



IMAGO RELATIONSHIPS INTERNATIONAL

Resources for members

Practice Building Guide

Version 1: Feb 23, 2009

How can I attract more couples to my practice?

This guide is to help you make the best decisions about how to promote your practice, and attract more clients. We've released it in response to the current economically challenges.

To create the guide we combined knowledge from a range of from different sources. We've included the results of a survey which shows the steps that the Imago community as a whole finds to be most effective at attracting clients. We've also incorporated some insights we learned from Henry Harlow, a successful Practice builder coach, and from others who have provided coaching programs to the Imago community.

The guide is divided into four sections:

1. *Survey results showing you the most effective way to create referrals*
2. *An outline of some basic practice builder techniques*
3. *The value of using a practice builder coach, and how to do it cost-effectively*
4. *Ideas for practice building from your colleagues*

In later editions we hope to add some profiles of successful Imago therapists, with their advice on how to attract referrals. We hope you find some of this advice helpful and wish you success in growing your practice.

Online resources for Imago Therapists

Visit www.ImagoWorld.org and follow the link to the Resources for Members Section.

There you will also find information about monthly support calls, and our practice builder coaching.

How can I create more referrals?

Focus on the following four activities

1. **Building a network of therapists who refer**
2. **Building a network of other professionals who refer - lawyers, doctors etc:**
3. **Giving introductory talks or seminars in your community**
4. **Having a really good website**

In February 2009 IRI ran a survey of Imago Therapists to see where their referrals came from.

These results are shown in this section. In subsequent sections we provide some guidance on actions you might take to achieve this.

We also believe that the best results will be obtained by working with a coach, who can guide you through the key steps, and help you use your time most effectively. The cost of a coach could easily be recovered through a single referral. In Feb 2009 Imago is launching a partnership with an experienced practice building coach to support your work.

Results from IRI survey of Imago Therapists – Where do clients come from?

Imago Therapists were asked to give a ranking of which practice building activities have led to new clients.

	Rating out of 100
Building a network of therapists who refer	53
Building a network of other professionals who refer - lawyers, doctors etc:	46
Giving introductory talks or seminars in my community	30
Having a really good website	Not in original survey – added through discussion
Joining referral services like "Psychology Today"	21
Getting written about in the local or national press	16
Newsletters and communications to my client base	15
Distributing brochures and flyers locally	13
Providing the GTLYW weekend workshop	13

Survey conducted by Imago Relationships International via email, Feb 2009. All 1000 IRI Therapists, internationally, were canvassed, of which 156 responded.

Survey results :

Which activities help build a therapist referral network?

	Rating out of 100
Attending trainings with other therapists	35
Attending professional meetings with other therapists	34
Presenting at professional meetings	29
Running seminars and classes for other professionals	28
Asking therapists I know to introduce me to other therapists	11
Sending my brochure to other therapists in my area	5
Cold-calling other therapists in my area	1

What are the key steps I need to take to be great at practice building?

The following is a very brief summary of some of the key steps in a structured practice building process. We recommend seeking some coaching to help you through these steps. Visit www.ImagoWorld.org to see the cost-effective coaching program Imago has made available to its members.

Step 1. Feel really good about spending time on practice building

Many therapists dread marketing. Some feel uncomfortable promoting themselves. This discomfort can undermine success right from the outset. If you approach building your practice feeling good about marketing, then you are much more likely to attract the clients you deserve.

Don't forget, the more couples you attract to your practice, the more lives you can improve. You are serving the world, not just yourself. Those who make referrals really want to send people to someone they know, like, trust and find credible. You are even helping out referral sources by getting to know them and winning their confidence.

Practice building is all about building relationships with people in your community. As an Imago therapist you already have an advantage. Relationships are one of your strengths.

A coach or a colleague can help you build confidence about yourself and the value of your message to the world. They can help you discover positive things about yourself that you may not be particularly aware of.

It's also important to work on your message. Having a laser talk that rolls off your tongue naturally can help you reliably and succinctly communicate what you do:

- I work with.....
- In their desire to.....
- How I get that result is.....

