

## The Road Less Traveled: Scientist-Practitioner-Entrepreneur

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When I was a graduate student in the 1970s we were taught that the ideal psychologist followed the Boulder Model and functioned as a “scientist-practitioner.” No one ever mentioned the possibility of becoming a scientist-practitioner-entrepreneur. And yet, those three words together describe my career better than the first two alone. I do many of the same things as my colleagues in academic posts. I supervise students, provide consultation to other professionals and programs, teach workshops, write books and articles, serve on professional committees, occasionally conduct research or provide cognitive therapy services to clients, and produce audio and video materials that teach cognitive therapy skills and protocols.

What makes me an entrepreneur? Entrepreneurs are people who organize their own business, taking considerable initiative and risk. I do many of the same activities of my academic colleagues without an institution surrounding me and without a fixed salary or paid benefits. My financial support and that of my Center for Cognitive Therapy fluctuate on a monthly basis depending upon the mix of my work activities and whether any of them earn money. Entrepreneurs need to manage the pressures of working hard without institutional support or a predictable income stream.

Despite the financial uncertainties and my occasional yearning for the support services and pension plans available in university settings, I cherish the freedom and opportunity to do many different activities in shifting proportions without institutional requirements or departmental reviews. I can accept or reject work activities at will. As I joke with my friends, the joy of working for yourself is that you can work any 12 hours of the day you wish. The path of an entrepreneur is not for everyone. Many entrepreneurs would be better off in salaried employment. Becoming a

successful entrepreneur requires vision, passion, a high tolerance for risk, and a commitment to quality. It also helps if you are willing to work hard by yourself when necessary and to partner with others when possible. And if you are devoted to cognitive behavioral therapy it is important to maintain a commitment to science. Here I share personal stories and lessons I’ve learned that illustrate each of these points.

### Vision and Passion

Entrepreneurs need to be self-motivated. There is no employer telling you what to do that day or assigning you projects. Imagine 3 weeks alone in an office with no outside contact. What comes to mind? Think of your own response before you read on. If you think, “I’ve got to get out of here!” you may not have the personality to be an entrepreneur. If you think, “Now is my chance to develop those ideas and projects I’ve been wanting to do!” you have the personality of an entrepreneur. You even have the right attitude if you think, “I don’t know what I want to do, but in 3 weeks I know I’ll come up with something!”

Self-motivation is fueled by vision, an idea or goal that guides your efforts. Vision is usually linked to your values and what really matters to you. The five main visions that have shaped my professional career all came about in different ways. My first vision at age 22 was to be a community psychologist. This vision grew after I attended the first national conference on community psychology and realized that psychology could really make the world a better place by empowering people to improve their own communities. The clear-eyed enthusiasm of older psychologists at this conference resonated with my desires to make a difference in the world and my belief that empowering people to help themselves was better than top-down solutions.

The second vision that drove my career was that I wanted to become the best cognitive

therapist I could be. This vision began one night in graduate school when I sat down at dinner in my apartment to read a prepublication copy of *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). Aaron T. Beck sent this book to our research team so we could consider using his new therapy in our depression research. I stayed up until 2 A.M. reading the entire book in one sitting. I was so excited. It transformed every idea I had been taught about psychotherapy and made me eager to become a cognitive therapist. Pursuit of my goal to be an excellent cognitive therapist has driven much of my career and informed my later visions.

After several years working as a community psychologist and then a year of solo private practice as a cognitive therapist, Beck proposed a third vision to me. After years of informal mentoring, Beck asked me in 1983 to open a Center for Cognitive Therapy in California. Despite my deep admiration for him, I hesitated before agreeing to his idea. I knew myself well enough to know I would only be happy if this career decision resonated with my own dreams. It seemed like a lot of responsibility. After much discussion and soul-searching I cofounded the Center for Cognitive Therapy with Kathleen Mooney, who agreed to share the work involved in this ambitious project.

In the process of training staff and postdoctoral trainees who joined our center, I rediscovered my love of teaching. Beck invited me to teach professional workshops with him and, after several years, I was teaching solo workshops as a primary work activity. My teaching experiences led to a fourth vision in my career. This vision was that cognitive therapy training could be much more interactive and innovative than it often was. I challenged myself to improve my teaching. To this day I work incredibly hard to develop innovative workshops, spending as much as 2 months full-time constructing a new 2-day workshop.

My goal is to ignite the same passion in workshop participants that I feel for cognitive therapy.

For similar reasons, Kathleen Mooney and I began to produce audio/video materials that attempt to capture the complexity and nuances of cognitive therapy as we understand it. I am passionate about demonstrating cognitive therapy as a fully developed system of psychotherapy. To critics who see CBT as all "technique," we offer taped examples of therapy sessions that illustrate the integration of science with all the relational aspects of psychotherapy.

