

PART ONE

New Beginnings

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Introduction

It was late afternoon, the conference was winding down, and I found myself in the middle of yet another discouraging conversation. A CEO for a medium sized mental health organization was talking about the state of the field and his belief that it had become virtually impossible to operate a successful business in the profession. He offered facts about insurance companies and managed care, stories about businesses that tried and failed, the lack of government support, and a general indifference on the part of communities as a whole regarding the value of mental health services.

As our discussion came to a close, he took one last breath, broadened his shoulders, and ended with a final statement: “There is simply no way to succeed. You have to be a martyr to be in this field for too long.”

He was not the first person to approach me with an apocalyptic view of the profession. Throughout the entire week I heard complaint after complaint. People were frustrated, discouraged, and concerned about their future in the industry.

Over the course of my 14+ years in the mental health profession I’ve heard my fair share of venting and have issued my own in abundance. There can be no doubt that the mental health industry has its share of obstacles and issues. In spite of all these challenges, however, there are opportunities for growth, rewarding work, and ultimately, financial success in the industry.

This book is designed to take a closer look at specific success factors beyond helping others—the hallmark and foundation of the profession. Instead, it chooses to explore directly, and without apologies, other important elements:

- Career growth and advancement
- Organizational growth and success
- Competitive advantage and differentiation in the marketplace
- Financial success for the practitioner

This book is a practical guide for any and all mental health professionals looking to achieve long-term success in the field. Much of the information discussed will be new, however, it is important to note that many of these concepts and models are not new to other industries. In many respects we are behind the curve, and, as a result, the information presented should serve as a wake-up call of sorts for all those in the field. I say “wake-up call” simply because this book proposes a different way of thinking about the profession, one that involves leveraging and incorporating key business, sales, and marketing principles that best-in-class organizations and top performing sales/marketing professionals use to generate an increase in market share, financial wealth, and overall success.

BEGINNING THE EXPLORATION

The CEO who spoke with me about his impressions of the field is not incorrect in his attempt to describe the state of the profession. A mental health career is an honorable and courageous endeavor, which can come at a significant price. We see state governments use mental health services as a scapegoat for poor financial management and planning, choosing to balance their Medicaid books at the expense of community based mental health programs. As a result, government mental health employees are asked to serve effectively with few resources, little pay, and even fewer options to grow professionally. Mental health services in the private sector are equally challenged. Insurance companies devalue mental health treatment as evidenced by limited reimbursement rates, obscenely high deductibles, few behavioral healthcare plans for employees, and the implementation of complex and convoluted systems that test the most patient and saint-worthy of practitioners.

These are some of the realities of the industry. And yet, people do manage to achieve success in this business, whether it is finding a rewarding job that engages them, achieving financial success in private practice, or through many other ways in which we may uniquely define success.

How do they succeed? Is it merely luck of the draw? What I found with many of these people and practices was the presence and effective use of a core set of sales, marketing, and business principles that enabled them to overcome obstacles within the profession. It is the understanding and use of these principles, many of which are severely neglected or simply unknown within our field, that have helped mental health professionals succeed in a variety of ways.

This is the core message I communicate in the pages that follow. You will be presented with different philosophies, new strategies, real life stories, and very practical step-by-step guides and resources.

Clearing to Create Opportunity

- If you're new to the field and looking for work, the information offered will help open doors for you.
- If you're a behavioral health care leader or executive, these concepts will add impact and relevance to your existing sales and marketing efforts.
- If you work in an organization, these principles and ideas will expand your career, increase your value, and help you move up the organizational ladder.
- If you're a seasoned private practitioner or consultant, these concepts will enable you to build on your success and position yourself for greater growth in the future.

Choose what resonates with you and make an effort to integrate it within your own professional paradigm.

CLEARING TO CREATE OPPORTUNITY

Before moving forward, let's acknowledge that we all come to the profession with our own concerns and biases. Some of these may be helpful, and some may not. As an initial step I ask that you put aside some of the old and/or negative beliefs that might prevent you from being able to adopt and leverage some of the principles and ideas discussed in this book. This is not to say these beliefs are not true. They may in fact be very real. The goal here is to silence these beliefs, at least temporarily, in the hopes of uncovering new opportunities.

