

Keys to a Successful Reiki Practice



BY PATRICIA MAHAFFEY

This is the first in a series of articles that will focus on the creation of a successful Reiki practice. The series grew out of interviews with six Reiki Masters who have successful and growing practices within the United States and Canada.

MOST OF US NEED TO EARN MONEY to support our families and ourselves. We also have a strong, innate desire to do work that is meaningful, beneficial to others, and uniquely suited to who we are. Sooner or later we long to follow a “calling” to do the work of our hearts. American theologian Frederick Buechner put it beautifully, saying: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Mystic poet Rumi said: “Everyone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in his or her heart.”

We long to bring these two essential aspects of our humanity—livelihood and the calling of our hearts—together. We may even wonder if it’s somehow disrespectful to think about earning money in connection with a sacred calling. Yet, a right livelihood practiced with integrity is also sacred. In the more specific context of this article, that longing to bring livelihood and the work of our hearts together is expressed in a frequently asked question: “Can I actually make a living practicing Reiki?”

The answer is yes. Many people are doing so quite successfully, including six Reiki practitioners from around the United States

and Canada who were interviewed for this article. Carolyn Musial, Marita Aicher Swartz, Lynn McBride Boggess, Lisa Ross-Walker, Raylene Marshall and Colleen Benelli have been practicing between 2 to 12 years, and all earn a good income by giving Reiki healing sessions. Even during these difficult economic times, they report growing numbers of clients, an indication that Reiki is recession proof. Economic uncertainty often generates stress, anxiety, and fear, increasing the need and the demand for Reiki healing.

Some of these practitioners have chosen to limit client hours to make room for teaching or parenting commitments; others spend 25-30 hours per week with clients. Those with reduced client hours tend to generate incomes of over \$800 a week, while those spending 25 or more hours with clients typically generate \$1700–\$1800 weekly. All have substantial additional income from teaching Reiki classes.

How have these practitioners managed to make a living giving Reiki sessions? The common thread among them is a spirit-guided life, a life dedicated to truth, love, and the inner growth required to live such a life. In this context, they’ve created flourishing practices by operating their Reiki businesses using Reiki energy and principles. By doing this, they’ve discovered that Reiki flows in support of a practice that is in alignment with the essence of Reiki.

This doesn’t negate the necessity for working skillfully with material aspects of running a business, such as setting priorities, carrying through plans, and handling time and money effi-

ciently. In order for a Reiki practice to succeed, one must deal effectively with the material world. This provides the “legs” that spiritual energies need to manifest. By fostering a mutually supportive relationship between the material and the spiritual, these six practitioners are serving others in ever more effective ways while making a living and bringing about a life in which their own “deep gladness” meets with the “world’s deep hunger.”

Though their particular business techniques, training, and the outer forms of their practices vary greatly, the core of spiritual surrender is consistent. This includes the willingness to do the ongoing, challenging, not-always-pleasant work of self-healing, of facing one’s issues and illusions with honesty and courage. It includes inviting compassion, unconditional love, and faith to guide every step. It means letting go into a deeper knowing, trusting it, coming back to it again and again.

To begin a Reiki practice from this place, the essential first step is opening to that deeper knowing through a process of discernment about whether or not to start a practice. Not everyone is called to a Reiki healing practice. We will not serve ourselves or anyone else by starting a practice based solely on the voices of ego, will, or the mind. These voices can be very seductive and convincing; therefore, surrendering into a process of spiritual discernment is essential.

Bringing specific questions into your meditations and prayers is a particularly useful part of the process. Neither judging nor avoiding yourself, just be curious. Is Reiki your passion? What do you notice about the call to start a Reiki practice as coming from unconditional love and compassion vs. coming from ego? Be honest in noticing to what degree you are hoping a Reiki practice will bring you approval, validation, or power. Almost everyone has some of that. Are you hoping a Reiki practice will offer an escape hatch from a job or situation that is challenging you in some way? Do you have a strong attachment to acquiring wealth and power that might influence your focus on serving the purpose of healing? Does a Reiki practice fit your unique array of gifts and limitations? Is it in harmony with who you most deeply are?

