

***BUILD THE***  
**ULTIMATE**  
**PHYSIO**  
**CLINIC**



**NICK SCHUSTER**

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***ULTIMATE***  
***PHYSIO***  
***CLINIC***

NICK SCHUSTER



“Year after year, Nick Schuster sat in the front row at my live health business training events and each year he told me about his long hours, his struggles and how it was just him treating patients in his practice. Then all of a sudden everything changed. He went from sole treating therapist working crazy hours to being the owner of a thriving practice with multiple therapists, incredible systems and a silky smooth online marketing presence. Nick is a true success story in health business ownership, and this warts-and-all account of his journey should serve as a lesson to all physiotherapists wanting to earn more, work less and enjoy their lives.”

**Paul Wright, Physiotherapists and Health Business Mentor**

“Who wants to be average or mediocre? No-one would admit to it, and yet people’s behaviours, habits and decisions often put them on a fast track to becoming exactly this. We, as physiotherapists, are no different. We shouldn’t be lazy, blasé, naïve, complacent or disengaged. If, like me, your mission is to empower clients in optimal lifelong health, then we need to learn how to do this. Here, Nick unpacks some of the practical ways you can become the ultimate – especially for your family, staff and the very next client you treat.”

**Jason T Smith, Physiotherapist, Founder and Group Director, Back In Motion Health Group, Author and Speaker**

“In 2009, I was a physio clinic owner with a stressful practice that consumed me. I had a small team and a big dream. But I was stuck. In the years since I’ve obsessed over learning from others that have taken the leap before me. The Physio Co now has over 150 team members, and has 10 times been ranked as one of Australia’s 50 Best Places to Work. Learning from the experience of people ahead of me on the learning curve has been super-important. *Build the Ultimate Physio Clinic* is a guide to help you bring your clinic dreams to life. Make it happen!”

**Tristan White, Founder & CEO of The Physio Co, Author of *Culture Is Everything***

“I have known Nick for 10 years now and seen him progress from a great physio into an outstanding leader and business owner. Having been through the ups and downs of starting and growing my business over the years I’m so excited that clinic owners will be able skip a lot of the heartaches and challenges that Nick and I had to go through. I have been a client of Nick’s business for many years, and can first-hand attest to the quality of him, his team and the consistently awesome experience they provide in the clinic. You are a wise person if you follow his advice.”

**Jacob McLuskie, Founder and CEO, Positive Existence Personal Training**

“As an owner of three practices with 30 physiotherapists working under me I have come to realise this did not happen by accident and takes strategy, execution and strong leadership. Most of this was self-taught with coaches and lots of reading. Nick Schuster is one of the first physios to develop a model that he is willing to share in this book. It would have made my journey far simpler and quicker if I had this book prior to starting my business career. Nick has a great way of sharing information that is real, action-focused, simple and not fluffy.”

**James Schomburgk, Director, Back in Motion Campbelltown**

“I first met Nick like many of his clients do today – I approached him with a problem: I wanted to play in a touch footy team. He provided the solution immediately – ‘get on the field!’ Our friendship has grown greatly since then, and in him I have found a kindred spirit in the endless quest to understand the mechanics and strategy of business operations. Being in the dental field we always had many notes to compare from the cousin physiotherapy industry. Nick’s pivot from successful business builder to successful author, speaker and business coach has been a natural extension. He has brought insight and joy to many, assisting them in lifting the burden of their business and allowing others to really set sail. This book brings together a taste of those ideas and experiences. Specialised, industry-specific business insights are hard to find and very powerful when applied. I wish you all the best in the journey that Nick’s new book may start you on.”

**Dr David Houston (BOralH, GDipDent), Australia Dental Group**

“Private physiotherapy practice is tough by any measure. You are thrust into responsibilities for which you have not been trained, with staff and family depending upon your success. At last there is a book that offers wise advice and expert guidance, written by someone who has been through it all. How I wish it were available when I started out, for it would have saved me thousands of dollars and many hours in mistakes.”

**Glenn Ruscoe FACP Founder of the .physio TLD**

“I often say that founding a small business surely is one of the most fertile fields in life for true character development. From the highs of seeing your ‘baby’ grow and bring with it opportunities for self and others, through to the stress of cashflow challenges, and the despair of losing team members. I respect Nick as a fellow clinic owner and founder who has, despite the challenges along the way, stayed the course through a commitment to grow and get better as a business owner. I resonate with Nick’s candour and disclosure of the tough times and applaud Nick for his achievements through the good times.”

