



Business - Understanding Your Value and How to Market it - Referrals

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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In order to have a strong, active and growing business, you will need to have good referral sources and also be able to provide good referrals for your clients to receive services that you do not offer. Building and nurturing relationships with others will result in a steady stream of new clients for your practice.

There are many different types of referral sources that can be cultivated as follows:

1. Word of Mouth - For years, marketers have stressed the fact that the best form of advertising is through individuals who talk about your services in a positive manner. Former clients, their friends and relatives can personally attest to the satisfaction they gained by working with you. It doesn't take long until a community forms an opinion about you and your private practice. I remember hearing the words of a lawyer a few years ago who stated "It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and only a few seconds to lose it". People frequently refer their acquaintances for assessment and/or treatment.

2. Other Professionals - At times you might set up joint ventures where the client benefits from having different types of services. In divorce, for example, a lawyer, psychologist and accountant may all work together for the benefit of the client. Other professionals may work in tandem with you and ask that the client see you before they work with you. For years I have been completing psychological assessments for an infertility specialist who claims that he does not have ethical practice unless the couple has had this assessment done first. You may receive referrals from teachers who request that you treat students or from managers who are concerned about employees.

3. Government and Public Service Agencies - The Justice system, community service organizations and government departments might refer individuals to you for either assessment or treatment services. Some such as Worker's Compensation Board or Health Canada might actually pay for the clients but usually this is on a fee schedule that they set. There are times when your contract will allow you to ask the client to "top up" the fees if the organization's scale is lower than your rate, but other times when you will need to decide whether you are willing to work for a lower amount in exchange for a steady stream of referrals.

4. Employee Assistance Programs - Under this category, some companies offer a limited number of sessions or yearly amount as part of the benefit plan for employees. Most of these allow dependents and/or eligible family members to also obtain services. Most of these programs involve signing a contract with the EAP company at the fee per hour rate that they are willing to pay. The benefits are available to the employee on a yearly basis and cannot be carried over into the following year. It's "Use it or lose it". Some employees also are given a "Health Spending Account" which is a set amount of benefit money which they can choose to use for a number of defined services such as medications, dental work or therapy.

5. Private Benefit Plans - Some people purchase coverage for themselves and/or their family members to ensure that they can obtain services that might be needed. In Alberta, for example, there are different levels and options for those who want to purchase plans through Blue Cross. The premiums and benefits vary according to the plan that the individual chooses.

6. Insurance Company Plans - Companies like Manulife, Cooperators and Great West Life offer different types of coverage for policy holders. Some have a limited amount per year which covers therapy. Others offer short-term and long-term coverage for those who are unable to work due to disabilities. Usually, if the client is working, s/he is required to pay for their appointments and then submit them to the insurance company for reimbursement. Sometimes, however, a "worker" from the

company will negotiate with the psychologist for a limited number of sessions to help the client who is on a disability leave from their employment.

7. Professional Referral Services - Some professions charge their therapists a yearly fee which is used to promote the psychologist to individuals who call to that organization for information about services in their area. You might also choose to purchase an advertisement in the newsletter or magazine that is published by your professional organization.

8. Self Referrals - I frequently receive telephone calls or emails from individuals who have found my listing in the yellow pages or read one of my newspaper columns.

Ensuring that you provide excellent services, maintain a respectable reputation, and work at developing good relationships with referral sources will help you to turn every day of your business into a wonderful adventure.