

# THE RESILIENT MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

*Nourishing Your Business, Your Clients, and Yourself*



EDITED BY  
Jennifer M. Ossege and  
Richard W. Sears



# THE RESILIENT MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

*The Resilient Mental Health Practice: Nourishing Your Business, Your Clients, and Yourself* is a fundamental resource for mental health professionals, designed to serve as a comprehensive yet parsimonious handbook to inspire and inform novice, developing, and experienced mental health professionals. Replete with case studies, *The Resilient Mental Health Practice* gives readers a big-picture view of private practice, including detailed explorations of various topics related to therapist self-care and preventing burnout. Chapters provide a range of ways in which clinicians can build a resilient and sustainable practice while also taking care of their clients and themselves.

**Jennifer M. Ossege, PsyD**, is the cofounder and managing partner of Viewpoint Psychological Services, PLLC, a group private practice in the Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati area. She is a faculty member and associate director of clinical training in the PsyD program in clinical psychology at Union Institute & University, and she is an adjunct faculty member in the psychology department at Xavier University in Cincinnati. Her website is [www.viewpointpsych.com](http://www.viewpointpsych.com).

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*To our families, for all their patience and support of our writing and  
our private practice work.*

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## About the Editors

**Jennifer M. Ossege, PsyD** is the cofounder and managing partner of Viewpoint Psychological Services, PLLC, a mental health private practice in the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati area. In this capacity, Dr. Ossege oversees both administrative operations and clinical practice, while also maintaining an active client caseload. In addition, she serves as a core faculty member of the PsyD Program in Clinical Psychology at Union Institute & University, where she is the Associate Director of Clinical Training, coordinating clinical training, practicum, and internship opportunities for Doctoral Psychology students within the program. Dr. Ossege is also an Adjunct Faculty Member in the Psychology Department at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, and teaches in the Masters of Science in Organizational Leadership program at Union Institute & University. Dr. Ossege earned her Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology as well as her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Xavier University. During her doctoral studies, her concentration was in child and adolescent studies and she also obtained a certificate in Organizational Concepts and Management. She is coauthor of the book *Hopes & Perspectives of Muslim American Women: A Paradox of Honor*.

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**Ted Ossege, MSW, LCSW, ACSW** received his undergraduate degree in Social Work from the University of Dayton in 1987 and his Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Louisville in 1988. He started working in private practice in 1991, and after working in several psychiatric private practices, he cofounded and has helped manage Viewpoint Psychological Services with his wife, Jennifer Ossege, PsyD., since 2006. He has helped oversee the growth of the practice from 2 to 14 clinicians in three locations, to become the largest private practice in the Northern Kentucky area. Ted Ossege has been a past item writer for the Association of Social Work Boards in Culpepper, VA, provides clinical supervision for

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**Steve Sparks, PhD, ABPP**, psychologist, completed his undergraduate education at the University of Notre Dame, graduating Magna Cum Laude. He received scholarships thereafter and earned both graduate degrees, Master's and Doctorate, at the University of Cincinnati. He is board certified in forensic psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology. Dr. Sparks was formerly the Director of Forensic Services at Forensic and Mental Health Services, Inc., the state-sponsored forensic center in Butler County, OH. He is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati (currently inactive) and the College of Mount St. Joseph where he teaches Forensic Psychology. His research has been published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* and the *Ohio Psychologist*. He has provided psychological assessment services to numerous individuals, private attorneys, forensic psychology centers in Kentucky and Ohio, Ohio Attorney General's office, the United States Public Health Service, Bureau of Workers' Compensation, Social Security Administration, Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, among others. Dr. Sparks is a Past President of the Board of the Cincinnati Academy of Professional Psychology.

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# Introduction

*Jennifer M. Ossege and Richard W. Sears*

If you are reading this book, you are likely interested in the potential independence, flexibility, and income afforded to those in private practice. You have witnessed time and time again the life-changing benefits mental health services can offer, and you know you have valuable skills to offer your community. You may be tired of being forced to meet productivity demands for an agency, or you may be frustrated by the arbitrary rules imposed on you by an employer, or you may have a novel idea to deliver much-needed services more creatively. Perhaps you are already in private practice, and want to get some fresh insights and perspectives on ways to improve or reinvigorate your practice. Whether you want to set up a full-time private practice, or simply see a few clients a week in addition to the other things you do, private practice offers wonderful benefits for us as clinicians as well as for the clients we serve.