**Brad Beer, Titled Sports & Exercise Physiotherapist (APAM), B Ex Sc, B Physiotherapy, Founder POGO Physio, Author of *You CAN Run Pain Free!***

“Leading an organisation of any size is both challenging and rewarding. From a one-person physiotherapy clinic to a professional association representing over 31,000 Australian physiotherapists – there are countless highs and lows in any leadership journey. As I reflect on my ongoing education in leading teams and organisations, the biggest piece of advice I give to young people is to build your own network of leaders that you aspire to be like. Quite often, leadership can be very lonely. Having a support network of peers, mentors, friends (and critics) will help provide you with a sounding board for good decision making.

I admire Nick’s efforts in mobilising all Australian physiotherapists to be the best they can be. His passion, discipline, generosity and desire to be the best is something we can all learn from. It is my belief that by plugging into the network of the entire Australian physiotherapy profession, the whole sector benefits. Resources such as this book, online communities, networking

events, professional memberships and conferences will all help in 'Building the Ultimate Physio Clinic'.

I hope you enjoy the read and I look forward to connecting with all of you in the future."

**Cris Massis, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Physiotherapy Association,  
Chairman Allied Health Professions Australia**

"Nick Schuster is uniquely qualified to teach and advise aspirational physiotherapists on their journey to successful clinic ownership. The 'Ultimate Physiotherapy Clinic' is built on foundations of hard work, clinical skill, empathy with patients and strong cultural values within the clinic. Drawing on his own life experiences, Nick understands that success is achieved when work and family life are in healthy balance. Nick's passion, self-belief and practical wisdom combine in this book to provide outstanding guidance and advice."

**Gary Cunningham, Founder, Results Physiotherapy Group, USA**

"This book is the culmination of several years of practical experience, testing and measuring. Nick has put in place all of the things in this book to create a harmonious and welcoming workplace, while also creating a profitable business. As team members, we all know the level of expectation around our behaviour, we understand what is required to be a part of the SpaHtans, and we are all given the opportunity to grow through our career with his support. Putting all of the pieces of this puzzle together is where the magic happens. Nick's story is honest, raw, and gives you a background of the young man who purchased a clinic on credit and turned it into the Ultimate Physio Clinic."

**Ruth Woollett, Practice Manager, Scarborough Physio and Health**

"*Build the Ultimate Physio Clinic* is the 'bible' for physio clinic owners worldwide. Nick Schuster is the #1 authority in building high-performance physio clinics that give founders profit, freedom and fun while having a huge impact in the lives of patients. Most of all, this book will not only transform your physio clinic, it will transform your life...if you let it."

**Mike Reid, Director, Dent Global**

“Nick lives and breathes every element of this book every day of his working life here at Scarborough Physio and Health. I know from my own experience, everything Nick has taught me in this book has allowed me to be the successful physio and leader I am today. There is no other resource out there that provides leadership and personal development for physiotherapists like Nick’s book. It is a resource useful not only for clinic owners but for all physiotherapists to help develop their leadership skills and give purpose to their career.”

**Todd Bartholomew, Senior Physiotherapist, Scarborough Physio and Health**

“Nick and I met on Facebook in one of his Ultimate Physio groups. A meeting of like minds is sometimes found in the most unlikely places and that chance connection has started my journey to ‘build the Ultimate Physio Clinic’. Having already been in business for 30 years when I met Nick, I was sceptical that there could be much more I could learn about business. I believed business was tough, unforgiving and sometimes soul destroying. I felt like I was in the trenches and my business was suffering for many reasons – mostly poor hiring decisions, not a great team culture despite what I thought were my best efforts, and an exhausted and jaded leader.

Meeting and working with Nick has – bit by bit – changed the way I think and act in my business. Nick has worked with me closely through a painful and difficult business turnaround, and his support, advice and wisdom have not only helped get my business back on its feet but allowed me to believe that I can have a better, stronger, more profitable business than ever before. This is built on solid foundations of strategy, mindset, team culture and the other gems of wisdom you will find in this book. Do yourself the biggest favour a business owner could and invest the time in reading and following the blueprint Nick is sharing here – you will not regret one minute.”

**Julie Campbell, Managing Director, Revive Ashgrove**

“As a practice owner and educator of thousands of therapists, Nick’s story is an all-too-familiar tale from professionals all around the world. Nick through his first-hand experience and innovative solutions that he provides in this book will help you make the transition from struggling therapist to successful practice owner. I just wish that he had written this book 10 years ago to save me the many headaches and sleepless nights along the way to a thriving practice.”

