

PRIVATE PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Introduction

Running a private practice is without question the hardest undertaking in the counselling and psychotherapeutic profession. It's the equivalent of someone going from a junior doctor to being a consultant, missing out all the stages in between.

So those who do not understand the huge difference between working in an organisation - where one has the security of a monthly salary, regardless of personal performance - and private practice are almost destined to fail.

Over three quarters of private practices fail in the first two to three years. Of those that survive that a further three quarters will have failed by the time that practice is five years old.

It's important to understand when we use the term private practice here, we are talking about a healthy, fully functioning service that is working daily at the coal-face - certainly at least 80% of the time. We are not talking about somebody who does one or two days a week and may have been doing that for ten years considering that to be success.

If that is all the therapist, can accommodate or wants to do, then that's a different matter, but most people running private practices are actually unable to generate on-going interest to the point where they are turning clients away. So, it's important that we understand what we mean by successful.

Reach has set new standards in this area and continues to do so because we follow a tried and tested formula. The following is a summary, based on our experience, of the minimal requirements to create a successful private practice.

Those who are working as associates of Reach can expect full support in all areas of their practice development, both personally and professionally.

1. Spiritual

The most important ingredient for a successful private practice is to be aware of the value of a spiritual protocol.

Far too often new practitioners and even experienced ones make the mistake of focusing on all the practical elements ahead of this primary ingredient.

Our experience is clear, the more effort you put into the mental/spiritual side of your practice, the greater the results.

Success depends on a marriage between the physical and metaphysical so there are a number of practices we would recommend.

i) Start by making a plan. We cannot reach our destination if we're not clear about what that destination is. The universe does not respond well to mixed messages, so we have to be clear

and concise. Make a detailed plan with time scales. If you're not clear about how to proceed with this, get help from your Reach supervisor and/or those who've already succeeded at this.

ii) With a clear plan in place you can begin invoking your desired outcome, using visualisation, vision boards, mantras and affirmations. The more precise your objectives, the better the results. Beware of being vague.

You will have to be intense in your invocation practice if you want the best outcomes. A healthy obsession is required. The more, good energy you put in, the more your results are assured.

iii) It is worth underlining that a therapist is only ever as good as the work she/he has done and continues to do on him/herself. You will find that you cannot take clients beyond where you have ascended to, so don't let your personal work wane... it not only sustains you but also your practice.

iv) Familiarise yourself with FACTS as this document is an excellent summary outlining the reason Reach has become successful - building on a spiritual way of working rather than believing success is about following purely practical and ethical guidelines. These aspects of course do matter, but they do not come close to the primacy of spiritual values.

When you engage in the practical side of developing your practice, you will find these principles (FACTS) invaluable in keeping perspective, especially when there are personal challenges, lulls in client throughput and moments of self-doubt.

v) Our 'product' is second to none, but if you are to honour what has taken a long time to be developed, then personal preparation is vital. Getting clients through the door is of course essential but what's far more important is maintaining and developing your client base.

So, develop the habit of preparing mentally and practically for your sessions to avoid personal and professional complacency. To establish what we mean by this, again FACTS will help you - because it underlines that our approach is built on faith in self and faith in the process.

2. Initial Setup

i) Location/geography - no matter how good your therapeutic model, experience, skills and ability, if you are not accessible you will struggle to build a private practice. When one is well known and established, individuals will travel from just about anywhere to see you, but we have found it takes at least three years to build that kind of reputation.

So, in the first instance, ensure you are accessible by local transport.

ii) The physical space that you work in really matters. Given that the most important part of our model is the experiential element (darkroom work, deep relaxation work, EFW etc.) then a space that is quiet is essential. It also needs to be an environment where confidentiality can be maintained. Clients naturally are very self-conscious if they think they can be overheard.

Once you have identified and secured the best environment from which to work, it is then important to acquire letterheads, business cards and complement slips as part of the 'tools of

your trade'. We have a longstanding relationship with a printer (Howson Print) and can acquire favourable deals for all associates. So please discuss this with your supervisor or the course coordinator.

iii) Critical to the physical space is creating a homely environment which isn't overly personal. So, comfortable furnishings are important, a space that is neutral, not too masculine or feminine also helps, as you don't want the client overly influenced or distracted by the fixtures and fittings.

