



CHAMPIONING PRIVATE PHYSIOTHERAPY

# THE PHYSIO FIRST STRATEGY AND CULTURE EXPLAINED

**Karen Willcock**  
**Hon Commercial Officer**  
**Physio First**

CHAMPIONING EVIDENCE-BASED COST-EFFECTIVE PRIVATE PHYSIOTHERAPY  
WITH PHYSIO FIRST MEMBERS IN A CHANGING HEALTHCARE MARKETPLACE

[physiofirst.org.uk](http://physiofirst.org.uk)



# *Our strategy and culture explained*

Dear reader,

If you are about to read this document, it will be because you are thinking about working with Physio First.

Whilst we dislike arrogance we do think that it is accurate to say that trying to form a relationship with Physio First having not read and digested (and indeed asked questions about) this paper would be a fool's errand. I make this statement not because I think Physio First is better than other similar organisations but because I do think we differ from many and to work with us, it is vital that you understand us and we you.

What follows is "our story" to give clarity and context to the strategic journey that we have been on, that was really crystallised in the outcome of some deep strategic reflections in 2013. The result was a decision as to what Physio First was for, or put another way, why Physio First exists.

The answer to both questions is contained within a 16-word statement of intent published in June 2013. Physio First exists to "**champion evidence based cost effective private physiotherapy with Physio First members in the changing healthcare marketplace**". It is this declaration that has been our guiding principle to everything we have done since and will continue to do so.

So, in very short order, to understand us you need to know 3 things, namely:

1. What our strategic statement of intent means
2. That since 2012 we have an organisational culture that is based upon our agreed values and which articulates the standard of behaviour to which we hold ourselves and as importantly, against which we judge our ability to work with a commercial partner
3. That although technically a not-for-profit organisation, we run ourselves with the discipline and structure of a commercial organisation

The purpose of this paper is to try to provide a summary of the journey that Physio First has been on in arriving at our culture and strategy; as by explaining this we hope that any future contact with us will become easier and lead to a very successful relationship.

Although it is the leaders of Physio First who set our culture and strategy (that is our executive committee who are elected from among our members), Physio First is a membership trade association that is run by members, "with" our members. You will see that our Big 5 unique member benefits all require member engagement.

From your perspective it may be helpful to know that our organisation-wide commercial strategy states that we feel that we can only do business with organisations that are culturally and



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strategically aligned with us. In other words, organisations that take the time to understand our strategic direction of travel and our values and feel that they complement their own.

By way of explanation, that does not mean that there must be a complete cultural and strategic match between ourselves and any commercial partner, but it does mean that there has to be sufficient synergy to make us all feel comfortable that we are on the same page.

Deciding that there is insufficient synergy is not, from our perspective, a criticism. It is perfectly acceptable for us not to have sufficient synergy with you or your organisation as different organisations have different priorities and different values and that is fine. But if there is insufficient synergy there is no chance of our working together, save upon a transactional basis!

So, to conclude, by providing this information to you I hope that I have sufficiently articulated our own culture and our strategy. In doing so I hope to have given you sufficient insight to be able to judge whether you think there is merit in spending the time and energy in trying to construct a functional (i.e. fit for purpose) relationship with us at this point.

So please do read on and let me know what you think.

Best regards,  
Karen Willcock  
Hon Commercial Officer  
Physio First

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# Our strategy and culture explained

## Our story

### 1. Who are Physio First?

Physio First, formed in 1952 as the Organisation of Chartered Physiotherapists in Private Practice (OCPPP), is a trade association of self-employed Chartered physiotherapists in private practice and a dynamic professional network of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. We have approximately 3,000 members across the whole of the United Kingdom, the vast majority of whom are practice principals (i.e. business owners). As a professional network of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, we are formally recognised by the Council of the CSP as representing self-employed Chartered physiotherapists. To find out about Physio First's history, [click here](#).

Physio First is run by our members and we pride ourselves on being an organisation that works *with* our members as opposed to *for* them.

Our elected Physio First executive committee, supported by fellow volunteer member post holders, our employed Northampton office team and commissioned professional advisors, proactively work together as an integrated team to deliver our strategic intent. We benefit from professional management, professional coaching and other professional support and pride ourselves on being an extremely functional (i.e. fit for purpose) organisation. We are well-structured, use project planning and capacity management tools and systems which include our sophisticated Membership Relationship Management (MRM) system.

