



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

## Peer Points: Mike Arsenault Builds From The Ground Up

STORIES OF PRACTICE SUCCESS

Brenda Duran

*Editor's Note:* This is our new bi-monthly column focused on highlighting the success of acupuncturists from around the country who would like to share their tips for making an acupuncture practice work and thrive.

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Licensed acupuncturist Mike Arsenault learned early on that in order to create a successful practice he needed to be patient. Over time, his hard work and ambition would lead him not only to create a thriving practice but also a successful side skincare business based on TCM.

By stepping out of the box and venturing into the world of commerce, Arsenault was able to apply more to his practice. Arsenault has learned that building a strong practice includes good marketing and establishing strong relationships with patients. Here he shares how he went from a new acupuncturist straight out of the New England School of Acupuncture to established practitioner and businessman in Ipswich, MA at Winchester Hospital in Winchester, MA.

AT: Tell us about going from an acupuncture graduate to being a successful business owner. What are some of the important steps you took?

When I first graduated I built my acupuncture practice gradually. I kept my day job as a community college professor and built up my practice in the evenings and weekends. I sent letters to network with doctors and massage therapists, gave talks, knocked on a lot of doors to let people know I had opened up an office. Only after I had a steady half-time practice did I make the leap and leave teaching. In the early years I joined BNI, taught classes at the local YMCA, wrote articles for the local newspaper and anything else that would keep my name circulating locally. Once there was a steady stream of patients the continued success and growth of the practice relied on results, so I listened carefully and made sure people got results that they'd want to tell their friends and family



about.



AT: What made you go from being an acupuncturist with a practice to selling a product? Tell us about how acupuncture helped you with your idea.

I had no intention of creating or selling a product. My products were born purely of necessity. My daughter Emily was born with eczema and I wanted to keep her off of harsh medicines if at all possible. I knew that I could help her herbolically and relied on my training in Chinese herbs from New England School of Acupuncture to develop something to help her. I read everything I could find and took traditional dermatology formulas and pared them down until we had something very simple and very effective. My wife Chi and I tested them on ourselves and later Emily. After I created a balm that worked well for Emily, I began using it in my clinic with patients. After it worked well with them, I slowly began to see the possibilities of building a business to help more people.

AT: What advice would you give to those who have just graduated from acupuncture school?

Envision how and where you want to practice. Be very specific. What are your goals? What would be the perfect practice for you? By clarifying this before starting it will be so much easier to take steps to get there. Then, realize that it will take time to build a practice. Plan on taking at least a year to get a steady practice off the ground.

AT: When you branched out with your product line, how were you able to bring your product to the market quickly and cheaply?

I came to quickly realize that our patients and their families are a good cross-section of the population. You can test and get real feedback on a product for very little money by giving them your invention and asking for feedback. If it does well with your sphere of influence, it most likely has a good chance in the general population. If it doesn't, you should reconsider before spending



more money and go back to the drawing board.

AT: What are some of the Traditional Chinese Medicine principles you personally follow to achieve success?

I try to keep some of the most fundamental TCM principles in mind in my work and my life. The first is simply Yin Yang balance. In the early years of the business it was like a tsunami that I was barely able to keep riding. I worked maniacally and got depleted. When I finally came up for air, I decided that if I wanted to keep doing the work I love I'd need to recharge my batteries regularly and work in a more reasonable manner. Now I stop and get proper sleep, meditate and take more time for myself and family. I not only feel better but also have more resources to do a better job and come up with more creative ways to keep expanding and growing.

The second principle is flow. I try to keep at ease and flow with the circumstances. Nothing good can come from obstruction, stagnation and tension, and they are generally due not to the circumstances, but one's own reaction to the circumstances. The facts are the facts, it is the interpretation of them that can make things either pleasure or torture. I try to choose pleasure and keep the *qi* flowing and not stuck.

AT: As an acupuncture business owner what have been some of the mistakes you have learned from?

Early on, with a general acupuncture education, I wanted to be everything to everyone. Unfortunately, you cannot be. There are some areas of practice that you are more interested in and those are generally the ones you become better at.

With time I learned that it is much better to choose the areas of practice that interest you most and become expert at those. In my case, I was especially interested in the treatment of injury and pain because of my background in the martial arts and my lengthy apprenticeship with a specialist in Die Da (traumatology). Later I became especially interested in dermatology because of my daughter's needs. I got the best, most dramatic results in these areas and that led to the practice growing quickly because patients were happy with the results and told their friends.

AT: How do you leverage customer feedback and testimonials? Have you applied this to your practice as well?

There is something deep within all of us that gets engaged by a story. A testimonial is essentially a story, and customers respond very well to them. When people read a positive testimonial, they naturally picture themselves getting the same positive results. It is a powerful selling tool.

I use testimonials in both my acupuncture practice and on the website. People get really excited when they read a story about someone who tried everything else with no results before getting great relief from your products or services. Before/after photos are even also extremely powerful and a great compliment to testimonials.

When a patient or customer gets great results from acupuncture or the products I ask them if they'd be willing to share their story with others looking for help. I also try to make that very easy for them to do and either send them a link to a simple, clear online testimonial form, or if they prefer, I give them a paper form and a self-addressed envelope. A large majority of people are grateful for your help and are very willing to share their story.

AT: What do you think is the most important business lesson most acupuncturists need to learn early on?



Don't talk, listen and then deliver. All the talk and theory in the world is well and good, but you need to get results for your patients and customers. Don't talk about theory unless your patients ask. The most important thing you can do is listen. Just listen carefully and determine where the person in front of you is right now. What do THEY want and need and what is the next realistic step for them to take in their health and life? It is not about what you want for them. If you can help them where they envision themselves, you are doing your job and they will continue to come to you. If you try to impose your ideas and your goals on them they will feel that, resist it, and it will be frustrating for you both.

AT: What tips would you give a new acupuncturist trying to build their practice and get into their own business venture?

Most people are modest and self-effacing. Those are laudable qualities, but they need to be questioned and put aside when building a business or practice. You need to make as many people as possible aware of the fact that you can and would like to help them. It may be uncomfortable, but if you want to help more people, you need to put aside your discomfort and promote yourself. I'd suggest you think of it as serving the common good and your own interests at the same time. I know too many practitioners that open an office and expect people to come along and find them. They feel awkward speaking about themselves or feel that self-promotion is crude. That attitude can be a huge obstacle and can get in the way of helping more people (and paying your bills!). It reminds me of the old Chinese proverb, "'A peasant must stand a long time on a hillside with his mouth open before a roast duck flies in.'" If you believe that you can help people, and you really want to, then you shouldn't just wait at the open door. You should shout it from the rooftops and let them come.

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