After John Weaver, PsyD, of Waukesha, WI, earned his doctorate from the Wisconsin School of Professional Psychology, his plan was simply to open a private psychology practice. But within three years of setting up practice at the Stress Management and Mental Health Clinics, Weaver was also providing consultation to businesses. He positioned himself for the new venture by joining three colleagues to create an email newsletter for the business community about psychology. Over the next four years, the group built up a list of about 700 subscribers.

Today Weaver no longer writes for the newsletter, but he continues business consulting through his company, Psychology for Business, which provides clinical services through a private practice and works in the wellness field through his Healthy Thinking Initiative. “I’m hired by businesses as part of their health and wellness training,” Weaver says. “The Healthy Thinking Initiative comes in to teach mindfulness, optimism and resilience.” (See sidebar at right for more on this work.)

Weaver also speaks and develops training manuals on the issues he promotes. This way, he says, businesses can benefit from his expertise without his needing to be present. “It creates extra revenue and extends the work that I do to more people,” Weaver says.

A wide-open field

In the last few years, more and more of his work has been in the burgeoning field of health promotion and wellness, or as Weaver calls it, “how to help people achieve psychological wealth. From a psychological point of view, health and wellness is a wide-open field,” he says.
large room he was given was filled to capacity. “I got a lot of positive responses and the leader of the institute stopped me to say, ‘I’m so glad you came. We need more of this here.’ From that point on, I’ve been presenting every year.”

Weaver is scheduled to present at 20 conferences this year, and he encourages his colleagues to explore the field. “The wellness community is hungering for good involvement from psychology,” he says. “The community knows that psychologists have a great deal to offer—people ask me why more aren’t involved.”

Joining the wellness community

For those looking to get a foot in the door of the field, Weaver recommends attending wellness conferences. (For more resources on networking with the health and wellness community, see the sidebar at right.)

Weaver says it’s a good idea to go and take some time and listen to what questions are coming up. “Attending just to listen gives psychologists a real opportunity to sit back and think about what it is they know something about and look at how they can begin to contribute,” Weaver observes. “You don’t have to know everything, but we have a discipline, a way of thinking about things that really helps to clarify these questions.”

Next, take the time to create your own presentation proposal. Weaver says that’s the hardest step, but “it’s critical for psychologists in the workplace and health and wellness field. Our contributions have to be oriented toward helping people live a higher quality of life.”

Weaver took the time to sit down and write out his work in an easily explained format. “I spent hundreds of unpaid hours in order to be paid really well,” he says.

The wellness community is a small one, according to Weaver, and he found that once psychologists are part of the community others will approach them for their expertise. “Many are looking for psychologists to help them with dimensions of their programs. They may have the exercise and nutritional [components], but they are looking for assistance with social relationships, resilience and emotional health.”

Rather than developing comprehensive wellness programs, Weaver builds on programs that already exist. “That way I can work with well-developed programs and add in the psychology expertise,” Weaver says. “We can collaborate.”

It was at a wellness conference three years ago that Weaver connected with SC Johnson, Inc., opening up yet another revenue path. A representative of new product development at the company approached Weaver for assistance developing a product line for women. “It’s meant to support practices that help [women] live healthy and balanced lives,” Weaver says. The line’s website includes short meditations and forums on living a balanced life.

“Many people have learned how much we have to offer and are seeking out the advice and expertise of psychologists who are tuned in [to health and wellness],” Weaver says. “There’s great potential for psychologists to have a huge impact on the well-being of our nation and the world.”

RESOURCES FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

Resources for psychologists interested in entering the health and wellness field:

Conferences

- Weaver and the head of APA’s Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program, David Ballard, PsyD, MBA, will be presenting at the Art and Science of Health Promotion Conference (healthpromotionconference.com) April 11-15, 2012 in San Diego, CA. Proposals are due by July 1, 2012.
- The 2012 University of Michigan—Health Management Research Center Wellness in the Workplace Conference will take place in Ann Arbor March 14-15. hmr. umich.edu/content.aspx?pageid=49&fname=conf.txt
- The 2011 Psychology of Health, Immunity and Disease Conference (nicabm.com/decon11/) will convene December 5-11 in Hilton Head, SC.

Social Media

The scores of wellness groups on LinkedIn include the Psychologically Healthy Workplace Network, CoHealth Workplace Wellness Community and Workplace Experience. Weaver advises searching “wellness” or “health promotion” on Twitter, and following people so they follow you back. Weaver is on Twitter at @bizpsych. The Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program is @PHWP_online.

Go Local

Weaver notes that local organic food stores, health clubs and local human resources associations tend to have activities and resources to connect people to local wellness groups. In addition, local hospitals and outpatient health care facilities are increasingly offering wellness programming.