Physio First also has a network of 18 Regional Officers who are, like our executive, volunteer members and so are practising self-employed private physiotherapists, who liaise closely with our executive. Their role includes holding and communicating our organisational strategy and culture; leading upon planned and aligned regional events and assisting with our education, recruitment and retention strategies.

In response to our members' needs we have developed our **Big 5 unique member benefits** which cannot be found elsewhere. You can find these, in no order of priority, [here](#).

### 2. Our strategy explained

Our commercial discipline has ensured that our strategic intent is clear. Physio First is for **championing evidence-based cost-effective private physiotherapy with Physio First members in the changing healthcare marketplace.**



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In deciding our strategic intent in 2013 our executive committee then developed a 5-year business plan comprising 9 goals to achieve it. To read our 9-Goal, five-year plan in its full detail, which we do recommend you doing to have full context, [click here](#).

Having completed our 9 Goals in 2017, a year early, our General Secretary, Paul Donnelly is now leading on the formation of a private, physio self-owned cooperative to come into existence in 2018. Together, our members who join the co-operative, can compete in the marketplace with consistent, predictable, sustained and measurable quality.

In October 2017, our executive committee met for a second strategic facilitation meeting, to determine Physio First's next three-year business plan. The outcome from this meeting was that we as Physio First needed to concentrate on:

## **Member recruitment**

As per our Commercial Strategy, Physio First has a goal of recruiting 3,200 members by the end of 2018. This is an ambitious goal that we are focusing our TEM (time, energy, money) on, and this is where our Strategic Commercial partners could help.

Physio First has organically grown a database of approximately 800 potential members, but needs to expand outside of this, if we want to achieve this goal.

## **Member engagement**

To champion our Intent, we need to increase the level of engagement with our members. We can measure engagement by seeing how many of our members take part in our Big 5 unique member benefits, as well as our supporting benefits like attending our annual flagship conference.

Working creatively with a Strategic Commercial partner in this context is something we would love to talk about.

## **Quality Assured Practitioner**

As detailed on our website ([click here to learn more](#)), Quality Assured Practitioner (QAP) is our 5<sup>th</sup> core member benefit. The quality assurance scheme means members can benchmark their outcomes and can demonstrate how well they are doing against pre-set baseline data. It's a quality kitemark to prove the effectiveness of a member's work.

We have had a plan in place since 2013 to work towards our Goal 9, with the aim being enabling these members to compete in the marketplace with private medical insurers and commercial intermediaries and even expand private practitioner business beyond its current boundaries.



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We now feel confident that Physio First, together with a network (or organised “group”) of Physio First QAPs, can come together legally in one or many co-operatives and disrupt the healthcare marketplace, to improve the service we private practitioners give to the public. We can protect our autonomy from rules imposed upon us by commercial investors who resell our skills. This can allow private practitioners to share in the commercial reward for engaging directly with the marketplace.

Whilst we look at business models for this sort of progression, we need to have sufficient Physio First QAP’s and so need to promote participation and demonstrate the benefits by getting involved.

## 3. Our culture explained

Our culture expresses our values and represents the standard of behaviour against which we are to be judged and against which we judge others. First published in 2012, we strive to live up to it in everything we do, every day.

We need to be able to feel enough synergy reflected by any potential commercial partner for us to be able to work with them. **“Doing business through relationships – through respect, no blame, good communication, structure and planning.”**

**Respect:** Total respect for each individual who volunteers and/or is employed by Physio First by behaving with integrity and in a way that:

- Helps all feel valued and trusted\*
- Demonstrates respect, even if in dispute with them
- Empowers
- Makes it easy to identify, declare, communicate about and then manage any personal interests e.g. self-promotion or promotion of anything in which an individual has an interest that could conflict with the interests of Physio First

**No blame:** We operate a no blame Culture, which means that we try to demonstrate trust\* and accept that if anyone makes a mistake:

- Internally we feel very comfortable to communicate our mistake as soon as it has happened as we can expect everyone in Physio First to respond by rushing to help and not to blame
- Externally we hope that they or we would feel the same.

\* There are two aspects to “trust” i.e. 1) trust in honesty 2) trust in competence. When using the word “trust” one has to be precise as to which meaning is intended.’ In this instance, the use of the word “trust” throughout Physio First’s explanation of our culture refers to both meanings.