Be curious and willing to listen openly. When we assume we already know, or when we cling however subtly to preconceived answers, we erect a barrier to the deeper knowing inside. Let go of the one who thinks they know, or even the one who is trying to know, and call on Spirit. Prayer, meditation, paying attention, and simply being present to what life is revealing are all indispensable. Guidance comes in many forms, inside and out. Each person’s journey unfolds in its own unique way. Trust.

Carolyn Musial has been practicing Reiki full-time in Buffalo, New York for six years. She had no intention of leaving her corporate America job. “It never entered my mind. If somebody had told me I’d be doing this, I would have thought they were crazy.” However, at a certain point in her life, she began feeling there was “something more.” This nudge led her to Reiki classes, and after a while, she started giving Reiki treatments “on the side” to people referred to her by a friend with a healing practice. After a couple of years, Carolyn felt an inner sureness that she was meant to do Reiki full time. She acted on that sureness, and it was the



Carolyn Musial

seed for a fundamental trust in Reiki that carries her practice still. She began by taking stock, figuring out how much she needed to live and how many clients she would need before she could leave her job. She says her client numbers grew as she grew as a practitioner, and that it was perfect because she wouldn’t have been ready for 18 clients a week when she first started.

The process for Carolyn involved an attentiveness, trust, and being present to what she felt. These states are critical for the *receptive* aspect of the discernment process; they create space in which inner promptings can be felt more distinctly. Carolyn also had the willingness to examine practical realities, which is an important component of the *active* aspect of discernment. Starting a Reiki practice may involve taking risks and leaps of faith, but this doesn’t mean foolish leaps unaccompanied by the grounding of practical considerations and clear vision.

How would it feel to you to be giving several Reiki treatments a day? Will you rent space or work from home? If you work from home, how will you provide privacy and quiet for your clients without undue interference in the life of your family? Do you have a particular sphere of influence where you can begin promoting your practice? Where and how? How much debt do you have? How much capital? Can you subsidize your practice while it grows? Will you need to keep your “day job”? If so, how will you balance job and practice and exercise good self-care?

Marita Aicher Swartz offers Reiki from three different offices in her growing practice in the Bristol, Tennessee area. She felt drawn to practicing Reiki soon after taking her first class, but felt some unsureness about leaving her teaching job at a parochial school. She kept the longing in her heart and prayers for two years, using Reiki at school, talking to students, parents, and staff members



Marita Aicher Swartz

openly about it. One day, one of those “chance” conversations with a parent in the cafeteria opened up an amazing opportunity. That parent happened to be Dr. James Schrenker, a physician who planned to open an integrative medical clinic. When the clinic opened in 2005, he invited Marita to work full time as a salaried Reiki practitioner and spiritual director. In 2008, when the clinic dismantled for re-organization, she was faced with

deciding whether to go back to teaching, or start her own practice. This decision prompted a painful walk through fear and doubt. She sensed strongly that she was meant to be practicing Reiki, but doubted the financial wisdom of making that choice. Her courage and the support of faith, friends, Reiki, and mentors helped her through. It was a process that required work, and it strengthened her.

“I was in a funk, really low,” she says. “I did self-Reiki every day, especially to the heart, head, and solar plexus. My best friend talked me through some practical details, and I prayed, asking God to help. I used visualization to call back past times when I was afraid and got through, to help me remember I’m never alone. My Reiki hands tell me I’m never alone. I knew I had to just put one foot in front of the other, and trust my instincts. I’m very blessed to have people around who support my spiritual life and this passion. Jim (Schrenker) has always encouraged me to listen to my Higher Self, to trust in my life path.”

The process of being willing to wait and pray often leads, as it did for Marita, to extremely significant stepping stones and opportunities. Her experiences and contacts at the clinic were pivotal when it was time to start her own practice, supporting her in countless ways.

Almost everyone contemplating starting a Reiki practice will have to work with some fear and doubt. The discernment process helps us become clearer about how we will deal with it, and to distinguish between the concerns that are expressions of fear and doubt, and therefore need healing, and those concerns that are valid considerations in our particular circumstance, calling for us to wait or to proceed with caution.

What spiritual practices and tools do you use to support yourself? Do you have support from family, friends, and spiritual community? Do you have Reiki mentors? How will you handle discouragement and setbacks?

