

My Journey from Chiropractic Student to Thriving Practitioner: Dr. Heidi Reuschling's Story

1: Building the Foundation

Let me paint a more vivid picture of my journey in chiropractic, from my days as a passionate student to my current role as a thriving practitioner with 15 years of experience. It's a story filled with personal anecdotes and valuable insights that can guide aspiring chiropractic students on their own path to success.

2: Financial Wisdom

As I stood proudly, graduating as the President and Salutatorian of my class at Life University in December 2008, I felt a surge of excitement for the chiropractic journey ahead. But my enthusiasm was tempered with a strong sense of financial responsibility. During my student years, I lived a frugal lifestyle. However, I made a strategic financial move that would shape my future – I decided to use my student loan money as a down payment on a house near Marietta Square.

This decision was not without its challenges. The interest rate stood at a daunting 7.5%, but my high credit score and the ability to provide a 20% down payment secured a mortgage, even with a "no-documentation" loan. This move laid the foundation for my future success. During my student days, I rented out two of the four bedrooms in my house to classmates. Their rent helped cover my mortgage, a smart financial move that allowed me to focus on my education.

3: Community Engagement and Networking

Before opening my practice in Vidalia, GA, in March 2009, I embarked on an extensive community engagement campaign. I was determined to make a lasting impression in my new community. I conducted a staggering 1800 surveys, of which 500 were business surveys, and 1300 were residential surveys. Imagine me knocking on doors, introducing myself to every resident, and even dedicating my Saturdays to this endeavor. It was an arduous process, but it was essential to building trust and credibility in my community.

But my efforts didn't stop there. I diligently wrote thank-you notes to everyone who took the time to speak with me, a practice that helped establish strong connections. I became a fixture at local meetings, joining every organization in town and attending an astonishing five meetings per week. This level of community engagement was a key factor in my journey.

4: Setting Up a Thriving Practice

The journey of setting up a thriving practice was a labor of love. I left no stone unturned when preparing my office for opening day. I carefully selected and trained two dedicated Chiropractic Assistants. The commitment was real. When I finally opened my doors, I had an impressive 32 New Patients pre-scheduled, a testament to the tireless effort I had put into building anticipation.

With those efforts, my practice became profitable by April 2009, merely a month after opening. This early success was just the beginning of a journey that would see consistent growth.

5: Sacrifices for Success

The early years of my practice were marked by unwavering dedication and financial discipline. To keep costs low, I rented a modest apartment in Vidalia, GA, for a mere \$425 per month. It came complete with mustard-yellow toilets, cracked countertops, a cockroach problem, and was certainly no place to entertain guests. My meals were simple, often consisting of dry rice and beans. It wasn't the healthiest diet, but it was a cost-effective one.

In 2009, I paid myself a modest salary of \$25,000, putting everything I made back into the business. I didn't take a single day off for two full years, except for holidays. It truly was a labor of love, driven by my profound passion for chiropractic and an unyielding commitment to my patients.

6: Lessons in Leadership

My journey also encompassed significant lessons in leadership. I wasn't always the best boss to my first associate doctor, primarily because I expected her to match my level of dedication as the owner. However, I quickly learned that leadership demanded a more nuanced approach. When I hired my second associate in June 2012, I decided to take a different path, one that focused on empowerment and support.

Today, that second associate remains an integral part of my team, enjoying a fulfilling life both personally and professionally. The lesson here was clear: leadership is about fostering growth and providing the right environment for your team to thrive.

7: Empowering Your Team

The success and well-being of your team are paramount. My second associate's life transformed for the better, with the ability to purchase a home, pay off vehicles, and enjoy an enriched family life. Empowering your employees and appreciating their contributions fosters a harmonious and prosperous workplace, a key ingredient in my journey.

8: Expanding Horizons and Overcoming Challenges

My journey took an unexpected turn when I acquired my second practice in late 2012 due to a close friend's untimely passing. The experience was emotionally challenging, but it required me to step up, not only to clear debts and support his family but also to ensure the practice continued to thrive.

I eventually bought the practice's building, solidifying my commitment to its success. However, this practice was over two hours away from my primary location, presenting unique challenges. Nonetheless, I managed it effectively until deciding to sell it in 2016.

Prior to selling that business, I opened my third practice in Baxley, Georgia, on the exact same day as my first practice...Six years later on March 9th, 2015. We are now nine years open at our Baxley location. The Baxley location was immediately profitable because, with experience, I knew how to do everything perfectly from day one.

