



### What's the best advice you'd give to a new practice owner?

Thousands of decisions face physical therapists who may be opening their first private practice, and potential pitfalls await every choice. What's the one piece of advice you'd offer to practitioners just starting out?



**Lynn Steffes, PT, president, Steffes & Associates, New Berlin, Wis.**

Embrace and enjoy your work. As a young mother, I recall getting plenty of well-meaning parenting advice. But looking back over the past 18 years of being a mom, the best advice I ever received was this: The best gift you can give your child is the gift of enjoying them.

The same advice resonates with me when I advise successful private practice owners across the country. I sense a passion in their work, a true commitment and love for patient care. It's evident in the way they greet patients, in their constant drive to ask questions, and in the way they genuinely listen to a patient's answers. It's also present in their ongoing pursuit to provide excellent care.

But more than anything, it's evident in the way they truly savor and enjoy the time they have with their patients. In fact, patients become their personal marketing team. If a new practice owner makes a personal commitment to create a practice from that place in his heart, he can't help but be successful.



**Shmuel Tatz, PhD, PT, owner, Manhattan Physical Therapy and Body Tuning Studio, New York, N.Y.**

Stay creative, learn all you can about manual therapy and, above all, maintain your independence. In my opinion physical therapists can only reach their full creative potential in private practice without affiliating with an organization. It's also the only way to make autonomous decisions about what's best

for your patients.

First, gain a thorough working knowledge of manual therapy, soft tissue, and joint mobilization and manipulation. This usually takes at least 10 years. I recommend working at least 5 years with an experienced physical therapist in private practice who takes personal hands-on care of patients.

Learn about different modalities, even those without coding numbers, and don't overlook Eastern therapeutic modalities. Combining long-standing healing traditions with high-tech Western approaches is the best way to eliminate pain and return function for the range of conditions that we treat. Maintain physical contact with your patients for 60 minutes each session.

By educating yourself and setting up your practice in this manner, you'll ensure true freedom—what to do, for how long and how much to charge.

After a 30-year career working on three continents, I've learned that physical therapy is my dream job, and this formula is the best way to achieve success while getting patients better.



**James Ko, MPT, senior advisor, IndeFree Association, Corona, Calif.; owner, Star Rehab Corp., Murrieta, Calif.**

Equip yourself with the right business tools. Don't use borrowed forms that you've collected from prior employers, and don't follow the lead of someone who is making mistakes.

In the past year and a half, 15 practices within a 50-mile radius of my clinic have closed. The winds of change are blowing, and words like capitation, closed plans and cost cutting are shaking the foundation of outpatient practice. The tools necessary to build a successful practice 20, 10 or even 5 years ago aren't the same ones you should be using today.

Your intake forms, marketing plans, collection letters, software, hardware and advertising materials can spell the difference between failure and success.

Even simple tasks can be nearly impossible if you don't have the right tools. Practices built with solid business materials and run cost-efficiently will stand the test of time.



**David Straight, PT, MPT, OCS, president, E-rehab LLC, Carlsbad, Calif.**

Learn how to open, manage and run a business. You don't get this in physical therapy school.

Many therapists aspire to open their own practices. Because competition is fierce and reimbursement isn't what it used to be, you have to do your homework. Create a detailed financial and marketing plan. Understand and apply the concepts of return on investment, leverage and multipliers, and realize that you must spend money to make money.

Also, find a mentor and surround yourself with a team of good employees. Having opened multiple practices, I realize that you can't do everything yourself.

Create systems for all facets of your new practice. Make sure you're committed, and establish a real practice vision—something that's goal oriented and that you can strive to reach.

Finally, read up on business topics and consider attending small business classes in your area. Many nonprofit networks such as Counselors to America's Small Business provide advice and training to budding entrepreneurs in all fields, and much of the information is free or very reasonably priced.

Do you have an opinion on this issue? Cast your vote in our online poll at [www.advancweb.com/rehab](http://www.advancweb.com/rehab), and view the results.

*If you have an idea for a future Rehab Roundtable, or would like to serve as a panel member, contact senior associate editor Jonathan Bassett at [jbassett@merion.com](mailto:jbassett@merion.com)*