- And what is unique about my practice is.....

When you have it right, you should find that your own laser talk is so compelling that it helps motivate you to build your own practice.

You've spent thousands of dollars and years of your life learning how to turn misery into delight. Don't keep it in the dark at home, share it! In fact you could almost say you have an obligation to share the work so more can benefit.

Step 2. List the Categories of people who might refer

Think about your clients for a moment. Ask yourself what type of people do they come in contact with? (Doctors, clergy, lawyers, beauty salons, massage therapists, etc.) Just write out the list.

Then do the same for people who come into contact with you – family, friends, colleagues.

Now look at these lists and choose the top 8 that you think you might focus on. Choose categories that you think that you have good access to and might come into contact with many potential clients

Example:

Category	Ranking out of 10	My top 8
1. Contact with client		
Other psychotherapists	7	✓
Doctors	6	✓
Massage therapists	3	
Divorce lawyers	8	✓
Realtors	4	✓
Gym trainers	2	
2. Contact with me		
Friends	8	✓

Family	9	✓
Sports team	3	
PTA	5	✓
Church	6	✓

Step 3. Build your referral list

Take the top 8 categories from your referral list and list out the current or potential referral source names.

Category	Names
Doctors	B. Well A. Tishoo
Divorce lawyers	Bill High D. Kri Nisi
Etc:	

Step 4. Develop your list of top 20 referral sources

The top 20 list includes the referral sources you send you great referrals on a consistent basis. These are the people you should focus your attention on. Don't worry if you don't have 20, you can build the list over time as you build your referral network.

Name	Category	Rapport A-B-C	Potential High/ Med/ Low	Priority	Action to move them up
B. Well	Doctor	A	High	Top	Lunch

Make sure you are doing everything you can to build your relationship with these sources.

- See them regularly – perhaps buying lunch to thank them for a referral. Take the opportunity to learn more about them, hobbies, family, birthdays. Then you can send cards, or perhaps information about things which might interest them. A small but personal gift sent at a time when it is not expected is an even better touch.
- Track how many referrals they send you. Thank them both at the time, and also at the end of the year.
- Find out more about why they refer, and what might be frustrating about that
 - What would be an ideal experience for you when you refer?
 - What has frustrated you in the past when you refer to therapists?
 - Is there anything I can do to make the experience of referring work better for you?
- Once you feel really connected with the referral source, it's a good time to see if you can explore with them how they might introduce you to other potential sources. You can ask them:
 - What types of people might you recommend that I network with to build my practice? (Lawyers, doctors etc.)
 - Are there any that you might suggest I talk to? (See if they will drop them a note to introduce you, or let you use their name)

Step 5. Build your “farm team” list

This is the list of referral sources which are just below your top 20. You may have only just met them, or perhaps they don't come into contact with many people that they can refer. Even so cultivating them is still important, using some of the actions outlined in Step 4 above. Maybe you can move these referral sources up into the Top 20 list, or perhaps they will remain as a steady and consistent source of a few valuable referrals.

Step 6. Build your database system

As you develop these lists of referral sources, you should invest in a good database where you can manage them. If you want to save money, just use a spreadsheet you

already have, maybe Microsoft Excel. But for around \$200 you can buy market leading contact management software like ACT by Sage. www.act.com. ACT is a market leader, but you can find many cheaper programs which may meet your needs.

With these programs you can build up lists which include all the information you might want to know about your key referral sources. This might include:

- Partner's name
- Hobbies and interests
- Birthdays
- A record of each referral they made to
- When you were last in touch, and when you plan to contact next
- What type of referrals they are interested in, and how many you sent

Use the program to highlight your top 20. Remember that 20% of your referral sources are likely to generate 80% of your income, so make sure you keep focusing on those who are most valuable to you.

You can even use the database as a way to motivate yourself. In the early stages, keep track of how you build rapport with the top 20, increasing them from a C score to an A. Maybe measure how often you are in contact with them, or how many new contacts you have made over a period. Just measuring this will help you see that you are making steady progress towards your goal.

