

Building Your Ideal Private Practice: A Guide for Therapists and Other Healing Professionals (2nd ed.)

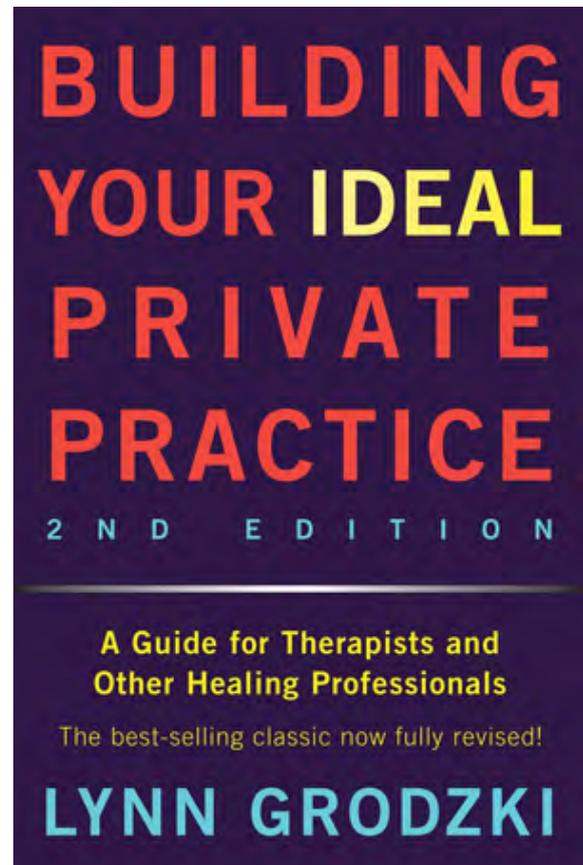
by Lynn Grodzki. Published by W. W. Norton & Co.

Reviewed by Matthew Dahlitz

One deficit among many of the graduate and postgraduate courses in psychology, psychotherapy, and counselling today is the failure to adequately prepare students to become business owners. Yet many of the graduates will be exactly that—business owners running a private practice—even if this represents only part of their overall income. Untold hours and personal resources are poured into learning theory and practising skills, yet once qualified, it is business savvy that will separate those graduates struggling to make a living from those who will thrive in their profession as successful private practitioners. Thankfully, Lynn Grodzki fills the gap in this much-needed business training area with her book, *Building Your Ideal Private Practice*, now in its second edition.

Grodzki approaches the subject like a true therapist, with self-reflective exercises and cognitive challenges, while maintaining the entrepreneurial mindset of a savvy businesswoman. Unlike some other “set up your business” books I have read, this guide speaks to therapists in their own language, and inspired me on many levels. Setting up a practice can be overwhelming, with the business details often unfamiliar and perceived as a distraction from what you have been trained to do—help people. Grodzki steps us through the cognitive, emotional, and practical steps required to go from blueprint to finishing well in private practice.

In Part One, “Preparation”, Grodzki talks about the initial process of defining your approach to practice, in an exploratory coaching style. Addressing fears about the business aspect of private practice, she attempts to dispel commonly held beliefs about business that may conflict with the values of a healing professional. As someone with a business background, I thought I was philosophically comfortable with the necessary business of psychotherapy, but found my thinking shifting to an even more integrated place as I was led to revisit some of my assumptions. Grodzki encourages the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, but goes about it in a way



that makes you realise you can be an entrepreneur without being a “hard-nosed” business person who cares about profit over people. Entrepreneurship is about looking for opportunity, being positive and persistent, and having a mindset of abundance. It is not a mean-spirited grab for a bigger slice of the pie. Grodzki is not only philosophical in her coaching approach but is also very pragmatic, giving us plenty of “to do” lists as we create vision, values, and strategies for a sound practice.

In Part Two, “Building Blocks”, we learn about keeping our business legitimate, ethical and safe—elements that are key to reducing risk as well as increasing return on investment (your time, money, and expertise). Grodzki gives some very practical tips on “branding” and how to communicate your brand to others in a natural way that will generate referrals. The subject of marketing and having an online presence is tackled from the perspective of

a health care professional—something that is missing in the more generic books on marketing that can seem overly aggressive or downright unethical to a healing profession. Grodzki also talks about how to retain clients in a generation where clients are inclined not to accept fees or even how you practise without questioning, but to challenge and compare you with the next practitioner on Google. How to maintain integrity and connection without being intimidated is a very interesting discussion pertinent to every private practitioner working today. Grodzki also does a good job of contrasting the pros and cons of fee-based and insurance-based practices. Refreshingly, she steers clear for the most part of details in law and accounting that I have found an unnecessary burden to the foreign reader in other texts—a welcome change indeed for many readers.

