

Could we be better at 'closing' our clients?



Mark Shields explains the first of the essential Practitioner Proficiencies.

Having spent ten years as a sales director and the last five years as Life Coach you would think the two worlds couldn't be more different. But that couldn't be further from the truth. After all, I gave up the corporate lifestyle to improve my quality of life and add more value to other people's lives.

What I've come to realise is that the key to commercial success as a practitioner is that the one true measurement of the value we so desperately want to add to other people's lives must be reflected in the value we put on ourselves as professional practitioners. After all, that's the reason why we came into this business in the first place wasn't it?

So how do we place a value on the skills that we use to help others? The answer is simple, although very difficult and contentious for some. After all, so many of us struggle desperately with charging clients the going rate for our services. But it's odd that we seem somewhat alone in this dilemma. Even the butcher, baker and candlestick maker charge in full for their services and some even in advance. The better the joint of meat the more you expect to pay and for the best fillet steak in the shop this may be sometimes a small fortune.

However, you would also need to make sure your punters were happy as they allowed their eyes to roam up and down your window display so a hearty laugh or a smile to customers standing in the queue wouldn't be out of order.

So if charging a fair price is the Holy Grail, how do we get there?

Ensure you achieve World Class Practitioner Proficiencies.

What I've named Practitioner Proficiencies are key performance indicators for the practitioner: strategies, measurement tools and skills to improve standards and achieve greater commercial reward in your CAM practice. Here we will deal with Practitioner Proficiency 1 – others will follow in future articles.

Client enquiry to appointment

The first is the proficiency in measuring "closing" your client; the proficiency that measures how many clients that approach with an enquiry are progressed to an appointment.

We measure this as a simple percentage of inquiries. Set yourself a minimum standard and ensure you have a strategy to achieve it. Our 2010 target is a 90% conversion from initial client enquiry to appointment. We are currently running at an annual average of 98%. Only 1 client this year who has made a formal enquiry has not booked an appointment to see us.

Treat every client as if they are your first

Treat every client contact or interaction as if it were your first. Treat your client with boundless respect and understand they may have taken months to get in touch and that you are one of a small number of people they have chosen to contact. Remember that for a client, reaching out to making that first contact is incredibly significant for them.

Charge top prices for a top service

The more you charge, the higher the value you place on your service, the more belief and buy-in you get from your client and the more successful you become.

Success breeds success. The best time to get even busier is when you are very busy.

Where to start

- Set yourself a proficiency standard and focus on it.

- Monitor your results daily, recording your performance year on year so you can monitor your improvements and learn from your mistakes.

Practical steps

- Formally acknowledge every email enquiry on the same day. (Most competitors take

several days, if they respond at all)

- Within 24 hours phone the client to book a free initial 20-minute telephone consultation.

- Understand that rapport is key. Ask lots of questions, make lots of notes.

- Spend that 20 minutes taking a genuine interest in your client; be friendly and, most importantly, offer reassurance that you can help them – assuming that you know you can – and they are going to be OK.

- Explain how busy you are and ask how urgently they need to be seen.

- Although you can't see them for a couple of weeks (unless urgent), give them some free tips so they can start attacking their problem immediately.

- Be upfront with your client and tell them you are the most expensive practitioner in town. Guide them to your price and policy page on your website and make sure they understand and are happy with the fees.

- Don't be afraid to tell prospective clients the excellent results you have achieved in dealing with problems of their nature in the past. Quote evidenced, sourced facts.

- Explain that to save time fact-finding on your first appointment together you would like them to mail you a written summary of their current situation to enable you to prepare in advance.

More Practitioner Proficiencies to come in 2011.

Best wishes for a successful end to 2010 and a great start to 2011! ☺



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