**Stephen King, Founder, MAT Assessment, The Injury Rehab Clinic**

“As a team member of Scarborough Physio and Health, I have seen the clinic undergo massive change and growth over the last three years. Nick’s desire to constantly develop himself, and help the people around him improve, has been the catalyst for this growth. He is one of the most motivated and driven people I have met, and it has been a pleasure being part of the journey so far.”

**Jackson Williams, Physiotherapist, Scarborough Physio and Health**

“Nick is an absolute expert and ‘guru’ in private practice growth, team and leadership growth and personal growth within the private practice arena. Nick’s wealth of knowledge and leadership style are geared and focused towards the higher, longer term gain for a business. I personally love his refreshing honesty, straightforward and easy-to-talk-to nature, and I love his no-nonsense approach to developing the best practice and team you can have. This book is a must-read for any private practice owner or potential new owner who seeks autonomy, purpose and ownership for their OWN SUCCESS!”

**Dean Lawler, Senior Physiotherapist/Senior Exercise Physiologist, Director, Sports and Spinal Physio, Founder, Private Practice Prepared**



## ***DEDICATIONS***

I would like to dedicate this book to my three highest values:

- 1 My wife Gerowyn, my son James, and my close family and friends, for whom I do all that I do.
- 2 Our team, patients and community at Scarborough Physio and Health, who have helped me grow into the person I am.
- 3 The Ultimate Physio clinic owners community, who have given me the energy, inspiration and fuel for this book.

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This is an uncorrected advance copy of  
*Build the Ultimate Physio Clinic.*

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# ***INTRODUCTION***

## ***ULTIMATE PHYSIO***

This is the book I have always wanted to write.

I suppose a good way to start this book is to give some context as to why I am writing it. In late 2016 I started a consulting business called Ultimate Physio. From humble beginnings – a small, closed Facebook group for Aussie physio clinic owners – we have grown a community of (at the time of writing) more than 850 physio clinic owners in this group. From the interactions within this community there have been a multitude of positive happenings. I am contacted on a near daily basis by clinic owners, many of whom are in the group, with messages of gratitude. These owners have told me stories that describe a mirrored experience that many of us face in small business – that of professional isolation. Small business can be a lonely place; sure, we have businesses that serve thousands of clients, employ tens of team members, and have huge impacts on our communities. But as a 36 year old who has owned a physio clinic for my entire adult life (since age 21), it is only in more recent

## ***BUILD THE ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC***

times that I have felt a sense of community – both within my business, thanks to the most incredible team of people I could wish for, and also within the greater collective of physiotherapy clinic owners in Australia, thanks to the nature of the frequent and positive interactions and conversations within this open-minded community of clinic owners.

I remember vividly in late 2016, after months of overthinking and overanalysing, deciding to start this group. I started by posting daily Facebook Live videos, describing experiences I was facing in my clinic on a daily basis. The videos were raw, honest, and a reflection of who I am. My initial desire was to help physiotherapists working in private practice, by drawing on my years of experience running a business and all this entails – the highs, lows, and everything in between.

But I missed the mark. I didn't know that these videos were *not* meant for physios. They were actually designed for physio clinic owners – *you*. As I posted more and more videos I started to notice clinic owners finding the group, watching the videos, starting conversations and asking questions. I had previously heard about this concept of “going viral” on Facebook, but never experienced it myself. But the Ultimate Physio group has gripped people much like a virus would. Except, unlike a normal virus, the symptoms of this are extremely positive. Physios are regaining their passion and enthusiasm for their business in ways they haven't experienced since they first started. It's bringing them to life, and isn't showing any signs of slowing down.

### ***LOOKING FOR A SENSE OF BELONGING***

These conversations initially struck me as clinic owners crying out for a sense of belonging – finding others like you and me, who have shared the same experiences. Business highs and lows, the inevitable challenges with staff and difficult clients, marketing that

## **INTRODUCTION**

either hit the mark or didn't, HR and legal issues, wider professional advocacy challenges, but most importantly the stuff going on in the six inches between our ears (which is my true passion). As the community started to grow, the thing that really struck me was the complete honesty and lack of scarcity in these interactions.