An outgrowth of my teaching and our audio-video programs is my fifth vision: to create educational materials for the public that are both inspirational and scientifically grounded. When Dennis Greenberger and I wrote *Mind Over Mood* (Guilford Press, 1995) we needed to convince the publisher that there was a market for a self-help book that involved serious work on the part of the reader. Most self-help books at that time were lighter fare. But I strongly believed there were readers who were motivated to work hard to conquer their depression, anxiety, and other mood problems. To Guilford's credit, they gambled on our vision. As one of Guilford's best-selling books of all time, *Mind Over Mood* has now been translated into 14 languages. The success of *Mind Over Mood* encourages me to continue following my vision of creating materials for the public that teach the science of CBT in a variety of appealing formats.

These personal vignettes illustrate how vision can result from participation in conferences, reading, relationships with mentors, partnerships with colleagues, observations of which work activities excite you, and from noticing where you succeed better than others. Vision doesn't necessarily emerge on demand. We often need to reflect and tune into our heartfelt interests to discover our vision. Notice what ideas and activities get your heart pumping faster. Visionary goals can and will change over your career. Those that ignite your passion have the greatest staying power.

### Risk Tolerance

At the start of each of these five career paths I worked hard to develop the skills necessary to realize my vision. Many times the choices I made to prepare myself for a new work activity were not financially rewarding but I made them anyway. This is a mark of an entrepreneur: a willingness to take risks, including commitments of time and money, to follow a vision that is important to you and yet has no guarantee of success. Of course, successful entrepreneurs usually pilot ideas and test the waters with small investments of time and money before running headlong down a new path.

The first risk most scientist-practitioner-entrepreneurs take is to reject the path of an academic career. Most entrepreneurs in the making will be successful graduate students, conducting research and publishing papers. I was successful as a graduate student and had the good fortune of positive relationships with several faculty advisors who were generous in their mentoring of me and willing to write good recommendations. When you make the decision to leave academia it is only natural faculty advisors will be somewhat disappointed. If you have a close bond with faculty advisors as I did, it can take courage to embark upon a path of your own choosing that may not fit the vision of those who have helped you thus far in your career.

I have a few suggestions for those of you who will tell faculty advisors about your decision to leave academia behind. First, don't make this announcement in your first year of graduate school. Most faculty members will invest the most time with students who they believe will make the best research and publishing contributions to our field. You don't want to discourage faculty from investing time in your growth. And who knows? You may begin graduate school not intending to become an academic and change your mind with experience. So it is best that all graduate students present themselves as preparing for an academic career in the early years. You are working hard in a Ph.D. program and you want to learn as much as you can about our profession, especially research and publishing because these are essential psychology skills to master no matter what you do later.

Second, when you begin to seriously consider not being an academic you may start to think of yourself as a second-class citizen because you are still operating in an environment that values academic achievement over everything else. Look around the broader world to test out this thought. Would the people you grew up with be more impressed to learn you published an article in the journal *Behavior Therapy* or to learn that you know how to help a suicidal neighbor feel glad to be alive in just 12 weeks of therapy? Would you rather talk to classmates at your 15th high school reunion about attributional styles or about a pamphlet you wrote on parenting? Psychologists can contribute to the world in so many important ways. Unless reading the journal *Behavior Therapy* is your greatest thrill in life, you can probably feel great work satisfaction in many different roles outside of academia.

Third, when you tell your faculty advisors about your decision, accentuate the positive. Tell them why this new opportunity excites you. Explain how you see your new career making a positive difference in the world. Express appreciation for what they have

taught you and comment on how that knowledge will be invaluable on your new career path. Follow through on your commitments to faculty including papers in progress toward publication and teaching obligations. Even if you are very eager to leave graduate school behind, faculty advisors can become lifelong friends as well as mentors. Treat them with the same gratitude and appreciation you show good friends when you move away from a neighborhood.

At graduation, money is usually a big issue. You need money to support yourself and often to pay student loans. Entrepreneurial ventures also require money. For this reason, it is not antithetical for entrepreneurs to look for a job. My first job began on a part-time basis 2 years before graduation, providing income as well as a setting to collect dissertation data. Post-Ph.D., I was hired full-time. This only salaried job of my career was with a nonprofit community agency and gave me the opportunity to work as a community psychologist and acquire invaluable skills for later entrepreneurial ventures.

My position was a mix of psychological and administrative duties. My job activities included supervision of master's-level counselors, consultation with community workers trying to divert young boys from gang membership, development of budgets, membership on county advisory boards, testimony at political hearings, and the writing of grant applications. Every job duty is an opportunity to learn something new. Working in this job helped me develop therapy, supervision, consultation, and teaching skills. When writing grants and administrative reports I honed my research, analytical, and communication skills. In political settings I observed how negotiations, alliances, and practical decisions were made and unmade. When I drafted budgets I understood more thoroughly that a business perspective is important even for nonprofit services.