The seating arrangements are important too because as far as is possible you need to make them equal. Try to avoid the 'expert vs inferior' dynamic, such as doctor and patient, professor and student etc. The more equal the physical context the more likely the client will feel at ease and a relationship of trust can develop.

3. Finance

Those who work as associates of Reach will have sole trader status (unless they choose to set themselves up differently). This means they are responsible for managing their own tax and national insurance. Working under the Reach umbrella means they can have their own individual name and identity, but benefit from being part of something much bigger than themselves.

The franchise scheme was developed for this purpose, to bring like-minded therapists together who are passionate about a holistic and integrative approach.

i) Accounts – it's not necessary to have an accountant and if you prefer to manage your accounts yourself, by all means do that. We have found over the years that having an accountant has led to a significant reduction in our tax bills. This is because they know all the legal loopholes and advantages that can be exploited to reduce your costs.

For those of you who choose to take that route, we will provide you with the necessary details and an accounting template that makes the process of managing and preparing your accounts easier. Our accountant is Mark Twinberrow of Godfrey Mansell and Co.

It should be pointed out that having a good accountant means that many of your overheads can be legitimately clawed back making your private practice more financially viable.

ii) Costs – obviously if you are to make a comfortable living from running a private practice, you need to keep overheads low. This is true whether you are working from home or hiring a room.

We had our accountants calculate the cost for running Reach and currently it works out at £28.89 per hour. Although that will not be your cost when setting up, it is best to start your practice thinking in this way. In other words, you are only breaking even at around £30 an hour. This figure includes room rent, lighting, heating, professional indemnity insurance, in some cases property insurance, supervision and training costs and costs for materials and resources.

At Reach we have always operated a sliding scale, which has been wedded to our 'principle before profit' approach. But when starting out in private practice, this principle has to be carefully managed, and we would recommend new associates having a fixed rate (especially when working out of rooms) and any flexibility should be modest and appropriately applied. There is no point running a private practice where you're absorbing a lot of low paying clients which ultimately leads to the demise of your practice.

You will need to 'grow into' the principle before profit approach to ensure success.

We would recommend you discuss this with your supervisor because when considering costs and client fees, you do need to take account of how many hours you're able to work and your lifestyle etc. You also need to factor in charges for cancellations at short notice. We have a conscience driven approach to this... please see the handout of the same name, and again discuss this matter with your supervisor.

If you are working out of rooms, try to negotiate the best hourly rate, or better still daily rate because in the first instance, this will be your single biggest cost.

It goes without saying, if you are able to accommodate working from home, this will reduce your outgoings significantly and impact favourably on your energy, planning, time and your ability to control the environment.

We are aware however, that there are many who do not have this option or would rather not 'bring their work home' – this is something associates will need to decide for themselves.

4. Marketing

i) All associates of Reach will benefit from having their personal profiles on our website. As a result, associates will enjoy special search engine optimisation (SEO) - as part of their monthly franchise payment they will be helped to improve their rating on Google, as that is increasingly critical in our digital age. What this means in practice is helping to promote all associates, bearing in mind their locality, specialities, services, experience and skills.

To assist us in enhancing your profile, we would encourage you to actively promote yourself on as many social media platforms as you're comfortable doing – such as Linked In, Facebook, Twitter etc. This will help to enhance your profile and establish a reputation more quickly.

ii) It is very helpful to promote yourself locally in as many ways as you can. Advertising in local newspapers, shopping areas, community centres and GP practices are all good ways to raise your profile. Some doctors will actively promote you where clients with sufficient means are able to come and access private services – it is certainly worth exploring this option in your area.

iii) It's worth considering, in the first couple of years, promoting yourself on the BACP website and/or the Counselling Directory. A lot of practitioners generate a steady throughput of clients via these routes.

iv) Reach was founded on workshops. It was those initial workshops, which focused on specific issues like raising self-esteem, managing anxiety and panic and promoting personal development, that generated the initial interest in our model and approach.

Where you feel sufficiently confident, we would help you in developing such workshops and promoting them as this is a very good way to get your name reverberating around your community.

To assist you with your marketing we can help you with the creation of flyers through our in-house graphic designer. All associates will enjoy a preferential rate when using this service. You are of course welcome to make your own arrangements in this regard. We will still assist you, whichever route you take.

It is important to stress at this point that when associates are considering undertaking any activity carrying the Reach name (including, workshops, information sheets, flyers etc.) this in the first instance must be discussed and agreed with your supervisor.

