

Planning for Success

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I hear of many practitioners who are scraping by in part-time practices, seeing between five and 10 patients per week and barely making ends meet with a side job. On the other hand, I also know many practitioners who are thriving in busy practices and love what they do. What makes the difference? I think the biggest factor lies in having a plan and executing it.

I see students who put so much energy into learning the medicine and preparing for exams, but when it comes to starting a business, they have no idea how demanding it will be. Even experienced practitioners can benefit from creating a business plan. Having a clear, well-thought out plan is essential to the success of any complicated endeavor. It makes the action steps much easier, since you can reference your "map" and paint by numbers, so to speak.

For a new practice, I recommend writing a complete business plan even if you are not seeking outside funding. This process will help you to formulate your vision for your practice so that it can be manifested as completely as possible. It really is an alchemical process, and the better prepared you are, the closer you will land to your objective. A clear plan also will help you identify your own strengths and weaknesses, so you can better utilize your limited resources and accomplish more with less wasteful effort.

For experienced practitioners, I recommend writing, at a minimum, an annual business plan consisting of a simple one-page format that outlines your mission; your vision; your objectives; the steps required to achieve your goals; and a timeline for accomplishing them.

Whether you are new or have been in practice for a while, it's important to keep your plan out where you can see it and revise it as needed. If it merely finds its way into a file cabinet, it will quickly be lost in the shuffle of day-to-day activities. One of the first rules in using the power of intention is to stay focused on what you want to have happen. Keep your map handy when you are traveling into unknown territory!

There are many business-planning resources available. Two that I've found particularly useful are not very expensive; however, they require that you actually do the work. One is the startup business plan found on the CD-ROM that accompanies the book *Points for Profit*; the other is *The One-Page Business Plan*, templates of which can be found on the Web (and which is quite useful for established practices).

Once you have written your business plan, it's important to create a timeline for action steps that you write into your calendar and actually do. If you get lazy or scared, it's important to do whatever you have to do to motivate yourself to stay on course. You can't climb off a mountain by sitting at the trailhead! Have fun crossing completed items off of your list, keep adding new ones, and keep your business in motion. Businesses are not immune to the concept of *qi* stagnation.

Best wishes to you on your journey!