In the final part of the book, “Finishing Touches”, there is an exploration of styles of working solo or developing a group practice. Through this section the reader can quickly clarify what type of practice he or she identifies with most strongly and dismiss ideas of setting up other types of practice that may not be suitable. If you have ever wondered if you should be in a different type of practice, this section is for you. Grodzki also provides a very interesting discussion and practical tips on moving from a medical model (we are here to fix psychopathology) toward a growth/coaching model (we are here to help you optimise your life). In today’s competitive world, there is good reason to recognise the value we can add to people’s lives by helping them to thrive in life rather than merely attaining a nonpathological state. Grodzki finishes with advice on sustaining a practice and oneself for the long haul, including help on planning to sell a practice on retirement.

I found *Building Your Ideal Private Practice* an inspiring, relevant, intelligent, and practical resource that had me excited about what I can do with my own private practice. It helped me further resolve the perceived incompatibility of a money-making enterprise and a helping profession, and dovetailed them together for me in a way that gave me a renewed confidence to get out there and make more of my practice. I would like to see this as compulsory reading for every graduating professional in our field—helping new clinicians avoid unnecessary confusion, pain, and even financial loss through the recognition that they are as much business people as they are healing professionals.

Contents:

Part I. Preparation

1. **The Blueprint:** Develop the framework for your ideal private practice today
2. **Loving the Business of Therapy:** Change your feelings to become a happier business owner
3. **Top Ten Business Mantras for Success:** Learn ten short phrases that make private practice easier
4. **Values and Vision:** Create a private practice vision based on your skills and core values
5. **Entrepreneurial Mind-Set:** Think and act like other successful entrepreneurs
6. **Getting a Strong Start:** Find specific checklists and strategic advice for those starting out or starting over

Part II. Building Blocks

7. **Protecting Your Practice from Harm:** Take steps to keep your business legitimate, ethical and safe
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9. **Expanding Your Reach:** Position your practice for success with today’s best marketing ideas
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11. **Retaining Today’s Clients:** Connect with and satisfy clients who find you online and want fast results
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Part III: Finishing Touches

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16. **Holding Onto Success:** Stay successful and motivated over time

Appendix

- The Private Practice Success Program Pre- and Post-Test
- Top Ten Money Management Tips
- Your Marketing Action Plan
- Resources

Good-Heartedness is Good For Your Heart

An Excerpt from *Issue of the Heart* by Richard Hill

It seems almost weird and perhaps pretentious to suggest that there is science to show that kindness, good-heartedness, positive social engagement and feeling good about yourself is an evolved factor in our capacity to heal, be well and stay well, but this is true. The era of the tough, individual, socially disengaged hero that saves the world is past. The hero/heroine of our health and well being is in the activities that occur between us and the subsequent activities that are generated within us.

Neuropsychobiological science is discovering that our fundamental functionality is dependent on being an engaged, social species. The very development of our brains, our biology, is dependent on interaction with the environment and with other people. Daniel Siegel, developer of Interpersonal Neurobiology, has said that neuroscience is proving the value and importance of kindness to our health and wellbeing (personal communication) and Ernest Rossi has long talked about the benefits of art, truth and beauty in the psychosocial genomic processes of daily life.

We are joined, you and I, by a flow of action and reaction between mechanisms specifically evolved for interpersonal engagement—faces, facial expression, eye contact, gestures and vocal communication. Each brain rapidly builds mental maps of the 'other' through a cascade of conscious and non-conscious cues. Mirror neurons form a sense of awareness of physical and movement similarities and intentions before our conscious awareness even begins to reflect on the content rich display being transferred across the 'social synapse' between bodies, brains and minds.

If we only existed in our brains and minds, like Putnam's philosophically mischievous 'brain in a vat', then this interplay between brains and minds would be limited to mental mapping process, but we are more—activities above the neck are given numerous pathways to extend the interplay into the biology below the neck. The experience without is the enriching opportunity that can trigger activity within that has the capacity to enable an organism to adapt,

change, develop and even promote self generation.

When the experience is positive, safe, pleasurable and socially rewarding, there is a cascade of reaction that transforms the experience into a biological conversation that is very different from the activity that is generated by stress, fear and danger. Of the numerous mechanisms that connect brain and body, the most ardent is arguably the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is also known as the tenth (X) cranial nerve. It emerges from the lower part of the brainstem (medulla oblongata) and leaves at the base of the skull (jugular foramen), passing close to the jugular and then extends throughout the abdomen, connecting with heart, lungs, stomach, liver, spleen, kidneys, adrenals and intestines. Efferent information (from the brain) is conveyed through the vagus nerve more extensively than any other single nerve. There is also afferent information (to the brain) conducted via the vagus nerve. It is an important 2-way street.

