



Private Practice Counselling Business Plan

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This Business of Therapy

<http://thisbusinessoftherapy.com/>

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About to start a counselling private practice? And looking for an easy-to-follow guide on writing a business plan that works? Our **private practice counselling business plan template** is for you!

But before getting into the specifics let's first address 2 key questions...

What is a business plan?

Quite literally, it's a plan for your business, your therapy business.

Each practice is as individual as the therapist it supports, and that's what a business plan is, a support for you as you step into the shoes of being a self-employed professional.

It's also a structure to help you to clarify what you want and a guide of how you are going to go about it as a new private counsellor.

How my counselling business could benefit from it?

A business plan will help you:

- Analyse the environment in which your practice is going to be established
- Identify which areas in counselling are in high demand
- Establish what services you would be offering
- Differentiate you from competing private counsellors
- Set up your financial goals
- Create a marketing plan for your counselling business
- Stay accountable to your business goals and aspirations

And with the basics out of the way let's get straight into our template...

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1. Profession Overview: Environment, Trends & Competition Analysis

The first piece of a counselling business plan is often looking at the environment in which the practice is going to be established. So ask yourself, what is going on in the therapy profession as you set out to create your counselling practice, and what is likely to be the impact of that on your plans? You might consider for example:

- Regulation
- Technology
- Client Issues currently in the news
- Trends in the structure of practices (eg sole practitioner vs group practice)
- Employee Assistance Programs and Health Insurers
- VAT and Income tax issues

Ask questions, read the journals of the professional bodies, attend meetings where these issues are discussed. Learn about the business aspects of the profession you are planning to make your own.

Look around at your colleagues who are already in practice. Speak to your own therapist and supervisor. What are they doing that you like and dislike? Can you learn from their successes and their failures? How have they rooted into the community in which they are based? If you find these ideas difficult to engage with, consider doing some market research.

We none of us exist in isolation. No man is an island, as the saying goes. The environment in which we practice will influence and shape our practice.

So, a city practice will differ from a country one. Clients in the city may care less about privacy and more about proximity to a bus stop. Clients in the country may not want to see someone who they will later meet in the supermarket, and so may choose to visit a therapist in the next town. The issues a city client brings will differ from those of a country town, which will differ again from a practice in the suburbs. Where are you planning to locate your practice, and what are the unique challenges and strengths of that location and its inhabitants?

You can read more about creating a business plan for your practice, and lots of other advice about finding your way through the maze of starting a private practice in my book, *“This Business of Therapy: A Practical Guide to Starting, Developing and Sustaining a Therapy Practice”* available from Amazon.

2. Market Positioning: Establish Your Place in the Profession

Having got an overview of the profession and started to form an idea of the bigger picture, how do you see yourself fitting in with the broader environment you explored in the previous section? Are there any opportunities that offer themselves and which might help you in setting up your own unique counselling business?

Begin to form an idea of the client you would like to work with. This is a step often missed. Think of a client you have loved to work with. What was it about them that appealed to you? Was it the issue they brought? Their personality? Their willingness to engage in the work? Their understanding of their process? Do you like working with women or men, young people or old, wealthy or financially strapped? Do you like parents or adolescents or couples?

Try to get as specific as you can. Bear in mind this doesn't restrict who you work with, it helps you to create a better understanding of what suits you best.

- Do you know who you would like to serve? What issues draw you?
- Who is an ideal customer for you? What are their struggles and their aspirations?
- What will differentiate you from a neighbouring colleague?
- What will differentiate you from a practitioner of other modalities?
- What is special about what you have to offer?

If you are struggling to know how your therapy practice might be unique and different from your colleagues', read more about "The Second Pillar: Knowing Your Practice," in my book, *"This Business of Therapy: A Practical Guide to Starting, Developing and Sustaining a Therapy Practice."*

3. How to Write a Counselling Service Description That Attracts Clients

All therapists have similar basic qualifications and offer similar services. But while yours and my services may appear to be similar, they are unique. Try to get a feel for the unique shape, colour and texture of your practice. How do you see yourself offering services to clients? What will those services be? How will they be structured? How do you describe what you do? What benefits will your work bring to those who you work with?

