, how do you do this?



Recognize Who You Are & Choose Again (If Necessary)

Chin-Lee suggests that there are actually three kinds of people:

1. People who makes things happen
2. People who watch things happen
3. People who get knocked over the head and then wonder “what happened?”

Obviously, to be a successful networker, you’re going to need to be the first kind person in that list. That may mean having to change your script, your “act” in life. Unlike other changes that usually need to be made for our own well-being, this isn’t a particularly hard thing to do, provided you’re focused and you are clear and truly believe in what you’re doing, what you’re after, and why.

There are six components that go into successful networking. These include:

1. **Openness and flexibility** – You should be open to new possibilities, new options, new opportunities as they arise. At the same time, be flexible enough that you can change gears as necessary in order to accommodate possibilities and opportunities that come up.
2. **Goal orientation** – Know what you’re after and what the network is after but be flexible in your approach to accomplishing the goal.
3. **Self-disclosure** – To get the most out of networking, you need to be able to talk to anyone. Specifically, you need to be able to tell people who you are, what you’re doing, what you’ve done, and what you want or need.
4. **Altruism and Empowerment** – Networking is about helping others and asking others for help. When you ask others for help, it empowers them. Likewise, when they ask you for help, you are empowered.
5. **Gratitude** – The cardinal sin of networking is forgetting to recognize the networking help you’ve received. Thanking others for their help is essential and will strengthen the network.
6. **Persistence** – In this case, persistence doesn’t necessarily mean hounding someone for something (though there is a place for that, I suppose, from time to time). Rather, this means not slacking off, not letting something slide by that can help you or someone else in your network. For example, you hear about a job opening that someone in your network would be great for...contact her! Don’t just let it slide. Putting energy into the network will result in more energy to draw from later.

Being a Network Weaver

As with most things, to build a successful network, you need to start where you are. And where you are when you start a network is right smack dab in the middle of things. A person who steps into the active leading role of gathering people together in a network is called a *Network Weaver*.

A network weaver is someone who can bring together several small clusters of people or individuals under one unified umbrella. This person has the vision, the energy, and the social skills to connect with diverse individuals and groups and start information flowing to and from and between them.

Initially, a network weaver forms relationships with individuals or small clusters of people who are already networked together (such as owners and employees at a day spa). During this phase a weaver is learning about each individual or small cluster – discovering what they know and what they need. However, this first step (which we can call the “hub-and-spoke” model) is only a temporary step in building the network. It should not be utilized for long because it concentrates both power and vulnerability in one person – the Weaver, the center, the one acting as the hub...you. If the weaver fails or leaves then the hub-and-spoke network falls apart.

So in healthy networks, the spokes of the hub do not remain separated for long. The weaver begins connecting those individuals and clusters who can collaborate or assist one another in some way. At the same time, the weaver also begins encouraging others to begin weaving the network as well. The result is that the hub becomes less defined, and the lines drawn between people become multiplied and much more easily tapped.

It's important to recognize that the goal here is not to own, rule, or govern a network of people, but to develop a strong network of people who know and respect each other and want to help and support each other, as well. This isn't about power or position. It's about connecting people in order to increase possibility. A well-connected network will actually thrive on its own and won't need you (the Weaver) in the center of things once they get rolling.

In the beginning, however, there may need to be a fair amount of overseeing done, simply so connections between people that are established don't fall away into nothingness. A Network Weaver's job is really two-fold:

1. Build relationships (particularly across established divides, if possible).
2. Facilitate collaborations between parties.

For example, as a Network Weaver you build relationship with Person A and Person B. Your next step is to help them successfully collaborate on something together, so that their relationship grows stronger without your having to support it.

Building a Network

So, how do you actually build a network? How do you get into the situation where you're pulling people and ideas together, building a catch-all net that everyone can draw from? Here are some suggestions that might work well for you:

Network with Friends, Family, and Co-workers. People have different family, social and career situations, so this really needs to be advice given and taken on a case-by-case basis. Still, most people have family and friends that want them to succeed. Even if they don't necessarily share the same vision, family and friends can support you by being open about what you're doing. My own mother, for example, in typical mainstream American fashion, is not holistically-minded. Yet, she will openly tell people that I have studied nutrition, herbalism and holistic health, that I teach it, and that I have a practice through which I help people come to better health naturally. Naturally, it's in my best interest to consider her part of my network and as such, to be sure that I keep in contact, keep her up to date on what I'm doing, and find out if I can help her in any way. An extra step would be to connect her with someone else in my "network" so that she gets even further "plugged in" to a system that exists to support people.

Networking with co-workers can be a bit more difficult, and requires some finesse and a healthy dose of respect. Few people are natural-born salespeople, and most people don't like being on the receiving end of a sales pitch. But networking doesn't have to be a sales pitch, and in fact, the strongest networks are probably not built around products and sales anyway.

When establishing networks with co-workers, you'll want to be sure that the person you approach shares your common interest. (Remember a network is a collection of people with similar interests and ideals. You don't try to build a holistic health network with people that are staunchly opposed to natural health, for example.) So, assuming a person doesn't work in a health food store, day spa, wellness center, etc. probably the best way to invite people into the network will be to (once again) practice some self-disclosure: let others know what your interests are, why you do what you do, etc. Those that are ready will be drawn to you, and then you can start weaving them into the network by connecting them with others and fostering those relationships.

Attend Professional Meetings, Conferences, Seminars, etc. One of the easiest ways to network is to go to workshops and conferences that are directly related to your interests. These offer prime opportunities to get to know other people who are probably already networked somewhere else. Have business cards ready and a personal website set up, so that the people you meet can learn more about you and contact you directly. Pay attention to what each person is doing, desiring, what direction they're going, etc., and you'll have a better chance of connecting people who would be mutually beneficial to each other.

