

Professional Practices
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While listening to the presenters at the recently completed AOP annual meeting January 16-19, 2003 in Washington DC, I was impressed that all successful practitioners of OOP shared remarkably similar work practices. These practices were the same regardless of whether their area of specialty was corporate consultation, running a national Employee Assistance Program, performing Independent Medical Examinations, treating executives, performing threat assessment or a combination of the above. Qualities in common include:

1. A 24/7 commitment to being responsive to clients or patients' needs
2. A belief enacted in everyday practice, that the role of the professional is to see to it that no obstacles are allowed to stand in the way of achieving the goal of a timely response. In practical terms this means having the tools necessary to accomplish the job, such as pagers, cell phones, dedicated fax lines, and the staff support as well as other professional assistance necessary to do the job. Not all practices require the same tools, but all necessary resources are continually in place.
3. A commitment to continuously improving ones skills. Underpinning this commitment is the knowledge and belief that "there is no human endeavor that cannot be improved upon." In other words, whatever you do next year should represent an improvement over how you performed similar tasks this year.
4. A healthy self regard balanced by a realistic evaluation of ones strength's and limitations, combined with a consistent effort to improve in those areas of weakness and locate assistance whenever needed.
5. A practice of continuous active assessment of potential risks and opportunities with concrete strategies for responding to each. Both Steve Heidel and Dave Morrison specifically discussed their strategic thinking, and how they have had the foresight to enter fresh markets and when they become crowded, leave them in favor of new opportunities. Flexibility, adaptability, reality grounding, and knowledge of ones own abilities are prerequisites.
6. Active and continuous communication with ones clients, before, during, and after the delivery of professional services to ensure that the client's needs are actively being served, and that if the client's needs change the services will be altered as needed. Said with fewer words, each successful OOP practitioner has established effective feedback loops.

These qualities are identical to those of successful businesses. OOP practitioners must reflect the same qualities and traits they are helping their clients acquire. Healthy, adaptive, effective, and ethical practices have been internalized by the successful OOP professional. We know from our studies of human development that children are very aware of inconsistency and hypocrisy, whether or not they are able to articulate this awareness verbally. The degree to which they develop into healthy adults is strongly influenced by the degree to which a harmony of words and deeds is present in the adults in their lives. The effective OOP professional will likewise *embody* those qualities, skills and traits he/she is striving to *impart*.

In my opinion it is a necessity to create a mission statement for ones psychiatric practice to be successful in OOP. The intellectual and *emotional* process requisite to the development of a mission statement is a discipline that is hugely helpful. It serves as both a yardstick against which your own performance can be measured and a reminder of what you have determined to be important—in quiet moments. Your mission statement should be reviewed periodically and revised as needed. All successful *businesses* have mission statements. Your mission statement will help you to retain your focus as you work with your clients and patients.