

# Wealthy is Healthy

by Elizabeth Beeson

What is wealth? The origin of the word dates back to 1200-50 with the root being well or health. To take care of your self, to be whole, full and complete, to be recognized and held in a place of respect are all aspects not only of health but also of wealth. It is important for us who serve the health of others to embody and model the principles of good health not only in our personal choices but our business choices as well. Making good choices requires knowledge, a keen sense of observation, strategic planning, and understanding your limits.

When I opened my door for business twelve years ago as a massage therapist in the southwest, I was enthusiastic and optimistic about being in the service industry. To have the opportunity to garner wages while helping others seemed like a dream job. I priced my session work competitively in order to build my clientele based on what other therapists in the area were charging. To build my practice I often bartered and sometimes gave work away. I felt that I was being smart. After all, that is what everyone else in the business had done. In massage school we learn to work hard and offer a superior skill with high moral standing, and eventually we can earn the right to ask more for our work. I thought that this was a kind of initiation period necessary to endure in order for me to fully “own” my space and place as a therapist. The point at which my initiation was complete, however, was unclear and undefined.

Years went by, and it was still not unusual for me to work twelve-hour days, sometimes without stopping for lunch. I was still offering discounts for seniors and those who were financially strapped, and was still, now begrudgingly, accepting barter for paintings and jewelry I really didn't need or want. Proving that I was a good therapist was not an issue any longer; I had built up a good reputation. I was well known and respected in my small community as offering the best service at the best price.

I must say, that a part of me was pleased and felt fulfilled. I had established myself and excelled in a very competitive field. The cash was flowing, the clients were flowing, my calendar was continually booked solid, so why was I anemic, exhausted and feeling more and more unsupported at work and at home? Things were clearly out of balance but what was the source? Did I need to eat more meat (or at least lunch) or hire a housekeeper to help out at home? However, I was not sure I could afford a housekeeper, they just raised my rent at the office and taxes went up twice in the last two years. I was still charging the same rate for session work as I did four years ago. What was this resistance to simply charging more for my work? After all, I had earned it in terms of effort, energy and expertise. The only thing that was clear was that I had no plan when it came to the financial aspect of my practice. My smart CEO, businessperson husband suggested that perhaps I needed to take a good hard look at my *cash flow* and see how much, if anything, I was actually making. Not just looking at cash that comes in, but also cash that goes out, and then, ultimately, what cash is left over, in other words – looking at my *profits*.

There was this sinking feeling in my stomach. When he is right, he gives me that look and slowly shakes his head, clearly chanting the unspoken mantra of “I told you so.” I *knew* he was right. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat and protested, claiming I am not trained in financial matters, cannot relate to numbers, and that I do not have a clue as to how to even begin. He calmly looked toward me and said in his most wise voice, “There is no substitute for being personally involved with your own finances.” What came next turned my practice and my life around. He created a software program for me that we eventually called HOPP, or Hands On Profit Planner. Using proven business principles along with strategic thinking, this program is a clever financial planner that allows the therapist or practitioner who works by the session, to take a look at numbers in a fun and non-intimidating way. There is no need for the user to be computer savvy and in minutes one can see what took me a decade to realize. I was working hard, making a lot of money and being paid very little. Money was moving through my hands but I was not making a *profit*. Why is available profit so important to the therapist? It is because that is how you are paid.

Let us begin with an introduction to the simple formula we use in the HOPP program. First, we take a look at all of the *variable costs* associated with a session. These are costs that occur each time you give a typical session. For most massage therapists, these are pretty simple. Things such as linen service, oils or lotions, paperwork and give-aways like bottled water. Next, we list the price we are charging per session. We then list all of the *fixed costs* associated with your practice. These would include rent, utilities, taxes and capital expenditures such as your table and equipment. You would also want to include any continuing education costs here. There are probably more fixed costs than you would think of right off the top of your head and the program helps cue you to consider all of the possibilities that would ultimately affect your bottom line income. Next, we will go to the forecast sheet. This is where we list how many sessions we anticipate giving each month. This is where your travel time for continuing education as well as vacations and holidays will be reflected. If you have employees or consider yourself an employee, you will then list salaries and benefits associated with your practice. This is where you may plan for retirement or a health care fund for yourself.

Now this is where the magic begins. Once all of the numbers have been put in place, you will be able to see in minutes exactly what your bottom line looks like. Not only will you be able to clearly see what the results of your past actions have produced, but you will be able to insert “what if” scenarios to play with for the future. As far as I know there is nothing out there especially designed with the therapist in mind that allows us to plan, strategize and ultimately, take responsibility for our own financial success. We can hire accountants to guide and council but there is nothing that can replace our own hands on involvement with the money flowing through our practice. As massage therapists, we know that when we touch someone or something there is an unspoken level of understanding that occurs. It is the difference between going out to eat and cooking our own meal. We know exactly what the ingredients are and we can put in just the right amount of spice and fat to suit our particular appetite on that particular day. Precision, clarity and adaptation of the numbers that represent your wealth and health are as vital as the nutrients you put in your body.

By playing with the numbers I was able to see that every piece of my practice needed to be considered carefully. That the holistic approach to nature and health care also applies to my own practice. When one piece is off, the entire practice will suffer. As a result, I changed the cost of my session work (I paid myself more) and was able to cut back on the amount of sessions I gave. I changed location, saved on rent, budgeted for, and learned a new modality that was easier on my body and my clients. There is much more to having a successful practice than just the bottom line but I have given myself permission to be both profitable and successful.

It is my hope that other therapists can learn from my experiences. The HOPP program is now available and on the market for therapists to enjoy and learn from. For more information about the Hands on Profit Planner software program go online to [www.Hilosoft.com](http://www.Hilosoft.com) and click on products. I have started up several successful private practices using the proven financial formulas in the HOPP or Hands on Profit Planner software program. Time and time again, the numbers have served and supported me well. Having a personal relationship with the numbers, being able to define, observe, and adapt those numbers that represent wealth and health have made all the difference.

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