Of course, embarking on any new venture can evoke fear of uncertainty, and freedom must always be balanced with responsibility. Those who are intolerant of risk, even when those risks are carefully considered and planned for, will always ridicule those with the courage to move forward.

We and our colleagues decided to write this book because we have all been in successful private practices for quite a while, and we enjoy sharing what we have learned, just as our mentors shared their knowledge and experience with us. Our editor at Routledge Mental Health was excited and very encouraging about this project. However, when we first submitted our book proposal, we were a bit surprised by the initial resistance we encountered from the reviewers. They expressed concern that private practice is declining, even though they admitted that they themselves were not actually in private practice.

Over and over, we've heard many people pronounce that private practice is on its deathbed. In fact, we first heard this decades ago in graduate school. Wild stories are told of how managed care companies or changing regulatory requirements have made it nearly impossible to be successful.

Yet, when we talk to our colleagues in private practice, and when we travel around the country giving workshops, people tell us their practices are thriving. We often hear that they have waiting lists, or even have to turn referrals away. This has been our experience as well. When you are good at what you do, people will demand your services. When asked why

they thought so many people instilled fear into those considering opening their own practices, one workshop participant wryly remarked, “They scare you away from private practice so that you’ll work long hours for low wages in an agency.”

Working in a nonprofit agency serving others is a noble cause to be sure. There is also something to be said for job security, a steady paycheck, and good benefits. There are certainly challenges in private practice that must be taken seriously. It does take a certain entrepreneurial spirit, and a tolerance for risk and uncertainty. There are definitely legitimate concerns for those in private practice about such things as the ever-changing political landscape, the requirements of privacy laws, the hassle of dealing with third-party payors, and keeping up with the rapid advances of technology.

However, just as we teach our own clients dealing with fear and anxiety, if you want to move toward your goals, taking action and moving directly into the fear is the best way to deal with it. Compulsively avoiding fear only makes it worse, and leads to a restricted life. Of course, that action must be thoughtful and strategic, based on an understanding of the business principles involved in private practice, and weighed against your own skills, abilities, and desires. You don’t need an MBA to be successful in private practice, but you do need to have or develop some level of business savvy. You may be a great clinician, but if your community doesn’t know it, and you cannot manage your time and resources, you will have difficulty surviving. When we were in graduate school, alumni would sometimes visit our classes, and frequently say, “I wish I had more business training.” The majority of mental health therapists spend at least a portion of their careers working in a private practice setting, yet most of us do not get specific training or preparation for establishing and maintaining a viable practice, much less ways to extend our career spans by reducing compassion fatigue or burnout. We intend this book to serve as a fundamental resource for mental health professionals, both new and developing, as well as for graduate students who are considering their career options. We also hope to inspire experienced private practitioners whose excitement and enthusiasm for clinical work have waned, and to inspire those who are pessimistic about the future of private practice.

In Part I of this book, we will explore the business side of private practice. In Chapter 1 entitled “Independent Practice and Consultation Services as a Solo Practitioner,” Richard Sears explores a wide variety of considerations for setting up and maintaining a solo practice, including developing a business plan, finding a niche, and marketing. The chapter also presents ways to diversify income streams, such as professional speaking and consultation and organizational development work.

Since some clinicians may opt to develop or participate in group practices, it is important to consider the unique challenges and opportunities of this model of practice. Chapter 2 entitled “Establishing, Maintaining, and Growing a Group Private Practice” will highlight some of the considerations for establishing a successful group practice. Ted Ossege and Jennifer Ossege will share their expertise and the many lessons learned along the way in developing their multilocation group practice.

