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5 Strategies To Grow Your Private Practice, with Dr. Hal Weitzbuch

As a part of my interview series with prominent medical professionals about "How To Grow Your Private Practice" I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Hal Weitzbuch. Dr. Hal Weitzbuch, M.D., M.S., F.A.A.D., JuveTress™ Brand Partner, and medical director of the Calabasas Dermatology Center, is an award-winning, board certified dermatologist and member of the American Society for Mohs Surgery. He […]

By Krish Chopra, 2x entrepreneur and founder of NP Hub. Let's discuss leadership, scaling, and relationships to serve communities that need more support! In ATL

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Dr. Hal Weitzbuch, M.D., M.S., F.A.A.D., JuveTress™ Brand Partner, and medical director of the Calabasas Dermatology Center, is an award-winning, board certified dermatologist and member of the American Society for Mohs Surgery. He specializes in diagnosing and treating diseases, tumors, infections and age-related changes of the skin, hair, and nails. Dr. Weitzbuch received a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering from Northwestern University, followed by a Master's Degree in Applied Physiology at the Chicago Medical School, where he also went on to obtain his Medical Degree. He then undertook a one-year internship working at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, training exclusively in surgery. After successfully finishing a dermatology residency at the famed Cook County Hospital, he completed specialty training with an extended Mohs surgery preceptorship.

Thank you so much for joining us! Can you tell our readers a bit about your 'backstory"?

After applying to medical school to become an orthopedic surgeon, I decided it wasn't the right career path for me and halfway through my third year of medical school I hadn't found any field in medicine that really excited me. I was considering all options, including NASA. I happened to shadow a family friend, who is a dermatologist, for a day during my winter break and it was an unbelievable, eye-opening experience! I knew that day that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I couldn't be happier.

What made you want to start your own practice?

Coming out of residency training there are a few main options for work: academics, large health networks, or private practice. There is a growing trend for new graduates to work for larger groups and health systems as it offers a better lifestyle, less risk, and less non-clinical work. Having served many leadership roles in the past, and being someone who loves to do as many things as possible to stay busy, I thought owning a practice would be an extremely challenging, rewarding, and enjoyable experience. Also, it affords me the ability to practice medicine the way I believe it should be without a board of medical directors giving me directions. I have been able to create an environment and experience for patients where they leave feeling educated, cared for, and with better skin of course!

Managing being a provider and a business owner can often be exhausting. Can you elaborate on how you manage both roles?

Owning a practice is no joke. As the CEO, medical director, and primary care provider in the office, my time from 8–6 Monday through Friday is spent almost exclusively with patients or on patient care reviewing labs, etc. Before and after I am a father and husband until everyone is asleep, and then I am able to focus on the business as the owner and director until bed. If the work excites you and is meaningful it isn't hard to sacrifice sleep. Plus, having completed a surgical internship at a county hospital without any coffee, I can survive pretty well without sleep… It also helps having a very understanding and supportive wife!

As a business owner, how do you know when to stop working IN your business (maybe see a full patient load) and shift to working ON your business?

This is one of the most difficult parts of owning a practice and the main reason new grads aren't going into private practice. If I am with patients all day Monday to Friday, there isn't much time leftover to take care of the business. From responding to emails, to negotiating contracts or purchases, dealing with vendors and insurances, directing the staff and keeping the peace, trying to keep a pulse on all collections, inventories, and employees, and juggling new and changing government mandated data collection, the only way to complete all needed tasks requires high level multi-tasking and constantly filling any dead time with non-clinical work. Also, like I previously mentioned, I end up spending many nights and weekends working on the practice. However, I definitely plan on taking a half day a week in the future to focus solely on operations, to ease the load while at home.

From completing your degree to opening a clinic and becoming a business owner, the path was obviously full of many hurdles. How did you build up resilience to rebound from failures? Is there a specific hurdle that sticks out to you?

