



BUSINESS



Physical Therapist as a Lifestyle Expert

By Shondell Jones, PT, DPT

From luxury cars to exotic travel, naturopathic living, and fit moms, there are many types of lifestyle experts across the globe. These people, otherwise known as influencers, boast hundreds of thousands — sometimes millions — of followers on social media and YouTube. They're often sought after as speakers because of public interest in their actual or self-proclaimed expertise in a certain area of life. Lifestyle experts have become known as those who can endorse or refute an idea or a product to cause a movement among people. Whether on the news or via social media they can begin a new trend by simply endorsing a new product, habit, or saying. Lifestyle experts, because of their influence, essentially become leaders once well-established.

Can physical therapists become lifestyle experts? Can we be considered a lifestyle expert as a part of our career path without diluting the core of the profession? Absolutely! Physical therapists certainly have specialized knowledge and are in a prime position to be the primary lifestyle experts

in areas related to prevention of disease, exercise, stress management, ergonomics, pain management, and many more. Mixing our expertise into various lifestyles is really what we do.

Let's discover why this is a good idea and how a physical therapist might be considered a lifestyle expert.

Why Pursue “Lifestyle Expert” Status?

As therapists practice, we gain critical elements of becoming an expert: Lots of experience and the benefit of success and failure in a particular area. As a result, we discover principles that we use to guide our decisions and how we educate our patients and those around us. This discovery leads to success with our patients, and even more importantly, would not have been possible without our expertise and knowledge. Here lies an opportunity to expand your business!

Becoming a lifestyle expert requires an area of expertise that is targeted towards a specific group. For example, a physical

therapist who is an expert at treating runners will have a different reach than a physical therapist who treats new moms who want to run to get back in shape. Suddenly the expertise of the physical therapists is mixed with the lifestyle of a particular group, thus creating a unique opportunity for growth. This expanded reach becomes an avenue for increased attention on your organization and can be a stimulus for further growth and is not meant to alter the primary focus of our profession. I believe that this path allows therapists to take the truths that physical therapists teach and customize it,

ABOUT *the Business of PT Series*

This Series takes PPS's best business content and highlights relevant points for all types of business-minded physical therapists from brick-and-mortar private practice owners to solo and hybrid practitioners, non-clinical PTs to next-generation PTs. Find your customized considerations on the last page.

align it with a personal brand, and address a specific population's particular lifestyle. Whether the expertise is fitness for traveling professionals, movement and mindfulness for stress management, deep breathing for wellness, competitive sports for amputees, or healthy footwear for women, becoming a lifestyle expert is about adding specificity to our expertise.

Pursuing the path of a lifestyle expert also promotes the visibility of the profession as a whole. Most conference speakers and special guest interviewees draw interest because they have something to say about their expertise that is unique and interesting as opposed to something important but generic. It is the unique expertise that speaks to a niche group that calls for attention. This is an opportunity for the public to see physical therapists on the main stage more often in areas outside of the traditional health care model. The accumulation of exposure offers more opportunities to inspire people to visit a physical therapist or even become a physical therapist. Ultimately, this visibility becomes beneficial for the profession as a whole.

Becoming a Lifestyle Expert

So how would a physical therapist become considered a lifestyle expert? There are several things to keep in mind when pursuing the path of being considered a lifestyle expert:

1. **Have an interest and experience in your chosen area.** Most lifestyle experts have some type of personal story of awakening, tragedy, or triumph

that introduces them to their area of expertise. While it is possible for any physical therapist to become an expert in mobility for UFC fighters, some experience in coaching, fighting, or refereeing UFC fights would give more credibility to your expertise and interest. There is credibility in being able to speak the language and understand the experience of the group that you are targeting.

2. **Talk about your expertise.** Passion is proven by pursuit. If you are passionate about a particular lifestyle and want to gain an audience, you must talk about it often and everywhere. Whether you are teaching a webinar, writing a blog, doing an interview on a podcast, or talking on Facebook Live (or YouTube, Instagram, etc.), no one knows that you are an expert until you share your expertise. Create opportunities to share with the world about your passion. The more you talk, the more likely others will remember what you've said and eventually you'll become the trusted source for information. Lifehack.org recommends looking for trade association meetings and making sure you have a website and LinkedIn page with a speaking expertise added as an endorsement.¹

3. **Think local and global.** The World Wide Web allows you to go global immediately, but this should not forsake your local impact. You can attract great audiences by holding seminars in your clinic, doing guest lectures at local colleges, submitting press releases about your subject to the local news, writing articles in the paper, and doing radio interviews.

4. **Keep learning and experiencing.** To be considered a lifestyle expert, you must remain relevant to that population. The minute your interest in the area is diminished, you should bow out gracefully. The worst thing experts can do is to allow their visibility to exceed their ability because they will lose their credibility. Staying updated and relevant in your area of expertise involves being embedded in the culture of the lifestyle. This keeps you current on the language, upcoming changes and interests, and how to advise people that fit your chosen lifestyle.

You might ask, "aren't physical therapists really already lifestyle experts?" Yes and no. While it is true that we are experts in movement for all people, and that we build communities that improve the health of society, it is not until we impact a specific community with a specific lifestyle that many of our patients would consider us a lifestyle expert. This path simply provides an opportunity for physical therapists to pursue impact and influence by using their expertise in an even more specific way that ultimately can benefit your organization and the profession as a whole.

REFERENCE

1. Tyagi S. Avoid Making These 13 LinkedIn Mistakes To Score Your Dream Job. Lifehack.org. <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/work/avoid-making-these-13-linkedin-mistakes-score-your-dream-job.html>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

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Things to Consider

Traditional PT Clinic Owners

- If your patient demographic skews in a certain direction, consider launching a synergistic coaching or lifestyle service for that population.
- Leverage your specific knowledge of a lifestyle topic to build your network and bring something unique to speaking engagements at conferences, meetings, and events.
- Connect with a community of people and professionals involved in your area of expertise to stay current on trends.

Solo/Hybrid PT Practitioners

- Incorporate lifestyle elements into your practice by adapting your service offerings and marketing around what your clients want most.
- Build a network with others who share your passion for an area of specialty; for example, your wellness coaching might translate into a specialty in nutrition and a network of people from all walks of life who share the latest trends and information in that area of focus. Their passion for information sharing is your professional gain.
- Before settling on a plan to produce educational content on a lifestyle topic, research the demand and interest in your area of interest, especially relative to your geographic area, to ensure it's an effort that's worth your valuable time.

Next-Gen PTs

- Research the platforms that are active for your area of focus (i.e., social media platforms, Facebook Groups, app communities). It may be easier to collaborate with another clinician who is more active on social media. They may host you as a guest speaker or co-create a workshop with you on shared topics of interest--a good way to get your name or brand out there!
- Take advantage of early career or student memberships with professional and trade associations focusing on your lifestyle area of expertise to develop knowledge, skill, and your network in that area.
- Get started building your personal brand on social media in your area of expertise with videos, demonstrations, and other informational and experiential content. Start with functional, injury-prevention videos, which can be as basic as teaching correct body mechanics while doing everyday activities such as, bending down to unload the dishwasher or lifting a bin of laundry.

Non-Clinical PTs

- As PT private practices increasingly diversify their business, consider your value to their areas of expertise. Highlight your knowledge of their lifestyle areas and the value that knowledge brings to your partnership.
- Explore the platforms lifestyle expert PTs are using to promote their expertise and business to help you understand the marketplace in which your clients operate.
- Leverage your own area of expertise to bring something unique to speaking engagements and conferences.

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