From a young age as a physio I had always felt that within our profession so many of us had put up our own professional walls, with such a fear of looking stupid among our colleagues that the end result was professional isolation. After all, who wants to be the one who asks the dumb question and gets shut down by the smartest person in the room? Our egos could not handle this. So we are a cagey and protective bunch, and this is rarely more evident than at professional development events, where so much mental energy is devoted to not looking like the dumbest person in the room.

*Oh, that old technique? Yeah, I know how to do that. Done it a million times!*

*That research paper – not only have I read it, but I have memorised it, including the reference list.*

But in the Ultimate Physio community this cagey, protective instinct does not exist, which is strange considering the bulk of interactions in our community occur online. In a world of online trolls, know-it-alls and keyboard warriors, Ultimate Physio is a sanctuary of positivity, with clinic owners helping each other and lifting each other up when we have challenges, and generally striving together to increase the impact that physiotherapy private practice has on our patients, teams, communities and – most importantly – ourselves and our families. The culture of openness we have created has to be experienced to be properly understood.

Then there is the addiction.

Our members are bona fide addicts. Middle-aged women and men who otherwise have no real interest in Facebook are contributing to our community at all times of the day and night, checking



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the group regularly for new and relevant tidbits of information that may help to improve their businesses and their lives. In life you tend to get out what you put in, and there are hundreds of clinic owners Australia wide who have invested significant amounts of time and energy into our community, and are reaping the results.

### ***IT'S ABOUT DOING BUSINESS BETTER***

Over the past two years I have poured my heart and soul into this community. I have given all I can. But as I've grown as a leader and as a person I've discovered I still have more to give.

This book is the best bits of what I have to give. My first Ultimate Physio book *Becoming the Ultimate Physio* was aimed at helping private practice physios. That book was a practice run – this book is the real thing for owners of physiotherapy clinics.

From what I have learned over the past two years and thousands of conversations with physio clinic owners, there is a groundswell of desire among clinic owners to do business better. For too long we have been “bleeding hearts”, in the shadow of the medical profession, and content with our own mediocrity. This stops now.

Doing business better means different things to all of you, and potentially it means something different to me. For me, doing business better includes building and creating a business that is bigger than just me (and is known in the community for the positive input of my team rather than just me), leaving a lasting positive impact on our community, and most importantly for me, helping the people who work in my business and give their time and effort to realise all of their goals and dreams. What drives me is positive influence – patients, team, community, my family, and me.

The positive and selfish personal success that comes from achieving this vision is more time in my life, a more profitable and solid business that can weather all seasons, and the freedom to live

## **INTRODUCTION**

my life on my terms – and this often includes me choosing to spend more time at work with my team and strategising, rather than lying on a beach somewhere, as tends to be the public's perception of what a business owner will do when their business is self sufficient.

*Build the Ultimate Physio Clinic* is dedicated to the Ultimate Physio clinic owners group members who have given me the energy over the past two years to strive to be the best business owner I can be, by being the best person I can be.

I hope I can repay your loyalty and friendship in some small way with the information contained in this book.

### **THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF BUSINESS**

In this book I'm going to tell you a business story about the things I have done in my career to date that have taken me from a 21-year-old novice business owner, working 60-hour weeks, occupying a 30-square-metre tenancy in a medical centre in Scarborough, Queensland, Australia, to the proud owner of a seven-figure physio and allied health clinic with a team of 15 who have so far helped 13,000 (at the time of writing) members of our 50,000-person strong community in Redcliffe – a beautiful seaside village 45 minutes north of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

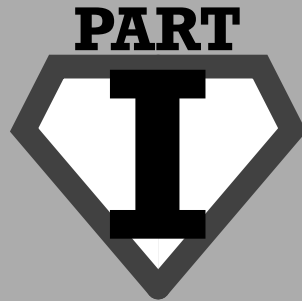
I will tell you this story through a simple five-step framework I have developed, which encompasses every facet of running a physiotherapy clinic. I am aiming to simplify the complex for you.

This is a “warts and all” story of the highs and lows of business, from someone who knows nothing else in his professional career apart from running a physiotherapy and allied health business. I'm not simply going to tell you a story about all the wonderful things I have done and the success I have gained – this would not be the whole truth. A hallmark of a great leader is the ability to be vulnerable to inspire people, and I will describe to you some of my business challenges – which almost invariably boil down to more

## ***BUILD THE ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC***

personal challenges, especially during times of flux in my business and life.

So without further ado, read on. And after you finish, let's put the book down and take action to change our profession for the better, one physio clinic owner at a time.



