

The Best Marketing Technique of All

It's easy to stay on purpose when you see the results of treatment through your patients. When you help transform the lives of people by restoring their health, it's easier to focus on your practice.

Almost every marketing technique anyone ever taught has to do with personal interaction, which means you talking one-on-one with someone, you talking to a group, your assistant talking to someone, etc. Advertising is the exception, which I'll cover in a moment.

If you are seeing less than one or two new patients per week, you are likely having some trouble explaining your care clearly enough so that people understand that they need acupuncture. If you are able to clearly explain to people about the necessity for treatment, you'll have a stable base of patients coming to you.

You can learn methods to acquire new patients, but if you have a problem talking to people and clearly explaining your care and its benefits, those methods will just be added to a long list of unused bright ideas.

You may think it's not professional to tell people that you are an acupuncturist. Perhaps you are hoping for people to see the sign on the door of your practice and just walk in. That's not the way to have a fulfilling practice. You have to drop the idea that being professional means hiding the fact that you are an acupuncturist. You should be willing to tell a stranger the many benefits of acupuncture and what it can do for their health.

You can always attempt to go the route of having a practice that gets its patients from word of mouth and advertising, and this may work for you, but I know what a practice built from advertising can be like. It often involves patients who are uncommitted, want a quick fix, and then drop out of treatment. Word of mouth is a tried and true way of getting new patients, but it may not be enough to keep your practice thriving. There is some value to advertising, but you shouldn't depend on it as your only source of new patients. Your ads also need to be of the highest professional quality, because your ad is a reflection your practice.

Here is an example of what I mean by being "above" to explain care to people. Let's pretend you are in a restaurant in a booth. Behind you in the next booth are two people, Lorie and Charles. Lorie turns to Charles and asks, "Are your headaches any better?" Charles says, "No, they're horrible. I've got one starting right now." What would you do in this situation?

Here are some options of what you can do in this situation. You can continue to eat your meal and pretend you don't hear them. You can think, "I've had a busy day; I want to just sit here and relax and not talk to anyone." You could think, "I should talk to Charles about acupuncture, but it could be viewed as intrusive." You could think a hundred other things, but thinking won't help Charles one bit, and it certainly won't get him to be a new patient.

You could turn around and say, "Excuse me. I don't mean to intrude, but I overheard you talking about headaches. I want you to know you haven't tried everything unless you've tried acupuncture." Then you can give him your business card. Better yet, get a business card from

Charles and tell him he should come and see you. Suggest that he can drop by and read some literature or chat with you to find out the results that can be gotten relieving headaches with acupuncture.

Now, you may be thinking about your hesitation with regard to talking to a stranger. If you don't, though, Charles will continue to have headaches and perhaps never discover the value of acupuncture.

Perhaps it's a sign of our time. With VCRs, entertainment centers and computers, people don't spend as much time talking to each other as they once did. A person can literally stay locked up in the home for days at a time and experience minimal personal interaction.

Talk to people when you have the chance. Not only will your new patient volume grow, but you will find you like people more and they will be interested in what you have to say. Those you talk to will like you. You will stand above the crowd.

The idea that professionals do not interact with potential new patients or promote themselves is false. You need to talk to people about acupuncture if you want to build your practice. Remember, there are millions of potential new patients out there, and though acupuncture as a profession has been around for thousands of years, there are many who have virtually no understanding of its value. You just need to interact with people in your community. Then you'll find that you have all the new patients you need.

MAY 2005