

TTN Member-Entrepreneurs



Joanne Harpel

Her business arose from a family tragedy - suicide -- and has enabled her to establish, in addition to a consulting practice, a nonprofit entity dedicated to easing the pain of other families who have suffered the same agony.

After years of working as a corporate lawyer in New York, the loss of Joanne's younger brother as a result of bipolar disorder inspired her to become involved with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. She joined the group's Board of Directors and was eventually invited to join its Senior Management, heading a new department focusing on the aftermath of suicide.

Fifteen years later, in 2013, she decided to establish her own practice dedicated to just that: helping survivors of suicide loss cope and heal, drawing on her own personal experience and her nearly two decades as a professional in the field. Her practice has grown both nationally and internationally, as she works with mental health and medical professionals, educators, clergy, and first responders, as well as families.

Seeing the magnitude of the issue, she realized something bigger was needed, so she has also founded a nonprofit organization that could expand the concept through larger projects such as documentary films. Called "**Rethink The Conversation, Ltd.**," its mission is to raise awareness about issues of serious concern - like mental health and suicide - that have been tinged by stigma, misinformation, lack of attention, or indifference, bringing them to the fore of social consciousness and activism.

She urges TTNers who are considering the establishment of a consultancy to first know the field, and acquaint themselves with their potential customers or clients. Accordingly, she has identified groups of individuals whose relationships would enable them to provide referrals. "Many of my clients are referred to me by their therapists," she explained. "I provide services in a specialized context with which most counselors or therapists are not familiar."

"I asked myself how I could add to the value of therapy my clients are already getting. Who do I need to meet and get to know?"

"It's so important to build relationships, because they can be a wonderful source of referrals," she said.



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So far, Joanne has not elected to rely on brochures or other printed materials to market her services. She relies more on personal contacts and the internet. "I look for opportunities to speak to groups," she notes; "even if some of them aren't necessarily paid, they're a great way to become known by a wider circle."

In addition, she has used LinkedIn

proactively. "My LinkedIn profile is very complete, I have videos, I list the organizations I have worked with and the speaking engagements I have filled, and I include testimonials by former clients."



She has also found MeetUp sites to be useful. She has found a group called Nonprofit Executive Directors and meets with them regularly. Finally, Joanne shares some advice she was given early on: Wait as long as possible to hire staff. Instead, she uses paid consultants.