# ***THE PHYSIO INDUSTRY***





# ***WHAT IS AN ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC?***

## ***IMAGINE ...***

Close your eyes for a minute. Imagine this ...

You wake up on a Monday morning, but not too early – and you don't need an alarm. You have time to have a nice, relaxed breakfast with your family before heading in to work. On the weekend before you didn't even think about work, let alone take any work home.

As you drive to work your mind is clear. You have a list with everything you need to do on it, so you aren't constantly thinking about all the things you have to do or all the hats you need to wear in your business. On the way to work you listen to music, listen to a podcast, or – as I prefer – drive in complete silence so you can let thoughts come to you about what you need to be working on to continue to improve your clinic.

You own a large clinic, and own the building it is situated in. It is about 8:30 am, and you get out of your car, which you park in the car space reserved for you, which is closest to the building.

## ***BUILD THE ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC***

When you enter the clinic the place is humming. And you didn't even have to be the first in the door. Your clinic has 9 or 10 consulting rooms, and two large, open gym and exercise areas. Your clinic waiting room is professionally designed, and almost every seat is taken, which is normal each morning when you arrive.

You are greeted by two smiling receptionists – one senior and one junior. Your reception area is staffed with two team members during busy times, and down to one during quiet times, to make sure your admin wages bill isn't too high. New patients check in using your cutting-edge software, to save your admin team time.

When you sit down at your desk in your office with a view (with no treatment bed in it), you start your weekly planning and numbers analysis of the previous week. You open your diary and correlate it with your practice management software. Each day you have meetings with different members of your leadership team – three senior physios and your awesome practice manager. They form the backbone of your team, and ensure that when you are not there the professional standards you have spent years establishing are maintained by everyone, all of the time.

After an hour of analysis, planning and important business tasks, you meet with your practice manager for 30 minutes and plan the week, troubleshooting issues from last week. You discuss new team members in the pipeline, new marketing campaigns you are about to launch, and the results of your current marketing campaigns. You give your practice manager direction about which team members need to achieve certain goals, and the practice manager develops a plan for how to work with each team member to achieve these goals.

Then you have a coffee with another local business owner who is a regular referrer. You have a great chat about how both of your businesses are going, and you give them some valuable advice. They appreciate it very much, so much so they invite you to their

## ***WHAT IS AN ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC?***

corporate box at the local sports game this weekend – all you can eat and all you can drink doesn't sound too bad.

From 10 until 12 you treat four of your best and favourite patients. You don't consult much these days – only about six hours per week, just to keep your registration and relevance. These high-value clients refer lots of their family and friends, but they know that their referrals will see other members of your capable team rather than you. Your consult rate is north of \$300 per hour, but these patients value your advice and wisdom so much they don't even baulk at it, as you keep raising your prices 10% each year.

At lunchtime you catch up with your team and find out how everyone is doing. Your team seems to be generally happy, and the banter is great. These people seem like they really get on with each other well, and it's great to see them forming genuine friendships, which only makes them tighter as a team.

After lunch you get onto three or four important tasks from your task list: filming some original content, emails, planning your new services, and teeing up some interview times with potential new employees. You review your weekly tasks and make sure they correlate with the three-month and one-year goals you have set for yourself and the clinic. This stuff is owner's work.

Once this is done, about 2 pm you head to the gym for a workout, followed by picking up your toddler from childcare. When you get home it is only about 3:30 pm – plenty of daylight left, so you go for a walk to the park together. After getting home you have plenty of time on your hands so you decide to cook a gourmet dinner for your significant other, so it's ready for when they get home from work.

Your partner really values that you have the flexibility in your day to be a great parent, run a pumping business, and still have time to look after them and cook the family a nice meal.



## ***BUILD THE ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC***

You have some nice time together as a family, then everyone goes to bed happy.

\* \* \*

The scene I have set for you is a day in the life of running an Ultimate Physio Clinic.

How do I know?

This is how I spend my days – the only difference being that I like to start my day around 5:30 am rather than 8:30.

But things weren't always like this ...



# ***FROM STUCK TO THRIVING***

## ***MY STORY***

A “reference” book such as this isn’t in context without me introducing myself to you, so you know where I’m coming from and what has led me to this point. So I would like to tell you my career story – but just the interesting bits. I won’t tell you about the 8,000-plus patients I’ve helped and 70,000-plus consultations I have performed over the past 15 years. I will also refrain from going too deep into my childhood and just give you an overview.

Here goes ...