Not sure what these biases might be? How do these sound for starters?

- We are in this field to help others, not to make money.
- There are so few good opportunities in the field.
- I need to take this job and pay my dues since this is how it has always been done.
- Government agencies are a losing proposition for the mental health profession.
- The profession doesn't have an effective voice at the table when it comes to federal and state legislation.
- Insurance companies regulate the industry in ways that are extremely hurtful for the overall growth and success of the profession.
- Communities, organizations, and individuals do not understand or value mental health services.

Feel free to add to the list. Write your ideas down if you must and tuck them away for another day.

All set? Great! Now let's move forward and begin learning how to gain a competitive advantage in the mental health industry.

SECRETS OF SUCCESS AND THE SALES STIGMA

"Everybody lives by selling something."

—*Robert Louis Stevenson*

The business world is changing at an incredibly fast pace, and many of these changes have a profound impact on the way people do business. Technological advances that decentralize and empower people at all levels; new concepts in sales and marketing that enable you to grow your business at hyperspeed using a sophisticated multimedia approach represent a mere fraction of the business changes and opportunities in the marketplace. Most of us in the mental health field, however, remain blissfully ignorant and unaware of these subtle but powerful events. Those lucky few who become aware of some of these changes are presented with a window of opportunity that can lead to tremendous growth and independence. Opportunities abound for those who are open to some of these new ideas and willing to integrate new concepts into their service model. The key lies in how highly skilled mental health professionals approach the marketplace and what tools they choose to use in order to succeed in a competitive environment.

A key area most mental health practitioners are sorely lacking in is the understanding and use of sophisticated sales and marketing skills. Clinicians receive heavy doses of clinical training in graduate schools and through continuing education programs. However, very little is offered in terms of how to succeed in the profession from both a financial and career development perspective. There are business seminars focusing on billing practices, business systems, and various administrative tasks; but few, if any, discuss the power and importance of sales and marketing in our profession. This area is often so untapped that adopting even some of the more basic principles will immediately distinguish you in the profession and give you a decided advantage in the mental health marketplace.

Confronting the Stigma

At first glance, the idea of adopting sales and marketing principles conjures up images of self-serving, manipulative tactics and ploys. As a result, a sales and marketing approach is often furthest from the mind of a mental health professional. This position, however, is misguided and comes from a limited understanding of sales and marketing theory and practice. First and foremost, selling and the sales process are critical elements in all areas of commerce. No business takes place without a sales transaction of some sort or another. Mental health serv-

Summary

ices are not utilized unless a sale is made and someone chooses to use a specific clinical service; you are not hired into a clinical position unless you effectively sell yourself to the hiring manager; a private practice does not last long without consistent sales for services; and funding for community programs is not awarded unless a government entity is sold on the need and importance of those services.

Sales and marketing activities are a critical part of the mental health business, but before your anxiety level rises, let's understand what I mean by these two terms. As you take a closer look at each of these disciplines in the upcoming chapters you'll find that they are highly sophisticated and value driven activities perfectly suited to the mental health profession. Sales and marketing are more closely linked to the behavioral sciences than you may realize. And it is this fact that should excite you.

How could they possibly be tied to the mental health profession? In the pages to follow you will see that these two disciplines, like the field of psychology itself, concern themselves greatly with the study of human behavior. As a result, the tools, techniques, and skill sets required of both are already present in you. All you need to do is bring them to the surface.

Don't take my word for it, though. Read on and see how truly important, exciting, and fun this journey can be.

SUMMARY

- There is real opportunity for growth, advancement, and overall success within the mental health profession. Understanding and leveraging key sales, marketing, and business principles will help make these opportunities a reality for you.
- Behavioral health care organizations can significantly impact their bottom line and improve their quality of care utilizing innovative sales and marketing tools and techniques.
- Understand that you are involved in sales and marketing regardless of your profession. Resistance to this fact will only hinder your progress.
- Changes within the industry offer tremendous opportunity for those who can identify those changes and respond quickly. Technology is one area that offers much reward within the profession.
- Sales and marketing concern themselves greatly with the study of human behavior, making them an excellent fit for the mental health profession.