**Communication:** Physio First as a group of people understand:

- The value of excellent communication

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- That relationships are founded on integrity, trust\* and good communication and that the better the communication the better the relationship
- The importance to always strive to:
  - Provide and seek both **clarity** and **context** all of the time
  - Listen – really proactively listen!
  - Look at the proposition from the other persons position – also a measure of respect
  - Reassure that there is no such thing as a stupid question and that each meeting is a safe place
  - Provide complete openness and demonstrable trust\*
  - Meet deadlines whether self-imposed or agreed
  - Encourage energy through optimism and discourage pessimism (e.g. long faces, complaints without suggested solutions, criticism without balanced affirmation).
  - Coach\*\* rather than tell
- Our need to embrace a “modern attitude” i.e. evidence based thinking and the creative use of technology to resourcefully use our limited TEM

\*\*Coaching means “asking the right questions” as opposed to “telling what to do” the distinction being that “coaching elicits the right answer for the person being coached in which that person takes greater ownership from having defined the answer for themselves”.  
(Source Business Coach Jon Wigley December 2014)

**Structure:** We have three structural elements each of which have equal importance.

- 1. Operational:** Our Big 5 unique member benefits supported by our education programme, our publications, our annual conference as well by the advice and support we provide.
- 2. Strategic:** To consider and plan our future and continuously monitor our progress against our business plan.
- 3. Support services:** From well-planned office procedures, to our meeting etiquette that is solely based on our culture, to team building appraisals, to elegantly simple management accounts, to role defining job profiles. Every management tool we have is designed to make us as fit for purpose as possible.

**Planning:** Through detailed planning of our business we reduce risk, frustration, conflict and misunderstandings. Planning, coupled with our culture of no blame, good communication, and structure enables us to form and nurture successful commercial strategic relationships.

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## 4. Our executive described

We have 8 defined volunteer roles that make up our Physio First executive committee, our Hon Commercial Officer being one, with other paid and volunteer roles who sit with and advise them. The majority of our executive officers are practising self-employed private physiotherapists who deeply understand and appreciate the issues facing the self-employed private physiotherapist today.

Our executive committee meets four times a year and it's their role to lead our organisation, in line with our current strategic Intent, in response to our members' needs, views and changing marketplace. To find out more about our executive, [click here](#).

Any Strategic Commercial agreement will be circulated to each executive committee member who will need to provide approval, before a partnership is signed and launched.

## 5. The role of our Hon Commercial Officer

The role of Hon Commercial Officer, in addition to being an executive committee member and thus to help lead Physio First, is to “champion the implementation of our commercial strategy and to contribute to our capacity and performance”.

The Hon Commercial Officer receives all initial contact from commercial organisations and, where appropriate, negotiates membership / organisational benefits. Additionally, the Hon Commercial Officer actively seeks out companies that we have not, yet, had contact with, with a view to building Strategic Commercial relationships with those who we share a strategic and cultural synergy with.

This means that it is my role, with the support of our full time Commercial Support Administrator, Amy Ross, to be available to spend time with you.

We already have formal Strategic Commercial and Transformational relationships with several organisations, details of which you can find by [clicking here](#). Our definition of a Strategic Commercial relationship as set out in our Commercial Strategy is one **“where our Hon Commercial Officer is satisfied that the individual or organisation has sufficient strategic and cultural synergy and 3 elements i.e. resource for Physio First, a mutually agreed realistic commercial outcome for our commercial partner and a benefit for our members that will help them on their journey to our Goal 9 and our intent, that our executive has sanctioned”**.



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## 6. What's next?

Thank you so much for reading all the way to the bottom. As explained above, the strategic facilitation meeting in October 2017 confirmed that for the next three years, Physio First is concentrating on continuing to recruit and retain members, but also increasing the level of engagement in the Big 5 unique member benefits.

Any partnership that Physio First therefore forms must support us in this endeavour. So, we ask that you write a business proposal capturing how you might do this, how you might help the members and of course, what your own goals are by forming this partnership.

For the sake of clarity, a commercial organisation that acquires the status of “Physio First Strategic Commercial Partner” is not acquiring an endorsement by Physio First. ‘Endorsement’ implies unqualified approval in all ways and Physio First is rarely in the position of being able to make such an assertion.

Best wishes

Karen Willcock, Hon Commercial Officer, Physio First

**Karen Willcock** – [commercial@physiofirst.org.uk](mailto:commercial@physiofirst.org.uk) / **Amy Ross**, Commercial Support Administrator – [amy.ross@physiofirst.org.uk](mailto:amy.ross@physiofirst.org.uk)