## ***THE EARLY YEARS***

Born in Brisbane in 1982 to middle-class parents, I was the oldest of four boys. You know, the one with all the expectations, not that this ever bothered me.

We had a simple upbringing, moving to Canberra when I was at a young age, where we lived until 1987. I was a sick child,

suffering from intermittent asthma attacks that landed me in hospital. Strangely, in hospital I felt safe. This was my first exposure to the medical profession, which would prove to influence my decision making later. My parents unselfishly packed up for Queensland again in 1987, almost solely to help me live a better life and despite having good jobs (which they did not have waiting for them in Queensland).

In the '80s it almost seemed like everyone was poor. Most of our time was spent playing outdoors, running around in our community, building things, feeling bored and having to use our imaginations to have fun.

### ***SCHOOL***

I remember attending five primary schools before grade three. When you move around a bit it teaches you to make friends quickly, and this was a skill I developed early in life.

We finally settled in Toowoomba – which is two hours west of Brisbane – in 1990, where I would finish my schooling. I was a difficult child – if I was a child today I would surely have been diagnosed with ADHD, and how my mother stayed sane raising me and my three brothers I will never know. I had excessive amounts of energy and would never sit still. I don't think much has changed.

Coming from a family that valued education drove me towards valuing school and doing quite well. I was the naughty kid who still managed to get straight As, despite breaking many teachers' wills. Even from an early age I had trouble reconciling the disconnect between high levels of education and lack of money – I thought, "Isn't intelligence and education supposed to be a ticket out of the middle class?"

High school was a wonderful experience for me, making lifelong friends. Many of my friends' parents had businesses, which intrigued me as I had never had exposure to people who ran

## ***FROM STUCK TO THRIVING***

businesses before. At the end of high school I made my career choice – I would study engineering and business.

But, one hour before the course applications were due I changed my preference to physiotherapy. The justification I gave myself was that I liked people, and engineers didn't have enough contact with people. I had also wanted to be a doctor, but entry into a medical degree was too difficult back then, even with the highest school leaving result.

### ***UNIVERSITY***

Next came university. Wow, I really came back down to earth. Right from the beginning I took an instant dislike to the physiotherapy degree. The first couple of years were too broad for my liking, and studying subjects such as biochemistry, microbiology and statistics just didn't make sense. Given physiotherapy is such a broad degree trying to cover all bases, I also took a dislike to cardiorespiratory (read hospital) physiotherapy, which was later confirmed during my prac year.

I had one really significant learning during my time at university.

The most vivid time I had at uni was living on the campus at St John's College, at University of Queensland, Brisbane.

John's was a great place to live. Our group of friends became very tight, and we were from all walks of life. People studied engineering, law, finance, commerce, medicine, accounting and degrees that were as far removed from physio as possible. I was the only physio among my friend group, and at uni I tended to keep to myself as I saw all of these young people inspired by what they were learning, whereas I was perpetually confused and doubtful about whether I had made the right choice – perhaps I should have studied engineering?

My friends were on the early part of their journeys to greatness in their chosen career pathways. Yet all of my exposure to the

## ***BUILD THE ULTIMATE PHYSIO CLINIC***

lecturers in the physiotherapy degree were that they either worked in hospitals or in research, neither of which inspired me.

My brain did a 180-degree switch in my final year – prac year. I could suddenly see the light. We were treating patients in hospitals and private clinics, and I was generally feeling like I was making a difference. At this stage I started to notice differences in what I now know as “culture” in various hospital environments – at the bigger hospitals there seemed to be a bigger hierarchy, and at Royal Brisbane Hospital the physio students were not allowed to eat lunch with the qualified physios! I crossed RBH off my list of places I wanted to work pretty quickly. The smaller hospitals seemed nice with minimal hierarchy, but the lack of mental challenge in hospital work was doing my ADHD brain in. Finally, I got my chance at a private practice placement, and I was hooked. A nice mix of process-driven thinking and contact with people. Perfect.

Now, how to get a job?

### ***SLIDING DOORS MOMENT #1***

The biggest sliding doors moment of my life happened in late 2003.

I had no idea what to do next at the end of uni or where to start looking for a job. One day I was walking past the noticeboard in the physio department and I noticed a flyer that read, “Physio clinic for sale – Scarborough”. I didn’t just record the number to call, I took the whole flyer and made my way up to Scarborough.

In early 2004 I bought the clinic from a lovely physio named Donna, who was working there a couple of half days per week. To buy the practice I had to borrow the princely sum of \$7,500 (best \$7,500 I ever spent), and I did this through a company called Med-fin, which I still borrow from to this day.