For example, you may offer your counselling sessions online, or I may visit a client's home. You may offer a fixed term contract or have views about endings. You may feel strongly about anonymity while I may feel strongly about time boundaries. I may have experience of working with anxiety or of loss and bereavement. You may like to sit on the floor or offer your client a glass of water or a cup of tea. I may like to offer playdoh or crayons. I may wish my clients to find forgiveness for themselves and others in their lives, and you may wish them to stand up for themselves or find their voice. My own personal experiences of life will influence the therapy I offer to my clients, and so will yours.

In this context, it is important not to focus too much on your counselling qualifications. You can do the job, that is a given as far as most clients are concerned. What they want to know is that you are interested in their problems, and that you hold the hope of something better for them in the future. The **80/20 rule** is helpful here. 80% of what you say about your practice should be about your clients, and 20% or less about you.

4. Private Practice Counselling Business Marketing Plan

Having a plan for how to market and attract clients to your counselling practice is an essential, unless, like I said above, you don't care whether you get clients or not, and you don't care about wasting time, money and effort on marketing to people who will never be clients.

A marketing plan is important to take you out of the ideas you have into the reality of taking action. Despite what the Law of Attraction proponents might suggest, a client cannot find you unless you can be seen and heard. A marketing plan sets out how you are going to be seen and heard. Your marketing plan should address the following questions:

- How do clients find you, where do they come from? (Note, if you haven't formed an idea of who your client is likely to be, this step will be difficult for you!)
- When they first make contact, what is your aim for that first meeting?
- Do those people who make contact and who are suitable as clients for you stay as clients? If not, why not? What could you do differently to encourage them?
- Will your clients recommend you? If not, why not? What could you do differently to encourage them?
- How can you increase your income?

Be as specific as you can here. For example, if you are expecting clients to come through GPs, be clear about which GPs you are going to target and why. If the client you are hoping to attract experiences depression, research which GPs support an holistic approach to depression, and recommend counselling or psychotherapy as part of their treatment plan.

Because your aim when first speaking to a potential client is to find out whether you might be a good fit for them, think about the questions you might ask to elicit this information. What would tell you the client is a good fit for you?

In relation to increasing your income, if you struggle to turn away clients who cannot pay you your full fee, find a way of dealing with this, such as referring to a local low cost service, or having a specific number of low cost clients at any time.

Most importantly, note that we are not talking here about selling someone into a service they don't want or need. We are not talking about coercing or manipulating. We are talking about opening a door and welcoming those who wish to enter, and are a good fit for what we have to offer.

To learn more about effectively marketing your practice read, "The Third Pillar: Growing Your Practice," in my book.

5. Risks Analysis: Challenges When Setting Up A Counselling Private Practice

There is risk inherent in every venture. The challenge when setting up a private counselling practice is to identify the risks and to find ways to mitigate them with the appropriate supports. What risks do you face in setting up or expanding your practice? Typical risks include:

- Financial risks such as losing money, or not having enough financial support to see you through the early lean phase.
- Emotional risks such as feeling overwhelmed or isolated, and fear of failure.
- Informational risks such as not knowing how to do something, or not knowing who could help.
- Reputational risks such as doing something you're not competent to do and harming your reputation.
- Legal risks such as failure to implement relevant legislation (GDPR, Child Protection, health and safety, taxes)

Again, get as specific as you can. The more specific you get about identifying the risk (or the fear) related to being a private counsellor, the easier it will be to find a solution to help.

What supports might you need to help manage these risks? Supports might include information you need to find (eg what are the laws and how do they apply to me?), skills you need to learn and grow (for example, financial management skills such as bookkeeping and budgeting), or people supports (eg having a tribe of supportive colleagues who you meet regularly and who understand what you are experiencing.)

6. Financial Projections to Guide your Counselling Therapy Business

Your business plan should include some financial information. Converting your plans into numbers helps to concretise them. You can see whether your expectations for income and costs are likely to meet your financial needs, and where you may need to tweak your plans, or acquire some financial support, such as a business loan.

For example, the income in a therapy practice can be seasonal, with peaks and troughs at different times of the year, depending on client attendance. You will need to plan for the troughs, and to put some money aside in the fertile times to carry you over the lean ones, or the times when you are on holidays or sick.