9: What Sets Me Apart?

At this point, you might be wondering what sets me apart from other chiropractors who struggle or close their doors. The latest statistics from the Small Business Administration that ChiroTouch emailed out in August 2023, revealed that 32.4% of chiropractic businesses close within 2 years; 51.1% close within 5 years; and 74.3% close within 15 years.

So, what did I do differently?

10: The Business-Centric Approach

One key factor is putting my business first. It was a conscious decision. As Patrick Gentempo wisely put it, we don't need new patients; new patients need us! It's our responsibility to inform them about the benefits of chiropractic care, since just hanging a sign and making a website does not tell them anything.

Prior to opening my office, my late mentor Dr. Tom Owen, D.C. shared with me the parable of the chicken and the pig: "When you have bacon & eggs for breakfast, the chicken makes a contribution, the pig makes a commitment." I understood that in order to be a successful business owner, I couldn't just make a contribution to my business, I had to make a COMMITMENT. Don't be the chicken!

11: Valuing Chiropractic Care

My fee is my fee is my fee! I firmly believe in the value of chiropractic care and charge a consistent fee for all patients, without discrimination or DISCOUNTS. My conviction in the effectiveness of chiropractic adjustments led me to confidently collect the full fee for my services. While some may charge more, I consistently collect over 96% of fees for services performed, thanks to a cash-based model, non-participation in Medicare, and constant review of my accounts receivable.

12: Keeping Overhead Low

Overhead...I watch it like a hawk and always keep it low! I was raised that way. My success over the years has not changed my perspective, and I have not let my guard down. As a small business owner, you cannot spend your way to success. I don't think I need my office to be a Mercedes Benz. I recommend to any chiropractor starting out—Keep it clean and simple.

My good friend opened his Savannah office in 2011 with a \$250,000 loan, which funded his extravagant new space. During my first visit to his office, he proudly showed off the elaborate décor. However, he was never able to cover his business and personal overhead, and within two-and-a-half years he was shut down.

It can be very hard to say NO, but every patient has a cause, and every town sees the new business coming from a mile away. EVERYONE wants you to market your company on their T-shirt, flier, billboard, movie theater, etc. Many new chiropractors donate and market themselves right out of business. So, I got really good at saying NO!

By saying NO early in business, I have become profitable, and now I get to say YES to causes that my patients and I value.

13: Embracing a Clear Philosophy

A defining aspect of my success is a clear and unwavering chiropractic philosophy. My motto, "Remove as many subluxations from the world as possible," has guided my journey. It is totally fine if you want to add something to your practice, but you better be an expert at it and "Keep It Simple Stupid." If I wanted to be a nutritionist, physical therapist, MD, ND, health coach, orthopedist, massage therapist, etc...Then why didn't I just go to school for one of those things? I am a CHIROPRACTOR first and foremost. When patients come to my office, it's chiropractic that they're looking for—that's what they expect, that's what they deserve, and that's exactly what I deliver!

I started a CrossFit gym in 2016 and sold it nearly six years later—I LOVE CROSSFIT, and I still work out at the gym I sold—But that was a completely different business. Don't water down your chiropractic services and never add a service just because insurance companies are paying for it...PLEASE. Be ethical. Be an expert. Be a chiropractor first and foremost!

I encourage others to define their philosophy and stick to it.

14: Stay True to Your Expertise

While it's tempting to diversify your services, I advise against it unless you're an expert in the additional field(s). It's essential to focus on being exceptional in one area rather than spreading yourself too thin. Patients can become confused if you offer too much and they may question your expertise. Ethical practice is key. I'll say it again, "Don't water down the value of your chiropractic services."

Case in point, my wonderful husband goes to three different chiropractic offices: 1) My office for his full spine subluxation-removal; 2) an upper cervical specialist; and 3) a Board-Certified Chiropractor Neurologist. Each office is an expert in what they do, with clear patient messaging and a well-defined purpose.

15: Lessons Learned and Commitment to Support

My motivation for sharing this journey stems from a recent experience with a former associate. After working at my practice for 3.5 years, she pursued her own practice in Florida around 2021. However, in 2023, I discovered that her office had already closed down. On several occasions, I had offered business coaching during her time with me, but she never took me up on it. Even though I know I offered, and she declined, it feels embarrassing to me that any chiropractor that ever works for me would leave and be unsuccessful. I'm committed on my end, to never letting that happen again.