As many of you now clinic owners can admit to – with the benefit of experience – I had absolutely no idea what I was doing early on, both with regards to treatment of patients and running

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the business. Basically I got by in the early stages with good people skills and lots of hard work. My patients were happy and my caseload grew, and as a kid who grew up with limited financial resources I really just wanted a good job, money, and a bit of financial freedom.

I started to shed some of my youthful trappings and moved away from my mates in inner Brisbane. I bought my first house in Scarborough shortly after my 22nd birthday. I thought I had made it, as my parents were in their mid 30s when they were able to buy their first home. These early years I really didn't focus on the business much – it was a means to an end to enjoy myself, buy my home, take holidays, and have fun with my first serious girlfriend (my now wife, Gerowyn), who I met in 2005.

The one thing I will say I achieved in these first three to four years of business is, because I was doing everything myself – answering phones, taking payments, submitting paperwork and invoices, even the bookwork – this is where I gained a fundamental understanding of the different moving pieces involved in running a physio business. This was both a blessing and a curse. There were so many times when the phone rang and I was treating a patient, and I didn't know whether to take the call or keep treating the patient.

I will admit to you now that the sole reason for me not hiring a receptionist at the time was money – I wanted to draw as much money out of the business as I could, to pay off my house and enjoy myself, even if I was working seven till seven Monday to Friday, and seven till four on Saturdays.

### ***SLIDING DOORS MOMENT #2***

My second sliding doors moment occurred when a nice man named Andrew booked in as a patient. As I was treating Andrew he said, "Why don't you come and have a meeting with my company – we are making lots of people wealthy right now." To cut a long story

short, I sat down with Andrew and signed up as much money as I could to invest with Storm Financial ... six months before the Global Financial Crisis. Storm turned out to be one of the greatest cases of financial heartache the country has ever seen, leaving thousands of retired Aussies destitute.

All in all I lost about \$150,000 of investment money with Storm, and there were some very black days in 2008 where I thought about ending it all. One day in the clinic I was treating a patient, and at 9 am the stockmarket would start up for the day. I clicked refresh on my web browser, did a quick calculation, and worked out I had lost \$30,000 in the first five seconds of the day as the market nosedived. I ran outside the clinic and puked in the gutter. Not good times.

But this made me step up. I had got out of Storm without losing my house, and this experience had taught me that my path to financial freedom in life was not through the stockmarket – it was through this business that I had basically done nothing with in the five years since I bought it. Sure, I had developed as a physio up until this point, and had even been to a few business seminars with an early career mentor Paul Wright, but I hadn't done anything with the valuable information Paul had taught me.

In 2009 I started what I would describe as a learning binge. I went on a mission to learn as much as I could about how to run a great business. I read books and articles, attended seminars, hired consultants and coaches, and even took patients of mine who owned businesses out for coffee to pick their brains. Every Friday I worked out at the gym with my now business coach Brad Flynn (but back then I was picking his brain for free – thank you Brad!), and the owner of the gym, who I consider has been one of my greatest influences in business, Jake McLuskie.

During this learning binge I made my first hires – two part-time receptionists, and then in 2012 my first physio. Before I hired Mitch, to whom I owe so much on this Ultimate Physio journey, my

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record week was treating 134 patients, in 20-minute appointments. At the end of that week I was so proud and the bank balance was good, but I wondered how long I could keep it up.

From 2009 to 2013 my learning and action in business accelerated. After hiring more staff we now had a team of eight, and in 2013 I splashed out and bought the beautiful premises that Scarborough Physio and Health occupies today. What I didn't realise was that a bigger premises meant a big jump in expenses, and profit dipped sharply in 2013. Lucky I had Mitch beside me, with a full caseload of patients who loved him.

### ***SLIDING DOORS MOMENT #3***

During this period I made one really, really big mistake. I was growing in skills as a leader, but I was a poor mentor to my team. I still had a full caseload of patients, and was working on the business during my gaps, or on nights and weekends. But I was not spending one bit of time with my team. Ego had grabbed hold of me, and I thought I was a wonderful boss simply because from 2009 until 2014 I hadn't lost a single team member (except for a couple of casual staff who weren't right and I had let go).

This is when sliding doors moment number three came up and punched me in the face like Mike Tyson.