Are there voices of doubt and fear that are affecting your decision—such as a voice that says you couldn’t possibly support yourself doing what you love, or a voice that says you’re “not good enough,” or one that says you should conform to what you “should” do, instead of what you really long to do, or a complaining voice that says circumstances, the faults of others, the world and times we live in make a Reiki practice impossible for you?

Willing explorations of one’s inner state and outer circumstances can help clear away mental fog and disperse unfounded beliefs, allowing the clarity of inner knowing to shine through.

Lynn McBride Boggess, founder of the Virginia Center for Reiki Training, had a rather startling and dramatic call to take a look at her own inner state and outer circumstance. In the mid-nineties, she suddenly went blind for three days for no apparent physical reason. “One day I woke up and when I tried to stand, I would pass out, everything went black.” She describes those three days as, understandably, “a very soul wrenching, difficult time.” It led her to do a life review. She saw that she had been trying to be



Lynn McBride Boggess

everything to everybody and getting sick a lot as a result. She came to the realization that there was another path she needed to take.

“The words that kept coming to me were: ‘All you need to do is say: *Here I am. Use me, Lead me.*’ She committed to saying that every day. Within three months, someone gave her a book on Reiki. She’s been in practice now for 12 years. She recently cut her weekly client schedule from 12-18 to 10-12 to accommodate a busy teaching schedule.

Here I am. Use me. Lead me. Such willingness and surrender is a grace-filled portal through which the creative movement inside can express itself, revealing what we need to know and germinating the opportunities our heart longs for.

With this openness, we are able to ride with life’s mysterious flow and native intelligence, allowing it to guide and propel us. This is the heart of discernment. From here, the plan of grace is unlocked from the barriers that our mind, fears, and egos put up. From here, a successful Reiki practice unfolds if it is meant to.

In a recent interview, Mukti, a spiritual teacher from California, referred to “internal navigational skills that are highly instinctual and intuitive.” This is the innate intelligence of the Divine. This is the wisdom of spirit that we can invite in and follow in a trusting dance, knowing that in fact we are the waves of the movement. Mukti stated that the more her own awakening deepens, the more she has a sense of “suppleness and ability to shift more quickly. Life is turning this way, ‘Okay,’ and then you turn this way.”

This willingness to shift is evident in the way that Colleen Benelli of Portland, Oregon and Lisa Ross-Walker, of Lindon, Utah came to have thriving Reiki practices. For both women, a willingness to let go of something was required. Both already had successful businesses that they loved—Lisa was a massage therapist who had opened and was managing a large holistic healing center, and Colleen was a thriving fiber artist. For both, their Reiki practices grew organically out of their passion for Reiki, until they needed to make a decision.



Colleen Benelli

Name/Location	Website and contact info	Number of clients per week/usual length of sessions	Approx. # of hours with clients per week	Fee and amount earned based on hours	# of years in practice	Reiki classes
COLLEEN BENELLI Portland, Oregon	www.ReikiLifestyle.com colleen@reikilifestyle.com	5 - 9 per week 2 – 3 hour sessions	10 – 27	\$65/hour	5	12 or more a year, plus other Reiki related workshops
RAYLENE MARSHALL St. Walburg, Saskatchewan, Canada	braymarshall@msn.com	12 – 15 per week (has four small sons, so chooses to work only 3 days with 4-5 clients/day) 90 minute sessions	18 - 23	\$65/90 minute session	2	2-3 a year but increasing; 4 between January and March 2009
LYNN MCBRIDE BOGGESS Virginia Center for Reiki Training Blue Ridge, VA	www.compassionatereiki.com lynn@compassionatereiki.com	10 – 12 per week (cut back from 12 – 18 due to teaching schedule) 90 minute sessions	15 – 18	\$75/90 minutes session	12	Approx. 18 a year, also hosts 4 workshops per year at Virginia Center for Reiki Training that are related or complementary to Reiki
CAROLYN MUSIAL Buffalo, NY	www.reikicare.com reikicare@verizon.net	15-20 per week 60-90 minute sessions	25-30	\$60/hour	6	1-2 classes a month
MARITA AICHER SWARTZ Bristol, Tennessee	www.marita-reiki.com marita.reiki@yahoo.com	8- 10 per week 60 – 90 minutes	8 - 15	\$50/hour	3	Approx. 8 a year
LISA ROSS-WALKER Lindon, Utah	lisa@healingtfc.com www.healingtfc.com	15-17 per week 90 minute sessions	23 - 26	\$80/90 minutes	Massage 21, Massage and Reiki, 11; Reiki only, 8	12 a year plus Reiki drumming, crystal healing and chakra classes

