



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

Peer Points: Lyle Wilson Goes Beyond Acupuncture

STORIES OF PRACTICE SUCCESS

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Editor's Note: This is our 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.

Lyle Wilson wears many hats - medical *qi* gong expert, bodyworker, educator and entrepreneur. For the past 32 years, he has used his wealth of knowledge as a healthcare practitioner to start his own dietary supplement business, Strength24 and teach others the key to success. Being able to wear many hats effectively has helped Wilson make a name for himself and helped him launch a successful dietary supplement business. Most of the year he is focused on traveling around the world to speak to other practitioners about health and improving their practice as well as to bring awareness to calcium cell level regulation. When he isn't speaking, he shifts gears and spends time giving patients one-on-one attention to help them improve their health. He took a few minutes from his busy schedule to share with *Acupuncture Today* about what he has learned along the way.

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



My experience is that most people who are drawn to the healing professions are not natively great business people, and even with an undergraduate degree in business, I felt like a babe in the woods when I started my practice. The single most important step I took was to ask a successful small business person in my community to be my mentor. She helped me avoid pitfalls and guided me through the fundamentals that got me started well. I joined the Chamber of Commerce, which taught me to be fearless about talking with complete strangers on the benefits of Oriental Medicine and to develop a one minute speech. I developed a network of trusted healthcare professionals in various fields to whom I could refer, always writing a letter of referral in language that would inspire confidence in me as a fellow professional, and when receiving a patient referral, always wrote a letter of thanks and a report of my findings. I still do these things today.

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

Create a good business plan that includes all of the above, and then treat it like the great training you've just completed. Trust it to be the foundation and framework for your business, and be open to adapting to the unique needs of your particular practice, just as you are open to listening for those things in each patient that will have you modify from a classic point pattern to make the treatment uniquely theirs.

Practice herbal medicine from day one with all of your patients. I was surprised at the results of a recent Acupuncture Today poll that showed a very low percentage of practice revenues deriving from herbal supplementation. Your thoughtful choice on herbs for your patient is an extension of your energy and care that is working with and for them all the while they are not in your office.

AT: What is the latest trend in your practice that you think is affecting the way acupuncturists do business these days?

The complexity level of referrals. I like to think of Oriental Medicine as "slow medicine", and in the same way that the slow food movement is trending, people are relishing the engagement level that is inherent in the acupuncture relationship. Because we take time to be thoughtful and in tune with our patients, outcomes are good, and the combination of caring engagement and good outcomes lead to referrals which often sound something like this, "My friend said to come see you because you can fix anything." These are frequently people for whom allopathic medicine has failed to provide help, and their situations are chronic and complex. This is great news for me and for other practitioners I speak with, because it encourages our delving deeply into the tradition as well as current literature to expand our awareness and our thinking in order to help.

AT: As a public speaker, what are some of the biggest concerns you have heard from practitioners and how have you helped them?

I present regularly both here and in China and expressed concerns are often the same: With allopathic medicine being (or becoming) the dominant voice in healthcare, how can I make my way? My advice is to make and to trust your place in the system. It is easy to get caught up in the sabre rattling done at high levels, but the individual MDs I know and you know often appreciate, or are open to learning about, the effectiveness of acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, and the benefits of a cooperative relationship. Some of the most interesting referrals I receive are from MDs, so don't forget to include them in your networking. That said, for acupuncture to have a say at high levels requires money.

Giving the equivalent revenue for just two treatments each year to your state legislative action fund, separate from any professional association dues, will make that voice much stronger. When you make nurturing your profession an automatic business cost, you are nurtured in return. Encourage your colleagues to do the same.

AT: What are the biggest health issues you are seeing affect your patient base the most?

High personal stress and overarching environmental stress. My patient base is largely comprised of high achieving people, and their stress levels when first entering my practice are amazingly high. Some of my goals in working with each of them are to help identify; controllable stressors, work/recreation imbalances, and food/drink choices that contribute. They are often so outwardly focused that I include an abdominal breathing lesson in a first session and give them "homework" of two 5 minute sessions per day as a reintroduction to their own bodies.

Our environment is a steady and increasing source of toxicity. From urban air and our food and water supplies, we ingest and absorb all manner of things that suppress and compromise optimal health. Self-directed toxic loads such as overuse of alcohol and caffeine, use of tobacco products and the above-mentioned stress add to the problem. I often use a gentle and systematic detoxification protocol that first addresses the bowel, liver, blood and lymph, then proceeds to the extracellular matrix, and then to the cell to clear away the impediments to vitality.

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

Movement is essential, and I do Tai Chi and *qigong* each day. I really notice the difference if I allow circumstances to cause me to miss. Stagnation will kill you.

I also meditate daily. A wonderful teacher told me that meditation widens the gap between stimulation and our response. The greater the gap, the broader the opportunity to modulate the Seven Emotions. This gives me a calmer center from which to work with patients and my life.

When I pay attention to the rhythm of things, whether it be a plan of care, an aspect of business, or in my personal life, events typically unfold well. If I push an agenda that is out of phase with that rhythm, they don't. Whenever I find myself getting exhausted, this is usually why.

AT: As a practitioner what have been some of the mistakes you have learned from?

When freshly graduated, I thought I could rest on my educational laurels, but even the very best education is just a great framework. Some of adding richness and texture to our art is simply time and numbers of patients seen, but reaching deeply into the tradition geometrically expands and progresses our appreciation of the nuance that is necessarily peeled away from what is delivered to us in school. Pick an area of special interest and dig in, then watch your practice flourish as more of you gets poured into it.

I also let fear and worry about income compromise my best efforts early in my practice. Never hesitate to refer a patient with whom you are not being effective to a trusted peer. When I began trusting that there was an abundance of people needing my help, and referring the ones I wasn't helping to colleagues, I became a better practitioner. And I even got referrals from some of the people I referred out, because they knew they could trust me to make the best decision for their friends.

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

Network. Network. Network. Create opportunities to tell people who you are and what you do, and then listen to their story with as much enthusiasm as you tell yours. What you hear will invariably enrich you in some way, and will often lead to more opportunity.

AT: What tips would you give a new acupuncturist trying to build their practice into a thriving practice with lots of new patients?

Weave yourself into the fabric of your community. There are many small groups and associations who are actively looking for presenters for their regular meetings. Develop a short presentation about the effectiveness of acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and spread the word that you are available to speak. Volunteer to be part of the post-event healthcare team at local races. Donate a series of treatments to fundraisers for local groups or schools. The opportunities are endless.

Create a peer group of 3 or 4 colleagues with whom you meet regularly, each bringing one case to discuss. If each of you have chosen an area of interest to learn more deeply, your different perspectives for the others' cases will help you be better practitioners. And tell the patient you presented their case to your group (assuring them that you maintained their privacy). Their appreciation for your level of engagement will translate into referrals. I joined such a group my third year in business, but didn't mention it to a patient until the following year. His response was so positive, I began discussing it as a regular practice, and my referrals, which I thought were already pretty good, increased dramatically.

Buy some stationery and hand write thank you notes to your patients for referrals. We live in such an electronic world, and your patients and mine understand the efficiency of email and text appointment reminders, but a handwritten note of thanks arriving in the mail is a small and delightful gift.

Practice what you preach! How can you expect your patients to get regular care if you don't?

Trust your efforts and your art. If you have laid the groundwork with a good education and a good business plan, and are working your plan and delivering great care, your practice will thrive.

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