

The Seven Pillars of a Painless Practice
Practice Development for Practitioners
by James Butler and Celia Champion

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About the Authors

James Butler and Celia Champion are directors of Painless Practice, which offers a range of support for practitioners – including a free monthly newsletter by email, workshops, training courses, practice health checks and direct support and coaching for practice owners, practice managers and associates. The Painless name derives from a deeply held belief that making a living should be as free from pain as possible – a sentiment many practitioners will identify with. Sometimes all that is required is a review of the experience a patient has, sometimes a strategic review of practice management, often it is an objective and supportive sounding board to talk through plans and options, providing an external voice of reason.

Prior to working in this field, James built a successful business in the environmental sector and since 2002 he has worked on helping business owners, especially practitioners, to build better practices. He has worked with hundreds of clients, over thousands of hours in dozens of sectors. He has written two other books on practice development and speaks widely on the topic. He has worked on programmes for business owners at both Cranfield School of Management and Cass Business School.

Celia's professional career started in South Africa, where she grew up. She built a successful business in the security industry, before selling the firm and becoming a Managing Director within the new parent company. For many years, her talent and passion was developing people in her team to improve themselves and the business, so when she relocated with her family to the UK it was natural that she would want to work as a coach, trainer and facilitator. She joined Painless Practice and since then has accelerated the growth of the business, worked one-to-one with many clients, lectured widely and is a respected authority on practice development for practitioners.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
Personal	13
Purpose	23
Pipeline (Part 1)	29
Pipeline (Part 2)	41
Patients	61
People	77
Profits	89
Plan	109
Summary	125
Reading List	127
Back of The Envelope	129
Useful Contacts.....	139

Acknowledgements

We have a lot of people to thank, firstly for the opportunity to work with practitioners, and secondly for help in the preparation of this book.

Painless Practice may not exist without the friendship between James and Sara Kennard, who first raised the possibility of working with osteopaths to help them improve their practices. From that germ of an idea, a very fruitful relationship with the British Osteopathic Association has developed, particularly with Michael Watson and Catherine Goodyear. From that connection came James' first book, the BOA's Business Development Handbook.

Our next debt is to Sarah Whittaker, a talented homeopath and an amazing woman, and the collaborator on *Running a Successful Homeopathic Practice*, published by the Society of Homeopaths. We must also thank Rob Finch of the College of Chiropractors for his insight and suggested improvements to the Seven Pillars – putting patients in their rightful place at the centre.

Thanks are due to Gerard Burke, the rest of the Your Business Your Future team, and to the participants on the Better Business Programme. We learn something from every encounter with them, and it is generous and gracious of Gerard to allow us to apply the idea of Seven Pillars in a different way to a different sector.

We both consider ourselves lucky to work in this field. We take huge delight in seeing those we work with develop themselves and their businesses, and we find the therapy sector an enjoyable sector to specialise in. Whether through idle chats at conferences, interactions on our workshops, one-to-ones with clients or exercises during in-practice training events with clinics, we are always learning about the professions and what makes practices successful. This book represents that collective knowledge.

We are also grateful to our growing Painless Practice team who contribute so much to our success and who help us extend our reach to hundreds and hundreds of practitioners each year.

A project like this also involves unsung heroes, who tediously and meticulously ensure we minimise the typos, errors and inconsistencies. Thanks to Bev Butler, Carol Plumridge, Michael Palfrey, Heather Barron, Naomi Watkins and Chris Johnson who have provided that input – especially from a practitioner's viewpoint. As always, any errors that remain are our responsibility alone.

Finally, we thank you, the reader, for taking the trouble to buy the book and to read it. This shows you want to develop a stronger foundation for your clinic – we hope the Seven Pillars provide you with that foundation.

Introduction

Why this book?

If you are holding this book in your hands, either having bought it, or because you are considering buying it, it is likely that you want your practice to be better in some way than it is now. Perhaps you haven't started it yet and are planning the launch, or perhaps you have been running it for years, and want some fresh impetus. Either way, this book is written with you in mind.

At Painless Practice our purpose is to see business owners enjoying their work and achieving their vision, and to that end we have been working with health practitioners to build better practices since 2004. Very early on, it was clear that most practitioners had well-developed technical ability in their field, but often lacked any training, experience or confidence in the business side of their clinic. This held back their ability to grow the number of patients they served, affecting their livelihood and well-being, and reducing the beneficial impact on the health and vitality of the communities they sought to serve.

We have worked with (in no particular order) osteopaths, chiropractors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, homeopaths, nutritional practitioners, acupuncturists, Bowen practitioners, reflexologists, holistic practitioners, GPs and many others, and the same issues have arisen. As it happens, we have worked with many other industries including graphic designers, surveyors, distributors, software houses, printers, importers, builders and butchers (but no bakers or candlestick makers, from memory), and the story is no different.

This book is our attempt to start to redress that balance, specifically for health practitioners. We have written two separate similar books, one aimed only at osteopaths, the other purely at homeopaths, but this is a general text for anyone in any health-based private practice. Perhaps a further book will serve the butchers and bakers, but we have chosen to keep this one focussed.

