

Healing Corporate America

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The new year brings opportunities to increase our impact upon the world and enhance our revenue generation. In this article, I will introduce one of these opportunities. A year ago, I was the Saturday evening keynote speaker at the Pacific Symposium, and I taught that corporate America was a desperately hungry market for our services. In that speech, I presented several options for opening one's practice to this market and suggested that each of us could move from where we are to a new model or segment of practice with a few easy strategies and virtually no money. Throughout this past year, colleagues who have been working to accomplish this have reached out to me for help, and much has been gained by those who have taken steps in that direction. Here is a letter written by TD, one of our colleagues.

Hi Dr. Dunas:

I'm writing you to ask for your help. I am interested in working with businesses by bringing wellness programs to their corporations. I have been practicing acupuncture for 10 years and have a very broad practice background. I've worked in hospitals, as well as private practices. Would you please offer me some advice/suggestions to get started down this pathway? I would like to provide stress reduction, weight management, smoking cessation, etc., to the work force. Also, how would I set my fees? I don't want to undercharge for my services/experience. Many thanks in advance for your kind help. Keep those thought-provoking articles coming! I love the way it stirs the pot!

Sincerely,

TD

I answered TD by saying that if you want to move into the corporate sector, there are three things to consider:

Do you want to focus on serving a particular problem, like stress, pain, addictions or some other malady that you particularly enjoy treating?

Do you want to work within your local community, say with companies within a mile of your office, so that referrals to your regular practice are easy for employees to take advantage of?

Is there a particular company with which you want to work, even though you don't yet know how you might be of service to them? Perhaps there is a prestigious bank or hotel chain for which you would like to aim.

If your intention is to treat a specific type of problem, consider which businesses would encounter these ailments. For example, if resolution of pain is your aim, research what local companies are involved in manufacturing or distribution of product, as these companies have entire departments devoted to moving, working assembly lines or enduring jobs that require repetitive motion. Many

companies with high workers' comp bills would be more open to your coming in than the local diner that hires only part-time staff without offering medical benefits. If you can get people back to work faster, or make them more productive while at work because they are in less pain, expect to be given the opportunity to present your proposals.

If you want to keep your business-related treatments to your local area, find out who is in the neighborhood. You may already treat several local employees in your practice. Ask them about the companies for which they work. Familiarize yourself with the people and companies who are in your backyard. Make friends; it's the best way to build your business. Once you know who is local, you can consider the size of the company where you want to propose a program. The small print shop with 10 employees may be the perfect place to start offering 15-minute stress-relief treatments on Friday afternoons for a small fee per person. Or maybe you have treated a barista from the local coffee house. Ask her if she will speak to her manager on your behalf before you set up a meeting to discuss repetitive-motion problems among employees. You can utilize this strategy with any patient currently in your practice or any person who works in a company with which you would like to work. Offer a gift of a comprehensive exam or other benefit for every employee from their business who comes to your office.

If your goal is to get into a specific company - say you love sports medicine and want to work with the large sporting-goods store around the corner - go speak to their managers or personnel director. Have a sit-down meeting, describe what you do and find out how they might need you. Remember, their need is the important one to fill. If you can increase the productivity of even one lower-level person in that company, the buzz will get around and they will consider giving you a try.

A great way to find out a company's most common health problems is to speak to the human resources or personnel director, or receptionists (many love to chat and know everything going on in the office); talk to anyone who takes a cigarette break outside during your morning walk around the neighborhood; or sit down with a small-business owner and ask questions. Find out from these people if the service you provide might be of interest to them personally or of benefit to the office. If you start out with casual conversations, you will have greater knowledge, which gives you the courage to begin proposing intervention options in more formal meetings.

With all of these options, do some research in advance. Find the science that will back up your sales pitch. Use research to demonstrate to potential corporate clients that you can get results. Consider doing lunch-break educational sessions for any staff level. Put a 20-minute speech together with 12 to 15 PowerPoint slides. You can get very professional photographs of acupuncture from the photograph databases online, and they cost next to nothing.

Go to local mixers and business networking groups, or start your own at a local restaurant, bar, etc. I know one practitioner, Kelsey, who started her own social mixer monthly by using Craigslist.com to invite local business people to network with each other. A neighborhood restaurant/bar was happy to have the events and gave her a separate room for the gatherings without charge. Business cards were collected at the door. She gave a 15-minute speech using lots of humor and levity (as that was the mood of the event series), made new friends and built a multi-business practice by the end of the first year.

Here is what TD did. This is another of one his letters to me:

Hello, Dr. Dunas:

How nice of you to follow up. The info that you forwarded to me was very helpful. I

joined the local chamber of commerce. With my membership I received a set of mailing labels for business and individual members. I immediately mailed a letter of introduction, info on acupuncture and my curriculum vitae, and described how acupuncture can help their business and employees with weight management, stress management and pain.

I talked about getting employees back to work more quickly, reducing lost days due to illness/stress, and mentioned how a healthier work force could eventually reduce their insurance premiums. (I forgot to include the increased morale.) Almost immediately, I received a phone call from the local sheriff's office inquiring about my services. I met with the sheriff's right-hand man and talked about how I could help them. I'm meeting with the sheriff in a few weeks in my office. He wants a treatment so he can recommend it to his officers/staff. I'm currently working on some type of "packages" for weight management, smoking cessation and stress reduction for their employees.

Also, I was contacted by a medical complex (as a result of the letter) to provide acupuncture information for a large open house they are hosting in a few weeks. It's not a corporate program but will get my name around in the local community as well as among the physicians.

So, I'm on my way. After working with the sheriff's office, I'll branch out and directly contact HR people at larger local businesses. The sheriff carries a lot of clout in the community (and it's a large department), so having that under my belt will add credibility.

Thank you again for sharing your work, as well as checking in with me. I appreciate your support.

TD

If TD can do it, so can you. We each have our own unique ways of expanding into our communities, and the corporate world is aware and curious about what we have to offer. This may be your year to hit a home run in that underserved community.

In closing this piece, I want to acknowledge the sanctity of what we do in the world and to honor you, my readers and colleagues, for persevering against the odds and bringing this medicine to those who need it. Your courage, fortitude and willingness to overcome the unfamiliar as you develop your business is reflected back to you by your courageous patients who come to you for treatment that is equally new and foreign. They come with their vulnerabilities, even as we market for them with ours. But underneath our individual challenges, the river of life moves, the *Tao* dances and the holiness of this medicine branches still further into our world.

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