“My Reiki clientele became overwhelming,” said Lisa, “Reiki was calling me very strongly and I didn’t have time to manage the center and do Reiki.” Colleen started out giving treatments without any intention of starting a practice, but her growing clientele encouraged otherwise. “Reiki guided me to become a professional through my enthusiasm,” she says. “I was obviously headed in that direction, but wasn’t consciously aware of it.”



Lisa Ross-Walker

This “suppleness and ability to shift” is the fluidity needed for not only a clear discernment to begin with, but also for allowing a successful practice to unfold from you if that is what you are meant to do. This is the openness of the mantra that has guided Lynn. *Here I am. Use me. Lead me.* “I try to live my life as sincerely as I can,” she says, “and let Reiki flow through me and open doors.”

Carolyn also spoke of that flow: “The more I open for Reiki to flow, the more it works through me not only for my practice, but for who I am, which is the basis of the practice.”

Love gave Raylene Marshall the courage to move into a new and completely unexpected path that led to her successful Reiki practice. She lives in Saskatchewan, Canada in a tiny town of 800, but she now has Reiki clients booked out for several months. She couldn’t have even conceived of this seven years ago, when her son was born with a stroke, leaving his left side paralyzed. In their efforts to do everything possible for him, she and her husband went to hear a woman give a talk about Reiki, even though,



Raylene Marshall

says Raylene, laughing, “I didn’t believe in any of this Reiki stuff!” On the way home she told her husband, “She has got to be the biggest quack ever!” But, filled with love and desperate to help their son, they continued checking out holistic medicine techniques. “Not that we believed in it!” she adds emphatically, laughing again.

Over a few years, Reiki spoke to her. She allowed herself to listen, continued exploring, took classes, and eventually started giving treatments. Before long the treatments being requested were more than she could handle with her part-time job at the funeral home run by her husband’s family. She rented


space, quit her job, and everything came together. Her practice grew exclusively through word of mouth.

Her initial skepticism is now a tremendous asset with clients who come on the basis of a recommendation, saying, “I don’t know why I’m here, I don’t really believe in this stuff!” Her work at the funeral home with grieving souls has become instrumental in certain aspects of her practice. And, her work is deeply enriched by her experiences with her son, who has overcome many obstacles. He now has almost full use of his left leg and steadily improving use of his left arm. She says, “I believe everything happens for a reason and I would have never taken this path if it weren’t for him. We also realized how much we took for granted when this happened. It’s made us more compassionate, understanding people. And for that we thank him!”

A willing heart allows us to move forward into the unknown. With passion and compassion to guide us, we keep our minds open. With faith in more than the possibilities we ourselves can see or believe in, we begin to see opportunities we may not have seen otherwise. Without forcing, avoiding, or clinging, we open ourselves to the powerful wisdom of life that flows through every particle, every cell, every moment in time. This is the heart of discerning if a Reiki practice is right to embark upon, as well as the heart of allowing a Reiki practice to grow and thrive.

Each person’s path is unique. Heyoan, a guide channeled by healer Barbara Brennan said that “new ways are continually being formed from the depths of the human soul, from wherever each soul is at any moment” and that becoming a healer means “dedication to *your particular path* of truth and love. . . It is the ever-renewing process of the creative force welling up inside of you....When you learn to flow completely, without resistance, with that inner creative movement, then you are home.”

It takes courage to live in open questions, but acknowledging our not knowing is a blessing, a sacred invitation. By giving yourself over wholeheartedly to this process of asking to know the truth about your calling, you can trust the truth will reveal itself. Then, if you find you feel energized to go forward with a Reiki practice, you have the rich earth of truth to root your practice in.

May the work of your own sacred and compassionate heart be revealed to you. May you trust life with great joy, giving grace the room for miraculous manifestations. May you find the way to bring your own deepest gladness to the hungers of this world. 

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