The activity between the brain and heart through the vagus creates the state of interplay called 'vagal tone'. Good vagal tone is better for health and well being and it is now being shown that good vagal tone is directly related to the quality of experience that is occurring across the social synapse. Barbara Fredrickson shows that positive development of the vagal tone changes the rhythm of the heart by refining what is called 'heart rate variability' (HRV). Basically, this is a variation in the frequency of heart beats as you breathe in and out. It is healthier to have a higher rate of variability. Fredrickson tested the quality of vagal tone in relation to a 6 week program of warmth and kindness experiences between participants and toward the self. This resulted in raising vagal tone and positively improving HRV. This experiment showed two important things: firstly, that vagal tone is not fixed and, like brain plasticity, can alter in relation to experience throughout life; and secondly, that vagal tone can be increased through engaging and caring social experience.

THE NEUROPSYCHOTHERAPIST

Issues of the Heart: The Neuropsychologist Special Issue

The Neuropsychologist Special Issues are anthologies of articles that have been published in the monthly magazine *The Neuropsychologist*. This special issue is all about the heart...

A wonder of complexity is the human being—something that continues to be a source of fascination and frustration for those of us who have set ourselves to understand human behaviour. This special issue focuses on the heart, an organ with a profound influence over our mental lives. We are all familiar with the heart in its classical biological role as pump circulating vital oxygenated blood through the body. But how many are versed in its neural and bioelectromagnetic influence upon our brains?

Research has revealed the heart even radiates an influence on those around us via electromagnetic fields. In the past such claims might have been dismissed as mere New Age fancy, but with ever more sophisticated and sensitive instruments, formal studies in recent years have demonstrated that our bodies have amazing multidimensional fields of awareness and influence. These findings about the heart continue to add weight to the argument that in the counselling room it is the therapist's unconditional positive regard, warmth, and personal coherence more than

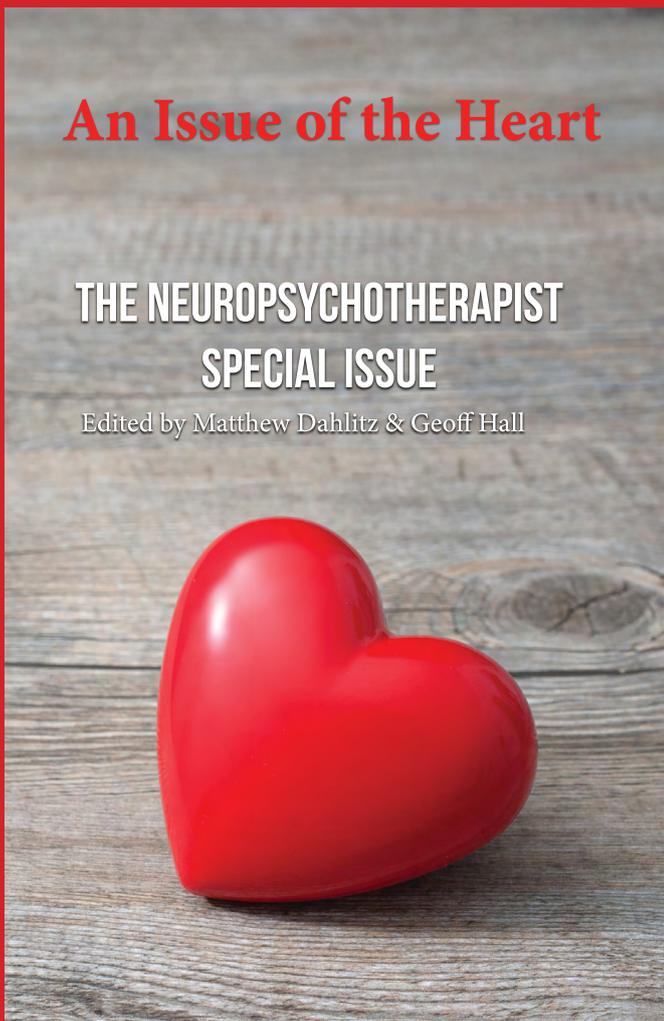
any technique that make for effective therapy. It makes one wonder what the focus of training should be for new therapists—will courses become more focused on students developing personal coherence, practising attitudes of genuine care and compassion, and understanding what they are radiating to clients from their hearts? Neuropsychology, and the multidisciplinary integration that it stands for, is part of an important paradigm shift in medicine. Likewise, the focus on matters heart-brain in this issue reflects an important shift of understanding in the broader field of health. The study of any one bodily system—even the central nervous system in the case of psychologists—leaves us in the dark on many levels for many phenomena.

It is our hope that you will come to appreciate the wonderful, so often implicit influence the heart has on our emotions and relationships, and that we will become more conscious of being authentic and coherent—for our clients and also for ourselves.

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