16: Your Dreams for TOMORROW Depend on The Things You're Willing to Do TODAY!

March 9th, 2024 marked my 15th full year in practice. Today, my two packed clinics are completely referral-based. The days of door-to-door marketing are behind me. Now, these two clinics support me, my three (3) Associate Doctors, five (5) Chiropractic Assistants, and a General Manager over both of my offices.

Remember how I started my first two years in practice—Seeing patients 7-hours-a-day 5-days-a-week. Well by my third year, I had cut my patient visits back to 4-days per week. In the words of Michael Gerber's book "The E-myth," I used that "extra" day to work on my business, rather than just in my business. I certainly did not use that extra day to give myself a 3-day weekend!

By year 4, I was seeing patients 3-days per week, and I maintained that schedule for the next 10 years. In 2022, I was finally able to achieve my ultimate vision of seeing patients just two and a half days per week. Now don't get me wrong, those days are completely packed with patients—*12 per hour to be exact*. But I LOVE it, and I could see myself keeping this schedule until I'm 100-years-old! When you love what you do, why retire?

17: Financial Independence

Through discipline and hard work, my Chiropractic clinics have generated the kind of financial independence I had always envisioned. These businesses have allowed me to build a cash-flowing portfolio of commercial and multi-family real estate, which pays for life's luxuries. I've been able to help my Uncle Steve financially when he was diagnosed with the most aggressive form of Primary Progressive Multiple-Sclerosis. I also give back to the community that has been so good to me, by leading the annual Business Expo for our County's Chamber of Commerce.

Because of my early sacrifices, I now have the freedom to enjoy life at its finest. Nowadays, my organic diet and weekly visits to fine-dining restaurants are a far cry from the days of rice and beans. No longer do I have to live with mustard-yellow toilets, cracked counter-tops, and cockroaches. Today, my primary residence is complete with a 20-ft by 40-ft concrete in-ground pool and an organically grown fruit-tree orchard. All this is surrounded by a 12-ft gated brick wall (*locally referred to as The Great Wall*). This is a home where I can finally entertain my guests with a variety of home-made craft cocktails and pool parties in my private backyard.

18. Spreading the Wealth and Taking Care of My Associate Doctors

So, what about doctors who don't necessarily want the long nights, responsibilities, and self-sacrifices that are required to build their own business from the ground up? And yes, those sacrifices are absolutely REQUIRED for the kind of business success that I'm writing about! Well, let me answer that question. The greatest benefit of working with someone who has already paved that business path is that you can avoid some of the most difficult sacrifices required to get a new business off the ground.

My associate doctors enjoy great BASE salaries, benefits, paid vacations off, 14 extra paid holidays, and Long-Term Incentive Plans if they choose to stay with me. More than that, they can enjoy their lives outside of work, without worrying about the added responsibilities of running and marketing a business. They just get to show up to work each day to help our patients get well and stay healthy, which is exactly what Chiropractors want to do in the first place.

Dr. Christopher Foster, D.C., has worked with me for 12 years now. In that time, he married Brittany (the love of his life), bought a home, and paid off his mortgage and their car loans. With Dr. Foster's salary, Brittany was able to quit her job as a nurse with the local hospital, and now she stays at home raising their six (6) beautiful children. She also spends a portion of her day growing the family's food in their own backyard organic garden. Dr. Foster recently gave me one of the greatest compliments an associate doctor could give when he told me that, "He loves working for Tri-County Clinic, and never plans to leave!"

Dr. Heather Turner, D.C., has worked with me for just over three years now after graduating from Life University in December 2019. She has already settled into small town living. In 2021, she bought her first home in Baxley, GA. A competitive swimmer in high school, her newly constructed house had to have a huge concrete in-ground pool. She loves being an associate doctor with Tri-County Clinic because she knows she'll never need to take work home after hours. As a single young doctor that gives her the opportunity to date with the hope that she will meet her person. Dr. Turner's also proud of the fact that over the last three years, she's been able to pay off \$98,000 of student loans.

19. Parting Inspiration

I'll wrap this up with one last fun fact and some parting inspiration. My favorite sport is soccer, and my favorite soccer player is arguably the Greatest of All Time—Pelé, who just so happens to share my birthday! In the words of the Soccer G.O.A.T., I leave you with this final motivational quote:

"Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice, and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do." – Pelé