

10 TIPS FOR BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE PRACTICE



1. **“Begin with the end in mind.”** Stephen Covey considered this to be an essential practice for highly successful people. Build time into your schedule to strategically plan your practice.
2. **Define your scope of practice.** Identify your competencies, types of clients you’re equipped to serve, hours you’ll work, fees you’ll charge, and payment types you’ll accept. Reflect on what types of issues are outside your scope (i.e., your exclusion criteria). How will you ethically respond to those you’re not equipped or prepared to serve?
3. **Set inspiring goals for growing your business.** Clearly identify success measures (e.g., billable hours, number of referrals, registrations for your groups, net income, client change, or awards and recognition).
4. **Write detailed plans.** Joel Barker wrote, “Vision without action is just a dream.” Building a successful counselling business requires investment of many non-counselling hours. Develop daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly action plans to ensure business growth and maintenance tasks aren’t overlooked (e.g., networking, bookkeeping, report-writing, marketing, and attending workshops/conferences).
5. **Evaluate outcomes.** Set aside regular time to track progress toward your goals. Collect and analyse feedback from clients, referral sources, and mentors/supervisors. Measure impact and net results – busyness may not result in counselling impact or a profitable practice.
6. **Revisit priorities.** A counselling practice is dynamic; your preferences and competencies will continue to evolve. Don’t stubbornly stick to a plan that’s not working or pursue goals that no longer inspire you. Make necessary adjustments to ensure your counselling practice fits with your overall work/life realities.
7. **Build essential partnerships.** Be realistic about your strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. Partner with individuals/organizations who complement what you do and fill identified gaps. You may partner, formally or informally, with counsellors, interdisciplinary team members, or other professionals (e.g., accountant, lawyer). Don’t overlook personal/home supports. To facilitate balance you may benefit from a personal trainer, coach, mentor, supervisor, housekeeper, gardener, or child-care / elder-care provider. A personal/administrative assistant can free you up for billable work and other business-growing activities.
8. **Generate referrals.** Unless a referral source provides you with ongoing clients, it will be important to continue to reach out to people in your community who can refer clients to you. Consider offering free topical workshops for local family doctors, school counsellors, pastors, funeral directors, lawyers, and others in your community who might be working with people who could benefit from your services.
9. **Diversify sources of income.** Stabilize your cash flow by taking on other relevant contracts that offer predictable work (e.g., facilitating workshops, teaching a college course, counselling part-time at a local school or agency, speaking to workplace groups about wellness or mental health). Explore required education/credentials so your services will be covered by your clients’ insurance or extended health benefits.
10. **Ensure personal and professional sustainability.** As with any business, it may be necessary to put in long hours up front. However, ensure that your business/lifestyle will be viable long term. Set appropriate fees, build in reasonable breaks, and have a clearly articulated exit strategy so that your private practice continues to be a choice – not a choke-chain.

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