For balance it should be said that this does not preclude you undertaking any activity of this kind under your own name.

5. Safety

Safety is central to your practice. It's worth remembering that if clients feel safe and secure, they are much more likely to share their hearts and concerns with you. But what's equally important is that the therapist also feels safe and secure – because you will find you do your best work under those conditions.

i) If you're working from home, the 'vetting' of clients is very important. In nearly thirty years we have not had a single case in which the therapist's safety has been an issue. This is because we always cross-reference clients by getting as much background information from them and the referral sources as possible. We would recommend, where you can, checking the clients details/concerns from at least two sources. Our reputation has been heavily built on recommendation and so this has proved quite easy to do.

However, if clients are coming from other sources, such as EAPs, GPs, psychiatric services, private/voluntary sector organisations etc., then it is important to investigate as far as possible the issue in question, the reason they are choosing Reach and if there are any historical issues you should be concerned about. This might take a bit more probing, but this kind of vigilance is very good practice.

ii) If you're working from rooms, all the above still applies but there is the added factor that if you're working in a building where several other practitioners work, who are not necessarily colleagues, but you share the same physical space, it's important not to be working in that kind of environment by yourself, unless appropriate security measures are in place.

It's a very different thing to work from your own home, which you oversee and manage versus working in a different physical space which you do not have control over.

Working alone can mean different things in these two contexts, so ensure the appropriate precautionary measures are in place.

6. Reach Resources

One of the reasons that The Reach Approach has become such a well-respected and valued therapeutic model is the vast library of audio, visual and written resources we have produced.

i) We have literally hundreds of handouts, worksheets and audio-visual materials. We have produced countless articles on every theme pertaining to the human condition and our resource library is expanding all the time. Our material has reached all four corners of the earth and much of what we have produced has been translated into numerous languages, such as: French, German, Urdu, Dutch, Spanish, Czech, Portuguese and the list keeps growing.

ii) Although Reach began in 1990 there was a period of 11 years research prior to its conception and so we have nearly 40 years of experience that highlights the simple fact that talking alone in the vast majority of cases is not sufficient if our aim is to help create sustainable solutions for those we work with.

This is why we have placed so much emphasis on creating resources that underpin the therapeutic work done with clients in the room. The primary lesson here is that a model that provides resources for its clients and those seeking help is much more likely to thrive than a therapeutic model that stands alone, relying solely on an hour a week of face-to-face contact. This is why recommendation has become our primary referral route – as clients are attracted to the resource materials and the support that they offer.

iii) For this reason, we strongly encourage all associates to become familiar with the resources and use them appropriately in their work with clients. There is no doubt that these resources make an enormous difference to the clients' understanding, appreciation and motivation. All associates will be given their own personal copy of the core handouts and worksheets, which number approximately 200, including mind maps and other diagrams.

It should be stated for balance that the resources are not going to make a difference without application but if they're not even offered, then the opportunity for the client to increase their understanding and sustain their efforts is denied them.

Final Comments

It can be daunting juggling all these different elements and it is certainly in part why so many who set out on this path do not succeed.

It's really important that you are realistic about developing a successful practice. It generally takes six to nine months to get the wheels oiled and turning and this is assuming you're doing all the right things.

It is important to recognise the importance of planning and preparing. Draw on the experience of your supervisor and anyone else you deem to have sufficient knowledge and understanding in this area. You will find that this humility will take you a long way.

Those who are consistent in applying the above principles and practices and take the necessary supervisory guidance can be assured they will eventually have a thriving practice.

Do not try to force anything. Rushing and pushing will undo your very best efforts. It will not surprise you that we would encourage you to apply the Three Ps (practice, patience and perseverance) – they will ensure a smoother passage.

In closing, it's important to remind all associates that Reach is a registered trademark. We acquired a trademark in 2009 for our work and products because sadly there have been numerous misuses and misrepresentations of our model and this was the only way to protect our product and legacy in law.

When associates are considering undertaking anything that is carrying the Reach name (such as: workshops, information sheets, flyers etc.) this in the first instance must be discussed and agreed with your supervisor and/or the senior management team. This is to ensure that our good name and reputation remains intact.

Reach has become successful because we've applied everything that's laid out here over a long period of time... so we know it works!

Remember we're here to help you bring benefit to many and become successful.