

# The Business of Psychology

## Practice Building for the Mid-Practice Remodel Stage of Practice

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In the last issue I wrote about practice building for the setup stage of practice, an exciting and hopeful time in one's career, full of opportunities yet to be discovered. Some of you who are midway or further into your practice may have succeeded in creating the practice of your dreams and it may still be working as well for you and your patients today as you always hoped it would. Hooray!

But what about those of you who are years or decades into your practice and who slowly or suddenly have begun to notice that something isn't right, that your heart isn't in it the way it once was, that something about your practice just isn't working anymore, if it ever really did? I talk to many of you and hear lots of stories of mid-practice malaise. Sometimes, it's the money part that isn't working. Sometimes, it's the hassles of dealing with insurance and managed care companies. Sometimes, it's the office mates or the employees. Sometimes, it's the paperwork. Sometimes, it's the work you're doing or the patients you're seeing that you just don't enjoy any more. The list of things that cause or contribute to mid-practice misery is long and fascinating. The levels of discontent I encounter range from mild annoyance to thoughts of leaving psychology and never looking back.

Certainly each of you began your practice eager to create a thriving, satisfying business that would help your patients and really work for you. How did it happen that instead of creating the practice of your dreams, you may have created the practice of your nightmares, or at least something that is less than fully satisfying today. Some of you may have had your ideal practice once upon a time, but something changed and it isn't ideal any more. Dream practices can slide down that slippery slope to nightmare practices for countless reasons and at varying rates of speed. Perhaps you've simply changed your mind about what you really want to do. Some of you never have achieved what you would describe as an ideal practice and may have given up thinking it's possible for you, if you ever did. In any event, here you are, not loving your job anymore and wondering "Can this practice be saved?" My answer to you is "Absolutely!" As long as you're willing to invest your resources (time, energy, money) in creating the practice of your dreams, you can have it. Simple, not always easy.

The basic tenets that guide and underlie my consultation work on psychology practice building are these: (1) Psychology has tremendous value in our culture; (2) You're either growing or shrinking; (3) Work is supposed to be fun; (4) You are in business and deserve to earn a comfortable living; (5) Practice building is the best investment you can make; (6) Practice building isn't just about making your practice bigger; (7) Practice building is about making

matches; (8) Image is crucial - it pays to distinguish yourself; (9) The best way to distinguish yourself is to be you; (10) There's enough work for everyone. (For more detail on these basic tenets, see "Practice Building at Various Stages of Practice" from The Oregon Psychologist, July/August 2005. You can find it on my website at the bottom of the consultation page.) The vision I hold for each of you is that you can and should have the practice of your dreams, in which you do only your own work. By that I mean the work you are ideally suited to do, with your patients who are ideally suited to work with you. Before you can create or recreate the practice of your dreams, you must know, in detail, what those dreams are. (Some tips for envisioning your dream practice can be found in "Practice Building for the Setup Stage of Practice" from The Oregon Psychologist, September/October 2005, also on my website.)

Remodeling a practice is not unlike remodeling a home you've lived in for years. Buying a new house is simpler, but giving a much-loved home a new lease on life can be very gratifying. Presumably you bought the house because there were things about it you loved. Maybe some of its features you still like; but others have definitely seen better days and really must go. Certain areas may need only a bit of redecorating to be pleasantly serviceable for years to come. Before remodeling your home, you'd envision how you'd like it to look, feel and function when it's finished. Remember: the degree to which you will be satisfied with the end result of your remodel will be in direct proportion to how well thought out your vision was and how well you or your contractors executed that original plan. Next you'd create a budget and either hire someone to do the work or decide to undertake it yourself. You'd then plan the step-by-step remodeling process. First comes the demolition, which is often the hardest part because you can't see any progress, only what's missing. Anyone who has remodeled before knows it can be a stressful, messy and frustrating process. But as the reconstruction begins and the vision you had starts to appear before your eyes, it all begins to seem worthwhile.

If you're still reading this article, it's likely you want to change some things about your business to make it more satisfying. Exactly what you remodel in your practice and how you go about remodeling it will depend on what isn't working or what you'd like to work better. Just as in the home remodel, you must first envision how you'd like your practice to look, feel and function when the remodel is completed. This is the most important part. Please don't scrimp here. Spend as much time, energy and even money as you need to get the vision right so you don't have to do this again any time soon.

Once you know what you want to achieve, consider what parts of your practice will work toward that end and take care to preserve those parts during the remodel. Next, think carefully about what won't work and then about whether a complete tear down and reconstruction will be required or whether some judicious "redecorating" would do the job. The title of this article talks about practice building, but in order to have the practice you deserve midway through the game, you may have to engage first in some practice demolition. As in the home remodel, the demolition phase can be the hardest part because it may not be the practice of your dreams, but it's the only practice you know and it's probably much better than no practice at all. Remember, the key to a successful practice remodel is exactly the same as the key to a successful home

remodel. It's all in the plan. How well you envision the desired result and how well you create and carry out your step-by-step plan for achieving that vision will be in exact proportion to your satisfaction at the end.

Next issue I'll continue the discussion of Practice Building, with an article about the Winding Down Stage of Practice. If you have questions or particular topics you would like me to address, please let me know. I hope that in some small way I've helped you create a more rewarding psychology "business" that serves not only your patients, but also the psychologist who owns it!

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