

The North Dakota Board of Dietetic Practice
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Let's suppose that you hear about a nutrition-related product or program that appears to have evidenced-based science to back up its claims and a good success rate with customers. The parent company is looking to expand into the state and you are offered the opportunity to become a sales associate. Should you take the opportunity? Is there any reason to be concerned about what your colleagues will think? Would running your own nutrition-related business, in addition to your regular job, somehow be a conflict of interest or jeopardize your LRD status?

Rest assured that the NDBODP does not in any way prohibit an individual from owning their own nutrition-related business! However there is a right way and a wrong way to promote your new business so that you maintain professional integrity and work within the Code of Ethics.

Use of Professional Credentials? If you need to be a dietitian for the new position or if you desire to hold forth your RD credential in order to lend credibility, then you must keep your license up to date and continue to abide by the Academy's Code of Ethics. This is not because of the nutrition-related product or business, but because you are using the title of dietitian. Only those who comply with the licensure law can utilize the title or do the work of a licensed registered dietitian.

Keep your new business separate from other work or professional organizations. As a member of a professional organization such as the NDAND, you have access to a "free" listserv. It would be tempting to post an informational message about your new business or features of a product using this venue. However, it is a conflict of interest for you to promote your own business via an association venue. Following Academy guidelines, it is considered inappropriate to promote your own business or to discuss pricing, fees, or hourly rates on a listserv. The correct way to advertise would be to contact the secretary of the ND AND or the NDBODP and pay for a mailing list, then send out materials on your own. As a business entity you need to develop your own separate clientele base and contact list. In the same light it is not ethical to promote your own product to a resident at the nursing home where you consult or during an outpatient appointment while you are on the job for someone else.

What will my colleagues think? This question brings to bear both personal integrity and nutrition knowledge. If it's a credible organization....then it's up to you to represent it in a professional manner. The burden falls on you to show your colleagues why and how this new business is something worthwhile. A word of caution is needed here to make sure the materials you use and practices you promote don't make any wild or unsubstantiated claims. Additionally it is always important to follow ethical business practices, financial recommendations and treat all customers with respect. A practitioner who doesn't do these things could be reported to the NDBODP by an unhappy customer!

Stay within your scope of practice. Some business opportunities have a broader scope of practice and are not limited to nutrition or dietetic practice. Be careful to stay within your own scope of practice! If some aspect of the product or service is beyond your level of training or experience, do not try to wing it...either refrain from involvement in that part of the business or get trained to the needed level. Keep certificates of completion to verify your level of training. Have a person who is trained, evaluate your performance or read your notes and document that you meet the standards.

By following a few simple guidelines it is possible to have a successful private nutrition-related business and keep your license and professional credibility intact!