My biggest game changer as a clinic owner occurred on Christmas Eve 2014. Mitch, my loyal physio colleague, asked me if we could have a chat. He said in three months he was leaving to travel the world. My first thought was, "Damn, what about the business? How on earth could I replace someone as good as Mitch?"

When I reflect on this experience, this was where the Ultimate Physio concept was born. As a leader I had failed Mitch. I had left him in his room and not spent any time with him. He had been a top-quality employee, and I didn't even do him the honour of truly



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getting to know him and what made him tick. World travel was high on his values, and I didn't even know.

Mitch leaving started a cascade of employees leaving the clinic (I ended up losing six people in six months) and a series of bad hires – which I now call “desperation hires”. There is nothing worse than interviewing a physio, desperately needing them, knowing they will not work in the position they applied for, yet hiring them anyway. I did this twice in three months after Mitch left, and the clinic took a \$100,000 haircut in both revenue and profit that year.

Some weeks I would look at the bank account and see it going backwards. After 10 years of hard work and clinic ownership I had an unprofitable clinic and an unstable team, and this was all reflective of me being a terrible leader who was mainly focused on my own massive and ever growing caseload of patients. My bubble had well and truly burst: I was not the leader I thought I was becoming.

### ***SLIDING DOORS MOMENT #4***

The most difficult year of my life professionally was 2015. I was angry and frustrated all year, and if not for the love and support of my wife Gerowyn I don't know how I would have got through it. I felt like everyone had deserted me at work, and that none of my team had my back. The business was *just* profitable, and I was spending a ton of money on marketing, but our toxic culture and poor levels of team commitment meant that for the first time in my life I was not enjoying coming to work. I knew that something needed to change, and fast.

Enter sliding doors moment number four.

Years earlier I had found out about a young guy studying physiotherapy. Everyone in our region spoke well of this guy, and I ended up offering him a job doing Saturday admin during his prac year. In October 2015 I offered him a graduate position at our clinic, and I remember sweating bullets as he asked for two weeks to make

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the decision whether he would sign on or not. He ended up saying yes (much to my relief and joy), and officially started work on 7 December 2015. For me that is the day our business turned around.

This feeling was further cemented when my wife and I were holidaying in Italy in January 2016, only to receive an email that a leaking tap upstairs in our clinic had virtually destroyed the lower level of our clinic. Our young physio had somehow found the insurance paperwork in our files, and started the process of having our clinic repaired.

I had finally found someone who had my back.

## ***TURNING THINGS AROUND***

What followed was a series of positive events, where I was lucky enough to make a series of positive hires. This included a new senior physio who was the perfect person to take our culture to the next level, and in late 2016 my crowning glory – a lady named Ruth, who I truly believe is the best team member in a workplace I have ever seen.

As our team culture improved I made a conscious decision to sacrifice short-term profit to spend time with these committed people. I wasn't going to make the same mistake I made with Mitch. But strangely, the more time and energy I spent on my team, the more profitable our clinic became. I was putting my leadership skills into practice, and I felt like I was becoming the mentor to my team that I had always wanted to be. I had good people, and I longed to make them great and help them achieve everything they wanted in their lives, and some things they didn't even imagine were possible.

## ***SO ... WHY ME?***

So, you may ask, why is a small clinic owner from Redcliffe, north Brisbane, the guy to try to help owners of private practice clinics have better businesses, and therefore better lives?

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I don't own the biggest clinic in Australia. I probably don't own the best clinic in Australia.

But what I do have is perspective. I had learned from both within the private practice physio profession and outside the profession, and from some of the most well-recognised mentors in our industry in the fields of leadership, personal development and business education. I have spent 10 years of my life living, learning and implementing business and personal development education, and I have invested more than a quarter of a million dollars in my own education. I am addicted to learning.

What makes me qualified to help you, similar to when we treat patients in our clinics, is that I understand you.

I have had thousands of meaningful conversations with owners of physio clinics since I started Ultimate Physio in late 2016. You have told me about your joys, your challenges, your businesses, and most importantly your lives. I have an intimate understanding of the problems and challenges not only facing you in your clinics but facing our profession as a collective whole today. (To say private practice physiotherapy is facing an identity crisis is an understatement, but this is not the topic of this book and therefore will not be discussed.)

Over the course of this book we will focus on how to build the Ultimate Physio Clinic – a clinic that will give you time in your life to spend how you wish, the profit you deserve to match the effort you put in, and the freedom to live life on your terms, in whichever way you want.

Like what you just read?

Check out the whole book here:

<https://www.ultimate.physio/book/>