Chapter 3 entitled “Creating and Sustaining an Assessment/Forensic-based Practice” will address reasons why practitioners may seek to enter an assessment-based practice, and provides an overview of the types of assessments often completed in such a practice. Steve Sparks will discuss appropriate training, study, and supervision, as well as practical issues such as start-up considerations and costs. Potential pitfalls for an assessment-based practice will also be addressed, including issues of empathy, dual relationships, overconfidence, failure to consider alternative hypotheses, and sacrificing thoroughness for efficiency.

After a practice is established, whether solo, group, or assessment-based, success also depends on the proper management of nonclinical staff, and on the administrative tasks that are necessary to run a practice. This can be difficult terrain to navigate, and can be a challenge for the many clinicians who lack specific training in this arena. Chapter 4 entitled “Therapist as Manager: Supervising Nonclinical Staff and Tasks” will tackle strategies for recruiting, hiring, and managing nonclinical staff, including billing managers and support staff. Considerations of various models will be presented so that practice managers can thoroughly weigh the options that best meet their needs. Jennifer Ossege and Ted Ossege will also explore other professional relationships that are important to develop as one begins or grows a practice.

In today’s private practice, the Internet and social media offer a window into the therapy room with a unique view. While the expanding technological landscape offers growing opportunities to reach and connect with clients, it also presents potential ethical and legal quagmires for private practice clinicians. Chapter 5 entitled “Navigating the Digital Landscape: A Practitioner’s Guide to Moving Through the Rough Terrain of the Internet and Social Media” will present an overview of ethical and liability concerns and considerations for clinicians who are connecting with the public through the Internet and social media. Jami Wilder and Heather Wilder will review concerns for practitioners’ websites, email communication, and social media sites, and will present strategies for effectively navigating issues clinicians are likely to encounter in a private practice setting.

Within the private practice world, clinicians must be adaptable, and be aware of the changing landscapes of service delivery. Forces such as

managed care companies and the current political climate make it crucial for clinicians to maintain an awareness of the external environment in which they function, and to stay current on changes as they occur. Chapter 6 entitled “Integration of Clinical Healthcare Strategies: Preparing Clinicians for Shifting Roles” will discuss some of the newest challenges that are faced in the ever-changing world of private practice. As the need for health psychology services grows, there are opportunities for practitioners to expand their knowledge and skill-base into new methods of service delivery. Kristy M. Fritz-Bosse and Jennifer Ossege will discuss the importance of clinicians proactively positioning themselves as reputable, competent colleagues with an integrated knowledge base. This chapter provides guidance and practical tips for the clinician in private practice to enhance collaboration and improve patient care in the context of the changing landscape of healthcare service delivery.

Despite all the training we have received and all the tools we offer our clients, many of us don’t do as well as we could in managing our own lives and finding a good balance for ourselves. In Part II, we will discuss clinician self-care.

Chapter 7 entitled “Isolation, Disconnection, and Burnout: The Importance of Staying Connected in Private Practice” explores the independent nature of private practice. For practitioners who choose this professional path, it can be difficult to avoid the experience of isolation, disconnection, and burnout. While many of us enjoy the benefits of being independent, there are inevitable moments when we face the challenges that come with such independence. Joy McGhee will address the benefits of participating in a peer consultation group and staying connected in order to build a sustainable career in private practice.

Finding an appropriate work-life balance is also an important part of self-care, and there are certain considerations specific to those in private practice. Emily Sander will explore this issue in depth in Chapter 8 entitled “Work-life Demands: Practical Tips for Finding the Balance,” where readers will learn how to engage in structured goal setting, with the purpose of developing an action plan for the successful pursuit of work-life balance. The chapter will also address psychosocial and logistical issues that contribute to the perception of balance in the private practice world, such as boundary setting with clients and schedule planning.

Clinicians working in private practice can find themselves taking on multiple roles, quickly increasing the likelihood that they will become overwhelmed or burnt out. Chapter 9 entitled “Twenty-five Strategies for Engaging in Self-care” will provide reader-friendly descriptions of effective yet often neglected self-care skills to reduce burnout in clinicians entering the private practice domain. Laura Hensley and Andrea Schultz-Duncan