I think every person is wired a certain way from conception, and while environment plays a role and there are many choices and experiences throughout life that help mold us, we are inherently a certain type of person no matter what. It takes a certain type of person to want to go through medical school and training. It takes a certain type of person to dissect a cadaver and to cut into a living humans' skin. It turns out it takes a certain type of person to enjoy popping pimples too (social media has shown that there are tens of millions of people who like that!). I think in every walk of life there are certain traits that lead people to their destiny. Resilience and rebounding from failures are traits just like others, and part of resiliency is not letting failure bother you, while the other aspect is learning from it and pushing forward regardless. One defining moment probably came when I was 14 years old; it was a hurdle I overcame both figuratively and literally. After a severe burn accident to my legs, my physicians told me I probably wouldn't be able to fully bend my leg, and definitely not run again. After a month long hospital stay, five surgeries, including grafts, and intense physical therapy, I was back playing high school soccer 8 months later and winning hurdle races in a year. If you have the determination, the fortitude, the aptitude, and you care, you can make your own luck. Failures are merely obstacles to overcome and leave in your past. They will not define you unless you let them.

What are your "5 Things You Need To Know To Grow Your Private Practice" and why?

1. The golden rule. Being ethical is rule #1! Treat every patient the way you would want to be treated. This will lead to good will, good word of mouth, and good reviews.
2. Being a leader means leading by example. If you want your staff to care about every detail, you need to care about every detail as well.
3. Own up to your mistakes. If you poke yourself with a suture, explain what you did wrong and how you will improve to prevent it from happening again. This instills the same mentality for your staff.
4. Hire trustworthy employees and reward them for achieving success. If a new assistant excels, shows aptitude, and displays a strong desire to learn and improve, give them a bonus or raise. Don't ever treat good staff like an expendable piece, they won't like it and you will waste time trying to find and train someone as good.
5. Don't make your patients wait an hour on average to see you. In this technologic age, our time is as precious as ever. I'm sure you wouldn't want to wait an hour for anything, and your patients don't have the time for that either. Emergencies happen, but that shouldn't be the norm.

Many healthcare providers struggle with the idea of "monetization". How did you overcome that mental block?

Unfortunately, healthcare is a business. It's a pay for service model and it's broken, but it's the model we work in. You have to block out all thoughts of pay or reimbursement when it comes to patient care and stay the course.

What do you do when you feel unfocused or overwhelmed?

Take a breath, realize that it's just the moment and no moment is bigger than the big picture, and if you need it, just take a quick run or nap! Remember that there will always be work to do and you will never be completely caught up. Keep hammering at the chisel…

I'm a huge fan of mentorship throughout one's career—None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Who has been your biggest mentor? What was the most valuable lesson you learned from them?

It sounds a little cliché, but my biggest mentors are my parents. I would have never been in this position if it weren't for them. My father is a podiatrist and I learned how to be an ethical, honest, caring, and enjoyable healthcare provider from him. His determination to stay fit, balance work and life, and just enjoy life have been instilled in me from a young age. My mother and I are extremely similar in many ways. I definitely have a grit and savvy from her, and I think her heart of gold has rubbed off on me as well…

What resources did you use (Blogs, webinars, conferences, coaching, etc.) that helped jumpstart you in the beginning of your business?

Having a network of physicians above me in my career that were willing to lend an ear and give advice have definitely been extremely helpful. Similarly, being able to bounce business questions off friends and relatives was critical, as I have no formal education in running a business. I also have tried to stay up to date to constant changes in medicine and healthcare business by attending conferences, joining listservs, and reading journals.

What's the worst piece of advice or recommendation you've ever received? Can you share a story about that?

An old professor once told me that you must complete everything professionally that you want to achieve before you have children. My wife Amanda and I recently welcomed our third daughter and I can't even begin to explain how wrong he was. I spend a lot of time with my kids, and I get less sleep, but it makes all the extra work into the practice that much more worth it!

Please recommend one book that's made the biggest impact on you?

Ishmael, by Daniel Quinn

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>
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