

By Stephanie S. Smith, Psy.D.

For many industries, the economic downturn has hit like a ton of bricks. Luckily for us as psychologists, our services have never been more in demand. We know from recent surveys done by the American Psychological Association that people are reporting increased levels of stress and anxiety. And of course we have all known friends or family members (and maybe even ourselves) who have been experiencing pain because of the poor economic condition.

While I know some of my psychologist colleagues have noticed a drop in their referrals or appointments in the last year, I know many more that have seen large increases in client numbers. Some of those who have seen increases may just be lucky, but I have noticed others doing a few practical and easy things that have helped them increase the volume of their practice.

A few ideas follow:

* Offer groups. Therapy groups are a win-win for the client and the therapist. Clients get to pay less per hour while still getting the expertise of the psychologist (and other clients to boot.) Psychologists generally earn more per hour for conducting groups than doing individual therapy.

* Embrace the Internet and social net-



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Good business tips for bad times

working tools. If your practice does not have an online presence – you are missing the boat. The vast majority of people use the Internet when looking for any kind of service, including psychotherapy. If you already have a website, consider starting a Facebook, MySpace or Twitter page.

If you are really adventurous, start a blog. You will be amazed at how many people in your community and nationally will take notice if you post thoughtful, interesting and/or amusing items about mental health. You have a business – so join the community. Often we as psychologists do not look at ourselves as business people, but we are.

* Consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce, Optimist Club, business networking group or other community-based organizations. The other members will be thrilled to know a psychologist in person and you will likely learn some valuable business strategies from them. As an added bonus, you will increase your referral base many

fold as there will likely be few, if any, other mental health professionals involved in these organizations.

Speaking requests, consultations and other connections are sure to follow involvement in organizations like these.

* Consider working with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). EAP programs can have poor reputations because of low reimbursement and high paperwork requirements, but the fact is people are using their EAP benefits more than ever.

Perhaps the relatively low reimbursement rate will be made up for in the number of referrals and/or happy EAP clients referring their friends and family to you. Stay connected and fresh.

The marketing professionals of the world know that when they remind their customers of their products on a regular, steady basis those customers are more likely to buy. We never know when someone might be in need of a psychologist, so it is up to us to keep our profession fresh in the minds of our referral sources and communities.

* Ask a colleague, pediatrician, lawyer, school counselor, real estate agent or teacher to lunch to touch base. Start a monthly e-

newsletter and distribute it to your friends, referral sources and anyone else who might find mental health information interesting (which is pretty much everyone).

This is an exciting time for us as the media is asking for more and more psychologists' comments on the psychological toll this economy is taking on the lives of Americans and as a result I think more and more people are becoming receptive to hearing about the importance of mental health.

Use this as an opportunity to become involved in the education of our communities in the importance of stress and anxiety management, strong mental health systems and psychological wellness in general. After all, who better to take on this role than us?

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