

A Manager's Perspective So You Wanna Be an Entrepreneur?

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“Employment puts us at the whim of those who fund our paycheck. Since the balance of power has shifted to the employer, we have seen that it is the employee, not the entrepreneur, who may truly be at financial risk in the workplace.” The End Of Employment – June 2000

So you've read some of my past columns on the troubles with employment for professionals. They've gotten your attention. You've spent a bit of time reflecting on your career, your skills and your future. If you are like many of the therapists who have called or written me since we started down the entrepreneur pathway, this whole concept of self-determination has gotten under your skin a little bit. You've got the itch. So you wanna be an entrepreneur? Now what?

The actual entrepreneurial path you take will be unique to you. I find the diversity of pathways that are possible to be one of the most attractive aspects of captaining my own ship. You will too. There are, however, some tasks that just about all new businesses (that is what you will be – a new business) have to accomplish.

You will want to start to read as much as you can on owning your own business. Consider the investment in time and materials to be tuition for you are learning about your new role. You will also want to start to look for key advisors to help you along the way. You will need, at a minimum, an attorney and an accountant, with whom you are comfortable - both personally and financially.

You will want to start to learn as much about marketing as you possibly can. Your ability to get business through referrals or directly from the public is most often the make or break detail for a starting practice.

You should also work to be able to accept insurance payments for the therapy you provide to your clients. Unless you are going to be strictly a cash only business, third party payers will matter to your success. The first step in this process is to complete the forms necessary to apply for a Provider Identification Number (PIN) under the Medicare program. Although you may decide that you don't want to participate in the Medicare program, many other insurance companies can require you to have a Medicare PIN before they will consider you for inclusion in their provider panel.

Getting a PIN under Medicare is not the most difficult thing you will ever do – but it will take a bit of time and energy to complete the forms and develop a formal relationship with the company that Medicare has contracted with to manage this process in your area. You can walk through the process yourself or hire someone to do it for you. I recommend that you do it yourself so you really understand how it all works. The information you need to do this and the forms (HCFA Form 855 and others) are available on line through the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) web site. The specific address for this information is <http://www.hcfa.gov/medicare/enrollment/>. Read the information carefully and you should be able to receive a PIN in 45-60 days.

Completing the HCFA 855 is not hard – just tedious. You'll need to do it eventually – so get started now.

Now for the controversial part of this column.

I believe every therapist in this country should complete the forms to be recognized as an independent practitioner under the Medicare program. Every therapist. I believe every new grad should complete the HCFA 855 as soon as they are licensed. Even if they have no intention to immediately become a private practitioner, we all should have a Medicare provider number. It just makes sense. If you ever work (even for a short time) in a private practice that is classified as a “Physical Therapist in Private Practice” by Medicare, you will need to have a PIN. Even if you simply moonlight there.

Someday, you may need the PIN and you may not have the luxury to wait 45-60 days for processing. Do the preparation now – just having the PIN does not mean you have to use it. Just keep it available and in a safe place until you need it. It is the smart thing to do.

So you wanna be an entrepreneur? Hopefully, this will help you get started. We have not listed all the things that you will need to do – but it is a very good start.

I'd love to hear about your thoughts and experiences on this issue.

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