It will get much more fun when you are able to track the referrals that all this work generates. As you look at what has resulted in referrals, use that information to motivate you to go out and do more, and more.

Step 7. Prepare for some great conversations

Most therapists are pretty good at meeting people at an event and striking up a conversation. But how do you guide that conversation forwards? Maybe at a local community event, you find yourself being introduced to your town's most prominent divorce lawyer. What are you going to say?

Start by asking questions. People love to talk about themselves, and as they do they will warm up to you and feel connected. Then they will be far more interested to hear your laser talk (see step 1).

Many social meetings are shallow, so its a good bet that many people you meet might just not be that interested in the people they are meeting. Here's your opportunity to make strong impression. Try to find questions which help people say a little more than they might normally say. Perhaps start off with the conventional questions,

family, hobbies, sports interests etc: But be ready to go a little deeper. You've got all the training you need for this from Imago practice. You could ask questions like:

- “What are some of the challenging aspects of your business/profession?”
- “What drew your interest to that business/profession in the beginning?”
- What do you see as the largest coming challenge for your business/profession in the next 5 years?
- If I came across someone that needed your services how would I know that I should send them to you? What would your ideal client/customer look like?

Also be ready to talk in a way that would be really interesting about your work should they ask. There's nothing wrong with having a few stories ready to roll out, which illustrate something of who you are and how your work benefits others.

At some point you need to decide what a realistic goal is for you. Are you aiming to recruit a new referral source on the spot? Or would you be more than satisfied just to get enough of a connection that you can meet or call later to discuss referrals? Usually the second of these goals is more realistic, and more productive in the long run.

Once again you can make it more fun and motivating by using your database to measure progress. How many people did you meet? How have you followed up? Track these potentially referral sources as they move up into your top 20 list.

Step 8. Get out there and have a good time

There's two key activities to building a referral network:

- Meeting new people
- Developing your relationship with them

The best way to do both is around activities you enjoy. If you set out to grow your practice through doing things you find difficult or un-natural, chances are you won't be very successful, and may very quickly give up.

Here's a few ideas for you to follow which will help you meet people:

- Breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings by local groups that interest you personally or professionally
- Local gallery openings, art shows and music festivals
- Community events, volunteer or sponsor an activity

- Seminars, workshops and speaking engagements. It's good to attend, but even better to present. Make sure you join the list of speakers for local professional associations
- Participate in local service events, Rotary, Lions etc., but only if you have a real interest in their work.
- Attend other professional trainings

Once you are getting to know people you met through these events, here's a range of ideas for developing the relationship.

- Just call them up to check in, and explore what maybe you can do to help them
- Invite them to breakfast or lunch
- Clip out articles that you know would interest them, and send them on
- Send out personal notes acknowledging events in the client's personal or professional life

Step 9. Make sure your web presence is great

Nowadays, before anyone contacts you, they are probably going to try to look you up on the internet. Make sure they find you, and that when they do they are impressed.

Your website doesn't need to be long, but it should be attractive, professional, up-to-date, and relevant to the services you are offering.

Potential clients will want to know about the approach you take to therapy, and a little bit about you. They love to see a good picture, and probably will look elsewhere if the picture you show isn't welcoming.

You don't have to spend a lot of money. Packages like www.squarespace.com can enable you to create a great website without needing to know how to design. But even with these packages, it's worth spending a little on a web designer to customize them to look great.

Find a web firm or coach who can help you with Search Engine Optimization too. Featuring keywords like "marriage" may not help you draw people to your site, but "marriage Springfield" may put you at the top of the list for someone looking for marriage advice in your town of Springfield.

What a practice builder coach can do for you

In the last few years, many Imago Therapists have worked with one particular coach, Henry Harlow. Here's what some of them have to say about the experience.

Henry has helped me to overcome my discomfort with marketing my practice and has given me the support I needed to double the size of my operation

Norene Gonswiecki

I found Henry to be very helpful, inspiring and full of good ideas!

