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1 CREATING A PRACTICE THAT MATCHES YOU, YOUR VALUES, AND YOUR VISION

We wrote this book to help you create a successful practice that serves your clients ethically and effectively; supports you financially; and matches who you are, your values, and your vision. We are four diverse psychologists from different backgrounds who are passionate about clinical work. Two of us have started and shaped our practices, and two of us are part of a group practice. We've pooled what we've learned along the way—including from our missteps—to give you basic information, guidance, and resources to grow an ethical practice that is right for you and your community. In part, this means that the practice is a sound business and a financial success (however you define that term). Equally important, the practice must be consistent with your deepest values, represent who you are, and contribute to a meaningful life that brings you joy (at least some of the time) and fulfillment.

Many of us leave graduate school unsure about the road to take. Some of us dream of building a successful practice but feel overwhelmed about how to get started. Finding our way is a challenge because there is no one way to do it, no best way that works for every individual and all circumstances. The challenge has grown because the field itself is rapidly changing.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0000321-001>

Succeeding as a Therapist: How to Create a Thriving Practice in a Changing World,
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The COVID-19 pandemic brought radical transformations and caused some changes that were already underway, such as telehealth, to accelerate at warp speed. Wind et al. (2020) titled their article on these changes “The COVID-19 Pandemic: The ‘Black Swan’ For Mental Health Care and a Turning Point for E-Health.” A survey of more than 3,000 psychologists found that their “practice changed from primarily in-office to mostly telepsychology practice over the course of 2 weeks in March of 2020” (Sammons, VandenBos, & Martin, 2020, p. 51), a trend that continued over the next 6 months (Sammons, VandenBos, et al., 2020). In January 2021, “one-hour psychotherapy sessions became the most common telehealth service” (Grant, 2021, para. 1) in the United States.

If we leave graduate school without adequate information and training in the practical nuts and bolts of creating a practice, and find ourselves amid a rapidly shifting field, it is all too easy to let anxiety, impatience, and a stampede of other factors lead us down a path of unfortunate choices. For instance, we may sign a lease that keeps us stuck for years in the wrong kind of office; buy insurance that leaves yawning gaps in coverage; publicize our practice in a way that brings us no referrals; or buy scheduling, charting, and billing software that transforms our days into one long nightmare.

Lack of essential information, practical ideas, and key resources can also cloud even the most promising horizons, sending our practice—and life—into a tailspin. The hopes, excitement, and dedication that drew us into a field where we could help others can fade into worrying about being able to pay the bills, drowning in paperwork, arguing with insurance companies that seem skilled at losing our billings (and asking us to resubmit them), and wondering where our next referral is coming from. Each day becomes a mix of fear and drudgery. But it does not have to be that way. Our goals for this book include providing information, ideas, and resources to support you in making less anxious, more informed choices as you create and grow your practice.

A good practice needs to fit both the clinician and the community. Unfortunately, there seems to be no shortage of practitioners who—because of insecurity, impatience, lack of support, or other factors—accept too quickly what a community appears ready to offer them instead of considering the opportunities they might create in that community. Some work hard building a practice without asking whether the practice is right for them as well as for the community. Too many seem to end up burdened rather than nourished, excited, and fulfilled by work that they would never choose to do if they could start over again. Even if they are making a lot of money, the practice drains more from their lives than it gives back, and they pour their time

and energy into work they don't believe is ultimately very important. They set out to build a practice but instead make a prison where they waste their lives. Our goal in this book is to help you avoid all that. We want to help you create the fulfilling and meaningful practice that you want, that you have dreamed about, and that you deserve.

As you set about creating a practice that is right for you, consider writing down your hopes, dreams, values, and goals. Categories may include one or more of the following:

- helping people
- making money
- promoting colleague networking and companionship
- providing services to particular populations
- developing a niche practice
- providing supervision and training
- having an attractive, secure office

Check each major decision you make against those criteria. Will the decision bring you closer to your goals? Does it fit your values and help you fulfill them? Does it keep your hopes and dreams alive? Does it make you feel excited, energized, and eager to go to work each morning?

That list can be helpful not only as you make each key decision but also as part of an annual self-evaluation: How have your hopes, dreams, values, and goals changed? In regard to your practice: Where is there room for improvement, and what do you want or need to change?

Creating a sound practice that is right for you is a wonderfully exciting challenge. Let's get started.