Chapter 2

Valuing Your Play Therapy Practice: Using What You Know to Brand and Grow

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ABSTRACT

Developing, growing, and maintaining a sustainable play therapy training clinic involves creating meaningful contact within the clinic’s targeted community. How the play therapist developing the training clinic goes about creating contact within a community reflects that clinic’s overall identity or brand. Counselors are often not trained regarding business practices, brand development, or marketing in their graduate programs. This chapter focuses on providing play therapists with information regarding branding a business and tools for promoting that brand in a manner that aids in the development, growth, and maintenance of a play therapy training clinic. Ethical considerations, as well as thought-provoking questions specific for the development and promotion of a play therapy training clinic are included.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health professionals often graduate with little to no educational exposure to business knowledge and strategies. Entering into the business of setting up and growing a play therapy training clinic involves a steep learning curve for many. Play therapists establishing a training clinic must consider the laws regarding mental health practitioners and businesses within their state, all code(s) of ethics related to their primary licensing credentials, as well as the Association for Play Therapy’s

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Best Practices (APT, 2016). In addition to legal and financial basics for the training clinic, there are several aspects of business to consider: choosing a location for the clinic, hiring employees, providing human resources, structuring policies and procedures, offering continuing education, training, and maintaining a thriving practice, or continuing to grow, when initial goals have been met.

Once the legal, ethical and basic business foundations of the training clinic are set, then the acts of branding and marketing may be used to communicate with the public and grow the business. While there is an arguably wide gap between business education and mental health education, play therapists have many skills that can prove useful throughout the branding and marketing processes. Branding and marketing can be summarized as the core actions of establishing and maintaining authentic relationships with the people the professional seeks to provide services for. Play therapists are equipped with the attitudes and skills to build authentic relationships (Landreth, 2012; Ray, 2011). The objectives of this chapter are to introduce play therapists to information regarding brand development and promotion, to link branding and brand promotion to knowledge play therapists are familiar with, communicate ethical considerations regarding brand development and promotion, and to provide prompts for creating an action plan to begin brand development and marketing for a play therapy training clinic.

BACKGROUND

Perspectives vary as to whether or not the utilization of marketing and advertising for promotion of mental health services is beneficial. Though some professionals deem the use of advertising as going against the altruistic core of the counseling profession (Stadler, 1988), others perceive marketing processes as essential components for strengthening community outreach and thus the practitioner’s business. Gilchrist and Stringer (1992) stated, “Counselors in all settings must understand marketing principles and be able to apply them ethically and effectively (p. 5).” Literature surrounding efficacy of incorporating branding and marketing methods into the development of a play therapy training clinic is deficient. Graham (2018) provided insight into developing a play therapy private practice, along with suggestions for identifying and using a mission statement to guide the growth of that clinic. The Association for Play Therapy provides marketing materials (free of charge) and clear definitions of play therapy terms via the association’s website (APT, 2018). Play therapists who communicate with clear, accurate messages regarding services offered are informing the community of existing resources. It is useful for the community to understand what play therapy is, to be aware of the types of play therapy services available to them, as well as to understand the potential impact of such play therapy
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