



PRACTICE PEARLS

## 3 Key Mistakes That Could Close Your Business

A PERSONAL STORY WITH LESSONS THAT APPLY TO YOU AND YOUR PRACTICE.

I thought I had it all under control. I was sole proprietor of an acupuncture business. My business was finally booked. Clients were coming in and referring others. I was having fun.

Then it all came crashing down. Not immediately. It took three years to come crashing down. I knew it was happening, but I didn't have the energy to correct the course. I didn't have the energy because I became a caregiver for two people in my family overnight.

I became a caregiver for my mother and sister when I realized I had little time left with them. I made the commitment they were going to come first in my life. They were going to be first in front of everything else, including my business and my husband. My husband had always known this would happen, and he was amazing through it all.

At the time, it seemed like a simple commitment. It ended up being anything but a simple commitment. The commitment was about three years of financial chaos, emotional turbulence, having to learn about end of life, business dysfunction and everything else. I wasn't prepared.

During the three years I was a caregiver, all the hard work I had put into the business came to fruition. The practice was full. I had a backlog. Yet I was getting crushed by a complicated caregiver environment and health insurance. At the office, I was having a difficult time getting a resource who stayed on top of the insurance issues. And the insurance issues were increasing. There were more "gotcha's," slow pays, denials, surprise policy changes, and patients not paying their deductibles.



I was overwhelmed. I was having a hard time keeping focus. I stopped doing the three things I had done to grow my business: positivity, client focus and soft sale.

#### Mistake #1: Losing Positivity

No one wants to pay money to listen to a whiner. I get it. Unfortunately, I was drowning in negativity. I had absolutely no free time. My insurance administration was on fire, and my husband and I rarely saw each other. I started whining. I didn't realize I needed to talk to someone. Where was I going to fit that in?

#### Mistake #2: Losing Your Focus on the Client

The ability to sit down and listen to what is going on in the client's life without comment is critical. My client would tell their story. I focused on listening and used all the input to devise a treatment plan. I shared the treatment plan. I gave options, explained the treatment, explained outcomes, and how to tell if they were getting a positive change.

Seems awesome. The problem was the stress of caregiving and the business was getting to be too much. I was having a hard time remembering what my clients said. I could no longer remember because my head was overwhelmed with a million details to juggle taking care of my family and the business.

I started taking copious notes and couldn't develop clear treatment plans. I was having a hard time staying focused during visits. And every so often, I would start whining.

### Mistake #3: Losing the Art of the Soft Sale

My key business skillset is being a master of the "soft sale." Before caregiving, I was engaged. My clients would mention friends or family who were thinking about acupuncture. Their sharing gave me an opportunity to pick into that a little more and help them find a solution for the friend or family member.

The soft sale established a pipeline of referrals. The family member or friend might take a week to a year; but when they were ready to take the plunge, they usually came to me.

When I stopped doing the soft sale, I lost my pipeline. I was unable to do a soft sale because I couldn't stay focused on my client. I wasn't positive. No one wants to share their story with an angry, negative practitioner.

Everything came crashing down. My sister and mother passed about a month apart. Another month and I lost my show horse that I had bred and bottle fed. He was 18 years old.

I was overwhelmed. It felt like someone had just kicked me off a ledge. I was free falling.

During the three years of caregiving, I stopped putting focus on the three things I needed to do to keep my practice flowing. By the third year, my clientele had started to slow down.

The losses of my family and horse left me shell shocked. I knew I couldn't put energy into my practice. I spent the next year and a half writing and then publishing a book on caregiving and the Five Element theory I used to survive the chaos. I spent every free moment with myself. My husband and I still were not talking. I knew I was going to have to work on our relationship at some point and time, just not yet. I was still grieving.

And finally, two years later, I started to resurface. By this time, the business was a hot mess. But I had the energy to start focusing on the core skills that had helped me grow my business in the first place.

I first focused on becoming more positive. I put together a whole YouTube channel on lessons from Daoism that I used when my world was spiraling into some emotional vortex, and I used them. When I got more positive, I started engaging with clients again. I became that teacher they respected. When I became that teacher, they started talking to me about their friends and family again.

So, here I am ... again. If there are 10 steps to a successful practice, I'm not at step one. I'm probably at step five and I'm building up that pipeline again. Just in the nick of time!

APRIL 2020