



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Peer Points: Marketing Lessons From Heather Lounsbury

STORIES OF PRACTICE SUCCESS

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Heather Lounsbury, LAc, knows a few things about getting her practice some publicity. For the past 15 years, her services have been featured in the official Oscars and Grammys gift bags. Her services have been directly offered to celebrities, many of whom remain her loyal clientele today such as the band Coldplay, actress Tori Spelling, Carmen Electra and the list goes on.

Lounsbury has also been called upon to talk about TCM in the television and radio show circuits. The success did not happen overnight, but was possible with a mix of determination and persistence.

When she was an acupuncture student, Lounsbury said she took her education from her alma mater Emperor's College seriously. She learned the profession and techniques and ended up graduating Summa cum Laude in 2001. After graduating, Lounsbury said she set out to ensure her private practice thrived by not only offering acupuncture services, but also herbs and nutrition services. Lounsbury is also a Reiki master and knows how to speak three languages.

"Ever since she graduated Summa cum Laude from Emperor's College in 2001, Heather has devoted her time to building her private practice in Santa Monica, Calif., from the ground up. She owes much of her success to her tenacity, her business acumen and, of course, her outstanding abilities as a healer. It's no surprise to me that Heather has worked with many award-winning celebrities and is a sought-after health expert on television and radio shows. Heather stands out as a practitioner due to her unique holistic approach to healing and her great personality. She's an inspiration to future clinicians," said Yun Kim, CEO of Emperor's College.



At her clinic in Santa Monica, Calif. Heather treats a variety of ailments, specializing in pain management, gynecology, mental health and addiction, digestive disorders and has developed protocols for those in the performing arts to maximize their bodies' health and to minimize illness.

She took time out to answer a few questions from *Acupuncture Today* about what it takes to make it big as an acupuncturist and get your name known to reach maximum potential in this growing profession.

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

HL: The main thing that kept me going was my belief in myself and knowing that I was good at my job. I'd say this is necessary to make it through the ups and downs of running a business. I was/am very tenacious. I follow up with patients, potential contacts, and press. At the very beginning I reached out to all my connections and let them know I was in business. I also offered discounts for any referrals.

AT: When it came time to market yourself, how did you go about doing this?

HL: When I finished school, the Internet was still pretty new. So social media wasn't even heard of yet. I put up a website. I gave lectures. I cold called potential referral sources- doctors, chiropractors, therapists, etc.. Now it's totally different- I have an active site, I tweet, Facebook and use Google +.

AT: Knowing many languages, how has this helped you in your practice?

HL: I can't say how it has helped my practice for sure. I know my patients who are Russian or German appreciate my knowledge. But honestly, I'm not fluent in medical terms. I also know a few to many words in several other languages. This definitely builds a rapport with patients who speak

English as a second language.

AT: As an acupuncturist, what is the latest trend in your practice that you think is affecting the way acupuncturists do business these days?

HL: Social media for sure. You can reach out to people all over the world. It's also a great way to dispel any myths and teach people what TCM treats. Also- more insurances are reimbursing for acupuncture. I don't accept insurance, but my patients always get reimbursed by their insurance.

AT: You are frequently called upon to talk about TCM to the general public on popular talk shows. What are people most curious about and how do you teach them?

HL: Most people want to learn about acupuncture face lifts and weight loss. This is probably because I'm in LA. I give a few tips on wrinkle prevention and healthy eating with out dieting. People also ask, if TCM really works. I'm hoping that gets asked less the more mainstream it becomes.

AT: You also have a strong celebrity clientele. How were you able to build those relationships and how have they enriched your practice?

HL: Some of my celebrity patients I already knew personally. Some were referrals by mutual friends or their managers. I've been in the gift bags for major award shows for several years as well. This includes the Oscars, GRAMMYS, and Emmys. They all have busy schedules, so I've learned to be flexible. I get to go on sets a lot and travel, so that's a lot of fun. When they mention me publicly, I get fans contacting me with questions. Of course, I can't answer any...

AT: In your practice, what are the most common health issues you are seeing these days?

HL: Stress, panic attacks, food allergies, infertility, weight gain, cancer are the most common.

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

HL: I try to live a balanced life. Some days/weeks are easier than others. I know this is key for my own well being. I incorporate meditation, exercise, healthy eating, and supplements to help me.

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

HL: I used to expect people to come in when they said they were really interested. That only happens about half the time. Or even less. I would have an expectation and end up disappointed. Now I let it go and am nicely surprised when I hear from them. Also, being very clear with my patients about treatment plans and prognosis. Most Westerners want a quick fix, which can happen with TCM. But it's nothing like swallowing a pill that treats symptoms and not the cause. Slow and steady will get you there.

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

HL: Know what your boundaries and policies are and stick with it. Charge what your worth. I see a lot of acupuncturists who charge too little, which can be seen as lowering your value. I think people can sense this.

AT: How did TCM college prepare you for the "real world"?

HL: I have to say, Emperor's College helped me learn the medicine. But building a business I had to do on my own.

AT: What tips would you give a new acupuncturist trying to build their practice?

HL: Believe in yourself, follow through, be tenacious, and value your work. Oh, have a great website and take your business cards everywhere you go!

Would you like to share your story of success with other practitioners? Email us!
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