

What You Are Up Against: Factors Beyond Your Control That Affect Your Business

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Although unrelated to you as a person or practitioner the challenges you face can affect your practice. As a new profession we are all feeling the *growing pains* but at varying degrees — depending upon where your practice is located. As each state moves forward in the maturity of its licensing process and public awareness there are gestational periods that each one of us goes through. Where each state is on that spectrum determines what you are up against. As spiritually oriented as you may be regarding the laws of attraction and success, the following affect how successful your practice is or isn't.

1. Currently South Dakota is engaged in developing a licensing program but Alabama and Oklahoma still have no licensure, and a practitioner must work under an MD's license. The first states in the U.S. to achieve licensure were Nevada followed by Oregon and California. It's been over 40 years for those three western states. Where your state is on this spectrum determines the atmosphere in which you work.
2. Several states' legal structures maintain that an acupuncturist must be referred to by a physician. This makes our work dependent upon MD education levels and has the tendency to leave patients intimidated. Mississippi, Ohio and Louisiana fit into this category. Sometimes the referral is in reference to a specific ailment so we are limited in what we can treat.
3. Some states require "supervision" which means an MD (or acupuncturist, as in Georgia) must supervise for the first 1-4 years of practice. This does encourage networking but it creates restrictions that are hard to overcome.
4. Insurance acceptance opens the door to many potential patients and makes it easier to run a successful business because the patient pool expands. As more people are exposed to our work the word-of-mouth marketing increases and creates a positive spiral of expansion.
5. Do you have a state organization? If so, how does their work feed into the law? State organizations can expand modality range to include both diagnostic and treatment modalities. It can engage in and fund studies, fight adversarial laws, create PR campaigns and market the field. Indiana has a small state association, its head, Jennifer Meador-Stone, has worked tirelessly to get acupuncture into university studies. This has made practicing in Indiana easier in a shorter period of time since legalization.
6. How TCM is discussed in the press affects your practice. All PR is good in the long run. If a negative event is reported in the press it hurts short term. But the word acupuncture gets out there and will help feed the local awareness over time. We are much safer than other health care professions with no cases of death, very few cases of injury, unsafe practice, or negligence by comparison.
7. Are there schools locally? Schools legitimize and market our work. They attract students using PR and marketing and promote the field to a wide range of patients through their clinics.
8. Legitimacy of other non-western fields of healing such as cranio-sacral workers, naturopaths, homeopaths, chiropractors and other fields, affect you as well because they are also trying to make a living. If other medical professionals are in survival mode they will do what they can to hold onto patients, even to the patients' detriment. I have heard several derogatory

comments coming from practitioners in other fields who did not know my work. "I generally don't refer to acupuncturists because it is too expensive, it takes too long, it's only effective for a few things, etc. "My homeopath told me acupuncture isn't good." One patient told me flatly.

9. The opinions of local MDs matters, as do those of your patient's close community members. I have heard, "My doctor told me not to get acupuncture" from several people who came with reticence and only because they weren't getting well elsewhere. If a patient tells their boss they are going to get acupuncture on a lunch break and the boss says that's ridiculous, that feedback doesn't help. If a patient's friends and family think your work is not valuable, patients are less comfortable coming to you or sharing their positive experiences.
10. Regardless of the law, how are practitioners thriving in your community? Sometimes practitioners who don't succeed believe the medicine doesn't work and vocalize this to justify their failures. Practitioners with poor results, also affect the local buzz. Patients assume if the medicine doesn't work with one practitioner it won't work at all.

What you can do to improve your odds

- Learn how to interpret research so you can discuss it and teach patients, colleagues, MDs and other health professionals what research means and documents about our work.
- Become familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine. Intuition is an important part of your work but don't be intuitive instead of theoretical or factual. Use science, as well as TCM theory, to understand what you do and communicate that to patients and other medical professionals. When you speak to patients be specific. "Here is the TCM theory, here is the science behind our work." This creates "safety" for them.
- Join state associations that are doing lobbying and are more effective than you can be alone in creating a more receptive marketplace for your work.
- Advocate that your state organization join ASA, a representative organization for all the state organizations. ASA brings all states together to support, educate and advocate for one another. They have a larger power base than each individual state.
- You need to know how to correct negative, uninformed gossip. Scientific research is vital in promoting our work and understanding that research is the best way to stop gossip. Studies only serve if they are properly conducted and not all studies are. The Society For Acupuncture Research (SAR) is a good place to start.
- Public speaking is a skill you need. Toast Masters is a great organization that teaches this complex skill set at no charge. It's a great way to learn and is all over the country.

Be able to give an elevator speech which is, metaphorically and literally, what you say when you get into an elevator with a perspective patient or another health practitioner, and have one minute, while the elevator goes up or down. Say what you do in a concise, powerful way that will inspire them to buy your service, or make further inquiry. They are simple strong statements that require thought and perfecting over time.

Ask executives from companies you purchase products from what their elevator speeches are because every executive has one. We all need to know how to teach and inspire those who are ignorant about what we do. Using science, research, TCM theory and community action you can move your practice and your state forward, no matter how the "law of attraction" is working for you.

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