

Contact: the strategy

In his coaching series for CAM practitioners dedicated to “The Difference that makes the Difference”, NLP coach **Mark Shields**, director of the Life Practice Group, explains the fifth key Practitioner Proficiency: making contact with potential clients.

Although this series is dedicated to enabling CAM practitioners to be successful, I would point out at this stage that achieving success alone is not the ultimate goal, but achieving and sustaining success are absolutely paramount for the long-term of any practice.

Managing that medium and long term business plan, although seemingly laborious at times, always proves vital in the end.

In this issue we look at the importance of having a formal client contact strategy. I have coached many businesses in my time as a professional business coach and each time I begin with a new client, I am always staggered that this is missing – as it almost always is.

Another term I regularly use for this is “client contracting”, but before we look at that in any depth let’s first look at what having a successful client contact strategy is and how it is fundamental to your success as a business.

The debate about follow-up

I think the place to start is a debate that has been doing the rounds for some years now and from my experience applies nowhere more than with nutritional therapists. Having said that, it can apply to any practitioner.

I was recently involved in a coaching session with a large group of highly experienced nutritional therapists. They were struggling, business was slow and they needed an injection of new ideas. In their case, their standard operating procedure was that following on from their initial lengthy consultation with a new client, they always fixed the second appointment for 6 weeks in the future.

When I asked how many clients attended that second meeting, I wasn’t surprised when a figure of 39% was declared.

Practitioners all over the UK are failing because they don’t get this bit right.

In our client’s shoes

Let’s think about our potential client just for a moment and put ourselves in their shoes. It



may have taken him or her six months to pick up the courage to finally pick up the phone to you.

He picks up the phone and makes the appointment. He comes along to see you and then is told he has to wait six weeks for his next consultation. I know how I would feel and what I would do!

The proven model

When working with any client, you need to really get close and understand that client’s issues. I would most definitely begin with weekly sessions, possibly moving to fortnightly and monthly as progress is made.

This enables you to continually motivate and inspire the client. It is proved that weekly face to face contact facilitates the success of sessions and provides better and more sustainable results. This has been evidenced many times over in successful coaching models from all over the world.

The dynamics of a successful client relationship and contact strategy are born out of trust and a strong foundation of rapport.

Whenever I am agreeing with the client how often sessions should be held, weekly is

always the first answer. They feel comfortable.

I would agree it can vary from therapy to therapy and practitioner to practitioner, but my advice to you is to study these models and don’t be afraid to try them in your practice.

Have confidence to make the changes

Just because it may always have been this way in your particular field that doesn’t mean it has to stay that way.

You may have ever been trained in a certain way with a certain process. Don’t be afraid to try new things.

If you always do what you have always done you will always get what you’ve always got.

Don’t be afraid to break the mould.

Liberate your business and the lives of your clients.

The Client Contracting method

Whenever I start working with a new client I always insist on a contract being agreed and signed so we know what to expect of each other and know where the parameters of the relationship are.

I am always surprised and delighted when the clients are driving the weekly sessions with, sometimes, telephone contact in between the sessions in addition.

In our next edition of practitioner proficiencies I am going to build on this topic and show you ways to ensure affective client contracting.

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* For more information on this article and details of current practitioner business coaching initiatives, including business plan coaching workshops visit www.lifepractice.co.uk/business-coaching.



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