



BILLING / FEES / INSURANCE

From the Treatment Room to the Boardroom

A PRACTITIONER'S JOURNEY

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I am always looking for new and interesting things to do with OM. Ever since the early '70s, when I first bought handmade needles in San Francisco's opium dens, I have hunted for novel opportunities. First, I successfully worked with my stepfather, a founder of the Kaiser Permanente hospital chain, to get acupuncture into the Kaiser system. Then I started exploring the business world through its executives.

The business population intrigued me because it is filled with powerful people whose opinions matter in the community. If I was successful in bringing OM to this world, there would be many beneficial ramifications for the profession. Power people spread the word in a big way. They have influence in government and legal affairs. By playing ball with a few power people, an entire society can benefit. My goal was to introduce high-level executives to what we do; to give them a personal experience that would trickle down to their spouses, families and ultimately, employee bases. I hoped to treat the one, thereby creating exposure for the many.

I came up with multiple ways to sell them on OM. I taught CEO family health classes, experiential acupuncture workshops, tongue diagnosis classes to aid human resource directors in their hiring practices, and marital support coaching sessions in which I taught execs how to use OM theories to improve their romantic lives. I even taught sex classes using OM principles, which I followed up with a book on the subject.

For the past 15 years my practice has been made up almost entirely of CEOs, their families and their top-level executives. I have worked in consulting and coaching situations, and as a clinical practitioner. Working this way has afforded me unique opportunities to travel the world (more than 60 countries), meet fascinating people, and earn higher dollar amounts than is typical of a traditional acupuncture practice. While my needles do get a workout, my primary work is theoretical, merging Taoist principles that make up our tradition with contemporary business models. While I may be the first in our industry to build a business with this direction, I hope to inspire my students at the Pacific Symposium to explore this option for themselves. I have had a far more interesting life because I chose this path. While the learning curve was steep, the rewards more than make up for it.

If you are interested in working with a business' medical benefits plan, either as a workers' comp practitioner or through wellness or addiction programs, approaching the human resource director or other appropriate person in a manner that is convincing is far more likely to get you the clout and thus the position you want. If you haven't done thorough homework before you go for that phone or in-person interview, don't bother showing up. In the business world, time is money and money runs everything.

You must be able to convince conservative, polyester-wearing, middle-management personnel that what you have to offer is documented by viable research to lower costs and decrease absenteeism in their workplace. This means you have to find research relevant to their needs. Studying an

industry and ascertaining its primary health concerns must come first. Motorola spends half a million dollars for each employee who dies of diabetes and its related complications. Can you show them proof you can save them money, either in direct costs or through lost work hours? Companies involved in the distribution of large products require that employees work with heavy equipment, lifting, packing and shipping. Can you demonstrate to their benefits manager that acupuncture works more effectively than 10 units of traditional physical therapy and ultimately costs them less for back pain injuries? You must use simple diagrams, graphs, abstracts and numbers. An interviewer needs to know that bringing you on board is a financial win for them, in that you can get people working again sooner and cheaper. We still hold a position slightly to the left of Saturn in the eyes of the conservative business world. It is only numbers, dollar amounts and work hours that will take acupuncture mainstream.

The most important thing to consider when interacting with any patient is the idiom required for them to learn what you need to teach them. My most used skill as a practitioner of 36 years is my ability to translate what I do into the language my patients are able to hear. Sometimes it's "Americanese," sometimes "business-speak," and when running a pediatric practice, "Sesame Street" or "fairy tales." When it comes to working with business people, either as a consultant or clinical practitioner, learning a lexicon that is relevant is imperative. To be given a chance in the business world, you must speak the language of the interviewers who screen you. They must feel that you present yourself in a professional manner well within the comfort zone of their corporate culture and language. They must get what you are introducing them to.

A corporate culture includes the vision of the company and the style with which it accomplishes its goals. The culture is the set of ground rules upon which all personnel interact, including the stratification system between positions. The culture shapes how people feel when they go to work, what their environment is, and how they interact with each other. One of my coaching clients is the largest U.S. producer and distributor of a certain vegetable. He was grateful to have the best executive assistant ever and depended upon her entirely to get things done when he traveled to farms and processing plants, which was often. But she didn't like how "loose" things were in his company. She had come from a position in banking and preferred the marble-floored rigidity provided by that industry. She left after only 18 months and my client's machine suffered. This is an example of differing preferences in corporate culture.

When you approach a company with whom you wish to work, first explore its culture to determine how to present yourself. Prepare to address the company's specific needs and have documentation available to prove your case. As acupuncturists enter the business world, we will expand the demand for our work and the price we can get for it substantially. Knowing that you are serving yourself, your profession and your community with such high impact is very rewarding. I am a living example of that. You can be, too.

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