

Aspens Noticeboard: The Business of therapy

Published as Benbow SM and Sharman V
ASPENS Noticeboard: the business of therapy.
Context (2014) 133 (June) 46.

By Susan Mary Benbow and Victoria Sharman

We live at opposite ends of the country, met through ASPENS Skypes and have continued to talk using Skype and email. One of the themes that interests us both is therapy as a business and we share some of our thoughts and dilemmas here.

The characteristics, skills and training that make a good therapist may be quite different from the characteristics, skills and training that make a good business person and training in therapy is just that, training in therapy, not training in how to run a business. So how do therapists develop business skills? One of us (VS) learned from her mother and as part of her degree. The other (SMB) has had to pick things up on her journey, since becoming an independent therapist.

A good accountant has been an important resource (but involves a financial commitment). The amount of time needed for administration may be a surprise - doing the books is a chore but necessary and important. Setting up supervision and consultation links may involve further expenditure and needs to be costed into your business plan, as does the cost involved in continuing professional development. Then there's data protection to think about: if you process information (except for invoices) electronically you need to register with the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office). Have you thought about "CRB" checks (now the Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS))? In her ignorance SMB thought she could just ring up and asked to be checked, but life's not as simple as that. You can pay an umbrella organisation to check you or, if you are including therapy as part of a portfolio of work, it may be possible to get checked as part of another workstream (or even as a volunteer).

Marketing may involve further time and expenditure and needs to address your particular strengths and interests. How are clients going to find you? You may want to join an online list of therapists as well as setting up your own website. How are those people who do find you and engage in therapy going to pay you? One of us has read with fascination a recent thread focussed on credit card payments to therapists, as part of an online therapists' group. An eyeopener! Electronic bank transfer payments are simple, quick and commonly used. Cheques can bounce, and, when one did, a charge was levied on Susan's business! It's a tough world and we're both still learning.

Time is money and dealing with enquiries about possible therapy by email and telephone is a further administrative commitment. What's your conversion rate - ie what proportion of enquiries received turn into clients in the room? And how might your conversion rate be increased? One of us offers to meet potential clients briefly and at no cost to talk about the possibility of therapy. That's something else the other one has learned and plans to try!

Susan is an independent systemic therapist and Director of Older Mind Matters Ltd (www.oldermindmatters.com). Contact her at: drsmbenbow@gmail.com.
Victoria is a systemic family psychotherapist and founder of V2Recovery Ltd (<http://www.v2recovery.co.uk>). Contact her at: victoria@v2recovery.co.uk.

Pre-publication draft