In the beginning, where these professional workshops are concerned, it's probably better to consider staying closer to home, rather than traveling far and wide, simply because people that are closer geographically are more likely to continue communicating and working with you than those you may never meet again.

Join Professional Organizations. It's not hard to find holistic health organizations that are interested new members. Quite a few of them are national in scope and are available online. Members of these organizations can have their names and practice information listed in print and online giving them an opportunity to introduce themselves to a wider audience. Gifted network weavers will reach out to those in leadership positions within such organizations or aspire to leadership positions themselves. Drawing into your network people in these positions can be a really effective way to strengthen and widen a network.

Give Presentations, Workshops, Seminars, etc. While this usually requires a good amount of time and energy (and sometimes money) it's one of the best ways that you can draw people to you that have similar interests and connections to others with similar interests. The key in this technique is to develop relationships with participants, keep excellent record of their contact and personal information, and invite them to connect with you and share your information with others. Then, when this starts to happen, it's important to nurture relationships that arise.

If Person A, for example, is a holistic dentist and Person Z is a massage therapist with a killer toothache, you are in a great position to connect the two! Remember that you don't lose anything by connecting others. Rather, your network grows, because people come to recognize that you are trying to help people...and they will, in turn, think of how they can help you.

Publish Articles. Holistic Health Practitioners should consider writing and publishing articles in their communities, or in organization newsletters, magazines, and journals. A way to go about this is to obtain several publications that are seen by your target audience and determine which one is most likely to publish an article that you might offer them. Contact the editor and find out whether they are looking for articles and what topics are particularly interesting at the moment. Find out the approximate length of an article that they are looking for.

You'll probably find that publishing an article or paper is less taxing than giving a presentation, but also less gratifying and less effective in drawing people into your network. One of the issues with this technique is that you only get to tell your story, rather than having an opportunity to exchange ideas and information with others. Still, your ideas and reputation will reach more people, and with a good byline including your contact information, this is great way to let other people know how to contact you. Both publishing and presenting will fortify your network.

Create a Newsletter, Magazine, Newspaper, Catalog, etc. If there aren't any opportunities for you to publish where you live or to connect with others of like mind, consider starting your own publication. It will certainly take some time and effort to produce, but you'll have a great tool for "spreading the word" about your interests, education, skills, and practice. Interested people will contact you and you can draw them into the network by discovering their interests, education, skills and talents and then helping them plug in where they can be of service.

If you live in an area where there are other holistic health consultants or practitioners, consider putting together a brochure or catalog that acts like a guide to the holistic health options available in your community. Putting it together will require some hard work and a lot of communication with other practitioners, but this is exactly what helps a network grow! The footwork required in putting this kind of holistic health practitioner catalog together will make just about anyone a successful Network Weaver! Other practitioners can help contribute to the catalog (financially as well as with information, advertisements, short articles, etc.), and this could come out periodically (perhaps freely distributed at health food stores, day spas, wellness centers, practitioner offices, etc.).

Networking is a skill and it can be used skillfully to accomplish just about anything. Networking is more than just people shaking hands and passing out business cards. It's about cultivating relationships with other professionals. It's about realizing the resources that come from building social relationships. It's all about people helping people helping people.

Conclusion

To conclude this presentation, let me share with you a list of characteristics of successful Holistic Health Practitioners. If you work on strengthening each of these points, you'll not only have established a great holistic health practice, but will be fully optimizing your work in the world, broadening your reach and your positive influence in the lives of others and in your communities.

1. Follow up on referrals. If you get a referral but fail to follow up successfully, it's no secret that you'll eventually stop getting referrals from anyone.

2. Maintain a positive attitude. A consistently negative attitude makes people dislike being around you and will drive away clients; a positive attitude makes people want to associate and cooperate with you. Positive holistic health professionals are like magnets. Others want to be around them and will send their friends, family and associates to them.

3. Be enthusiastic/motivated. To be respected within our field of holistic health, at the very least we need to present ourselves and our work with enthusiasm. Once we've done an effective job of promoting holistic health, we'll be able to reap the reward of seeing our clients refer us to others! For many, that is motivation in and of itself!

4. Be trustworthy. When people come to you with their health care concerns, they're really trusting that you'll take care of them and be genuinely interested in their health and healing. Your clients need to be able to trust you implicitly.

5. Develop good listening skills. Our success as practitioners depends on how well we can listen and learn. Communicate well, and listen well.

6. Network, network, network. Master networkers are never off duty. Networking is so natural to them that they can be found networking in the grocery store line, at the dentist's office and while picking the kids up from school, as well as at the chamber mixers and networking meetings.

7. Remember to thank people. Gratitude is sorely lacking in today's business world. Expressing gratitude to business associates and clients is just another building block in the cultivation of relationships that will lead to increased business and prosperity. People like to refer others to professionals that go above and beyond. Thanking others at every opportunity will help you stand out from the crowd.

8. Genuinely enjoy helping. Helping others can be done in a variety of ways, so keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to advance *other* people's interests whenever you can.

9. Be sincere. You can offer help, thanks, and a listening ear, but if you aren't sincerely interested in your clients, they'll know it! Successful holistic health practitioners convey their sincerity at every turn. One of the best ways to develop this trait is to give the individual with whom you're developing a relationship your undivided attention.

There's a trend within these points and that is they all tie in to long-term relationship building, not to one shot wonders. Practitioners who take the time to build their relationships are the ones who will have fulfilling, transformative experiences in their practices over and over again. As I said earlier: It's all about people helping people helping people.

Thank you!

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