Financial information also helps to form a ground from which you can set your fees. Too often, therapists look at their fees from the perspective of patients, and don't pay enough attention to their own needs. For example, how much of a client's hourly or sessional fee do you pay out for your rent, or your supervision? All of the fee doesn't go into your bank account as disposable income, and the amount does not seem so big when you reduce it by the costs you will have to pay out.

Before starting you will need to clarify several parameters, such as:

- What time do you have available for your practice; think about both the client hours, patient work related hours and the practice admin and promotion hours.
- What price range are you thinking about setting for your fees?
- Start getting an idea of the costs you will likely incur, such as rent, insurance, supervision, professional memberships, CPD etc

If you are starting up, you should have some projections or budgets, that show how you expect your practice will perform financially in the first year or more of its life. If you are already in practice, in addition to projections, your business plan should also include historical information, such as an income and expenditure account.

You can find an example of a budget for a small practice, an income and expenditure account and a cash flow projection on my website. You'll find the links in the online version of this article, at <http://thisbusinessoftherapy.com/private-practice-counselling-business-plan/>

(Note that the income and expenditure account looks very similar to the budget, except the figures are historical rather than estimated for the future.)

If you worry about managing your finances, and don't know where to start, you'll find lots of support in my book, *"This Business of Therapy: A Practical Guide to Starting, Developing and Sustaining a Therapy Practice,"* it's a guide to earning a living from the work you love.

7. Executive summary: Your Counselling Business Plan in a Snapshot

You should be able, in just a couple of sentences, to summarise your vision for your practice and how it is unique to you. Include an elevator pitch for your counselling business which says in 1 sentence, who you help, what problems you help them with, and what they can hope to achieve from working with you. You can read more about an elevator pitch on my website at <http://thisbusinessoftherapy.com/help-i-need-an-elevator-pitch/>

8. Counselling Business Plan Checklist: 16- Question Guide to Writing your Plan

As you prepare to write your own private practice counselling business plan, refer to this list of questions:

1. **Name:** My practice is going to be called...
2. **Location:** My practice is going to be based...
3. **Structure:** My practice is going to be...
4. **Values, Vision, Purpose:**
 1. I am setting up this practice because I am passionate about...
 2. The values that support my practice are...
 3. It is important to me that clients of my practice will benefit from working with me in the following ways...
5. **Strengths and Weaknesses of my Practice:**
 1. Clients will come to me because...
 2. They will pay for my services because...
 3. I bring these personal qualities to the work...
 4. I have had these experiences...
 5. And acquired these skills and expertise...
 6. I can sabotage myself by...
6. **Desired Environment:**
 1. My practice will be based...
 2. These words best fit the environment I'd like to operate from...
7. **Competition:**
 1. My main competitors are...
 2. These existing services most closely match mine...
 3. My offering is different from my peers in that...
8. **My Offering:** I am going to offer these services...
9. **My Clients:**
 1. I am going to provide my services to...
 2. I am most drawn to working with...
 3. Their problems are...
 4. Their challenges are...
 5. Their desires are...
 6. My services will benefit them in these ways...
10. **Marketing:**
 1. These factors are unique to me and my practice...
 2. I see my clients as coming to me through the following channels...
 3. I am going to reach these clients to let them know I am available to help them by...
11. **My Time Contribution:**
 1. I have this much time available to work with clients (per week, month year)...
 2. I am also willing to spend this much time to work on developing my practice (per week, month)...
12. **Fees and duration:**
 1. My clients will be willing to pay me this much...
 2. They will pay me this because...

3. Clients will continue to come and see me for...(weeks, sessions, months, years)
13. **Costs:**
1. It will cost me €... to see clients (per hour, week, month)
14. **Risks:**
1. These are the business risks I will be facing...
 2. My practice could be vulnerable in these ways...
 3. I intend to respond to those risks by...
15. **Viability:** My therapy practice will be not only survive, but will thrive because...
16. **Financial Information:**
1. I want to earn € after costs, each (week, month, year)...
 2. The following financial statements reflect my plans as set out above:
 3. I intend to monitor my financial results by...

You can read more about creating a business plan for your practice, and lots of other advice about finding your way through the maze of starting a private practice in my book *“This Business of Therapy: A Practical Guide to Starting, Developing and Sustaining a Therapy Practice.”*