Carefully chosen words

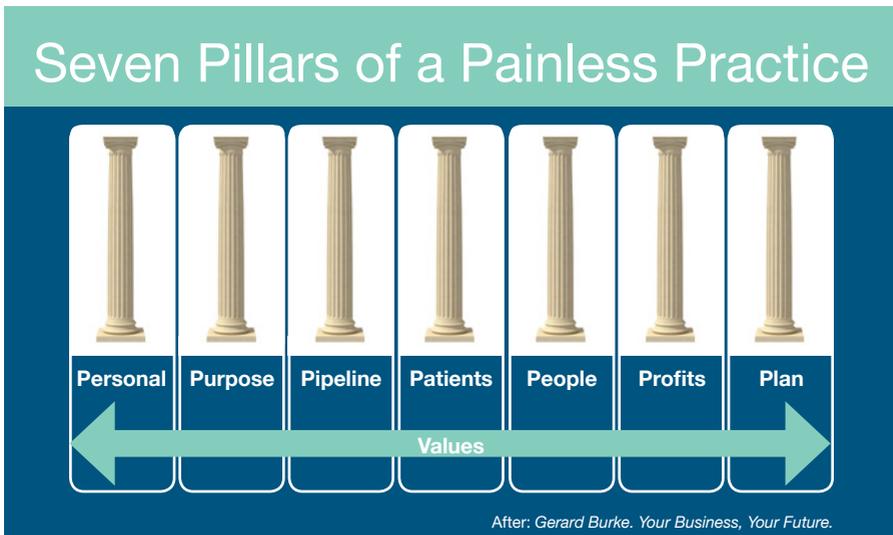
While we talk of the target for this book, it may help to clarify some terminology. We hear our client base variously described as complementary or alternative. Individuals may be described as practitioners, therapists, or by their profession – as we did earlier. For some, the exact word is important, and there can be an emotional reaction if the wrong one is used. We cannot, however, litter the book with clunky catch-alls like practitioner/therapist/healer, and so we have decided to use practitioner throughout. Similarly, we have consistently referred to patients, though we are aware that some will prefer clients, and we have used treatment when others might use consultation. We have interchanged practice and clinic, depending on what we felt worked at that point. Please bear with us – we hope that overall it will

help the flow of the text.

On a related note, we will often refer to successful clinics in this book. We have no definition of what success is. For each and every practitioner we have worked with, success has been defined differently – depending on their hopes, dreams and aspirations. We have worked with successful practitioners who have a clinic providing 10 treatments a week – whilst they raise their children or wind down to retirement. We have also met and worked with practitioners for whom a clinic of 20 practitioners, providing 1000 treatments a week, is a definition of success. Both are right – because success is defined on their terms. With this book, you will work on defining what it means for you.

The structure of the book

Our purpose with this book is to provide an easy-to-use reference guide and workbook for any practitioner wanting to improve their practice. We have structured the book around our Seven Pillars – useful mental hooks upon which to hang the many tips and exercises we want to share with you. Each section will have exercises for you to consider – giving you immediate benefits you can start to implement in your clinic. Alternatively, you can bring them all together in the Plan Pillar: your plan for your better practice.



After: Gerard Burke, *Your Business, Your Future*.

As the Seven Pillars form the skeleton for the book, and the chapter headings, perhaps we should take a moment to explain them:

Personal	The most successful practices align the aspirations of the clinic with the personal aspirations of the owner(s). It is crucial, therefore, to start with an exploration of what you want personally – so that the practice can be part of delivering it.
Purpose	Once we know your expectations of the practice in the context of your life as a whole, we can start to consider what you want the clinic to achieve. This is important if you are running a clinic on your own, but absolutely crucial if you have staff or associates involved in achieving what you want.
Pipeline	This is the conduit that brings new patients to your practice – a simple concept but a huge topic. As a result, the Pipeline pillar qualifies for two chapters of the book, whereas the others make do with one.
Patients	The central pillar in any successful practice. Without doubt, providing a memorable, positive experience for your patients, and getting them better, is a key part of growing a successful clinic. However, we will show this is so much more than just the treatment.
People	We are some way from computers and robots providing treatments, thank goodness, so the success or otherwise of your clinic will depend on the people within it – you principally, but also your fellow practitioners, your reception and administrative staff, your trusted advisors, subcontractors and many others. This pillar considers how you will manage all of them (including you!).
Profit	We know this is can be an unpopular word amongst practitioners, but it begins with P and maintains our alliteration. Furthermore, we don't want it to be unpopular. Profit is what allows you to live, to feed your kids, to re-invest in the clinic and to have a sustainable presence in your community. So we think profit is a worthy aspiration, and the one important pillar that practitioners often avoid.
Plan	It is our experience that practitioners who have a plan, and who follow and review it, are the ones who find success more consistently. With this pillar, we hope to give you the opportunity to set out your intentions in the short and medium term – so that you can find that success too.

Within each chapter we will be introducing a range of ideas and tips that we hope will get you thinking, then we'll be giving you ways to explore how the tips and ideas apply to you and your clinic specifically. After that, you'll have the chance to relate the outcomes of that work to your overall plan, which can build as you progress through the book. Then all you have to do is implement it...

Implementation seems an appropriate topic with which to close this Introduction. Building a painless practice, whether founded on seven pillars or not, is a process and a journey – not a destination in itself. We do believe that by working through this book you will have a clear map of how to progress from where you are now towards the future you want to create. But when you get there, another future will probably appear as your goal, and another plan will be needed for the next stage. But that's the joy of having your own practice!