Maureen Brine

Henry helped us learn to connect our business with the world in new and more dynamic ways as he empowered us to implement what we already knew."

Donna and David Bowman

He has helped me move my practices of therapy and Couples Workshops from successful to VERY successful.

Damian Duplechain

Whilst you may not choose to work with Henry, we hope these comments will help to convince you of the level of difference a good coach can make to your professional life, and the impact it can have on your income too.

Many of us are cautious about something that seems like it might be too good to be true, and that's why Henry Harlow is offering coaching to Imago therapists with a satisfaction guarantee. You only need pay Henry if you are satisfied that he is having an impact on your business. If you are interested in knowing more about how Henry Harlow can help Imago therapists, visit his website at: www.yourpsychotherapypractice.com.

A good practice building coach will guide you through a process like the one outlined in this guide. But its not really the knowledge the coach shares that makes the difference, the key to success is someone who can help you remain focused, committed, motivated and accountable for working through each step.

Most of us find that as we try to reach out and develop referral sources, we encounter internal messages that hold us back. Should we be promoting ourselves in this way? Are we comfortable telling others about how good we are at what we do? Countless other thoughts might emerge, all of which can lead to doing less than we are capable, and therefore being less able to reach the clients who need our help.

The other side of good coaching is to help identify the internal messages which hold us back from experiencing our full potential. A coach can help us create a story which better represents who we are, and what we can achieve. This work is similar to the work you do with couples, when you help them discover their relationship story.

Just as many clients struggle to make the most of Imago teaching on their own, a coach can help you make the most of processes which help you build relationships with those who can connect you to people who need your help.

It's often a difficult decision to invest in coaching, particularly when times are tough. Money is scarce, can you afford to spend it if there is no benefit? That's why we have provided an opportunity for you to try out coaching at no financial risk. Through our Imago partnership with Henry Harlow, you can try it out for a month, and only pay once you are convinced of the value of coaching.

What other members do to build their practice

The following are ideas which Imago Therapists contributed to a survey in February 2009

- Contacting other professionals. I am working on a CEU event on the role of social workers in stroke recovery.
- Present the CASP program at our church.
- Writing articles for the local newspaper
- Scheduling more networking lunches; revamping our website, writing a letter to other therapists about the workshop;
- Adding services (Keeping the Love, Imago Connects); offering the workshop to other key people at no cost, so that they can see for themselves the usefulness.
- Being on lots of managed care lists. Having good relationships with local Psych Hospital therapists
- Referral cards in my office and sent to client database
- Participate (show up) at networking events, eg. e-Women Network
- My webmaster continues to work on my web page to maximize presence.
- Joining a group practice with a robust referral network
- I talk about Imago when relevant to various people in a casual way. I think that lets people know, I am excited about it and they may tell their friends.
- Educational workshops with colleagues
- Focusing on developing low costs groups, classes, seminars
- Using Google Adwords for my website

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- Giving intro workshops, as at my local Food Coop (gratis) and at my home office with former and present clients.
- Business networking group membership
- I am planning on presenting more groups, so that the cost per patient is reduced
- Sending updates to docs about their patients that I see.
- Giving good dynamic talks is the best!!!
- Providing an Open House
- Tell people you are a relationship therapist up front (if appropriate), and that you are open to referrals of challenging couples
- Contacting other therapists working with my clients or other family members (after getting releases) - asking them to coffee or lunch and referring to them when appropriate
- Got my website up and running and participate in Marriage Friendly Therapists and their website, which has brought in many, many referrals
- Being an active member of county psychological association
- Started a weight-loss group based on the Beck Diet Solution
- 4 hour Sat seminars on dialog, money and sex (separate topics)
- Joint venture with other professional who are not therapist.
- Providing teleclasses.
- Providing free initial sessions
- Sending my flyers to other therapists in my area; contacting present and former clients about workshops and groups I'm forming and new treatments I've trained in, like EMDR, as specialties