The details of this job may seem far afield from the entrepreneurial paths that followed. Yet in my mind they are not. This job helped me gain skills, contacts, and confidence to start my own professional business ventures. And, it helped me support myself and save the few thousand dollars necessary to begin my own business. It is important for students and recent graduates to recognize that your first job need not define the rest of your career. At the same time, whatever job you take can be approached as an educational opportunity to learn skills that were never taught in graduate school. Any job can teach you to budget time and money, speak in public, negotiate contracts and work effectively with people who may not share your values or respect your knowledge base.

As my passion for my first job waned, I took a big risk. With the federal grant moneys

supporting our agency shrinking, I balanced our budget by eliminating my own position. I decided to support myself in private practice as a cognitive behavioral therapist. This decision was made after several months of working part-time in the evening as a therapist. To an outsider, my decision to end my job probably seemed foolish. I had only four clients, no office, and a car trunk filled with business cards and stationary. But I envisioned myself with a successful practice and I knew I would work harder to build it if I had no other source of income. Six months later I was seeing an average of 24 clients per week.

The successful growth in my private practice at age 29 came about because I used the skills I had learned in my community work to build my business. I boldly set up meetings with physicians to tell them how CBT would benefit their patients. I gave free talks at community centers. One of the most successful strategies I followed to build my practice is one I recommend to therapists starting a private practice today. This strategy is to identify the types of clients and diagnoses other therapists in your community don't enjoy treating and make those your specialties. I called successful therapists in the area and told them I specialized in seeing the clients they did not want: "Send me your most depressed clients, your most suicidal, and your therapy failures." I passionately believed in cognitive therapy and I had experience treating depression, so these types of clients were, in fact, ideal for me. My success with them led to many more referrals.

Over my career I have taken other risks, although probably none so daring as quitting my only salaried job. In the middle of the managed care revolution, I decided after a budget analysis that our clinic could not afford to participate in managed care anymore. Our overhead costs and the salaries earned by our experienced staff were often greater than the managed care fees collected. We gradually dropped out of all managed care contracts. This risk was a calculated gamble because our Center for Cognitive Therapy operated in a large population center, had a good reputation for high-quality therapy offered by experienced therapists, and the demographics of our area suggested people could afford to pay for therapy out of pocket. We kept our therapy fees below community norms and required full payment at time of service. Taking this risk helped our clinic survive financially.

Another large risk came in the year 2000 when I decided to sell the clinic portion of our center. This risk was born of my own burnout as an administrator. After 17 years of owning and operating a clinic, I no longer enjoyed coming to work each day. I longed to have more time to write and teach. I had a new vision for my career. Kathleen Mooney and I decided to more narrowly focus our Center for

Cognitive Therapy on the development of innovative teaching programs, writing projects, and production of audio/video materials. Once we sold our clinic, we decided to limit client therapy services at the center to our own small private practices.

Selling the clinic removed from our shoulders the responsibilities and time spent on administration and employees but it also removed a source of income. Once again, I knew that, for me, following a vision is more important than hanging onto an income stream. It is a true test of such a philosophy to close the doors on a thriving 17-year enterprise and open the doors on a new office that is primarily a nonfunded think tank. Mid-career, I accepted minimal weekly income with occasional income-producing workshops and projects. This risk has been well worthwhile to me. My passion for work has grown with each year in our new streamlined center. Now I have the time to write books (two in progress) and produce teaching materials that approach my vision of what cognitive therapy can be. And we've been able to earn income on enough work projects to support our many unpaid activities.

### Quality

My own entrepreneurial philosophy regarding quality is that it is better to do fewer things so you can offer high quality in all that you do. An emphasis on quality means most activities pay very poorly on an hourly basis in the beginning. For example, it can take dozens of hours to create high-quality forms for a clinical practice. These forms contribute to your professionalism and image but yield no higher fees for your services. It can take hundreds of hours to construct an effective workshop, which means you may earn less than minimum wage for your time the first few times you teach it. It takes time to think through the quality implications of business decisions. There is usually a financial cost to hiring the best staff and following the highest ethical principles. And yet over time these commitments to quality pay off. For entrepreneurs your prime asset is your reputation. When you develop a reputation for delivering the best quality services and products, people are more willing to hire or purchase from you than from someone else.

For example, the first 3 years I taught workshops for free to gain experience. I had the advantage that many of these workshops were assisting Aaron T. Beck so the unpaid expenditure of time was really a tuition investment. I learned about cognitive therapy from its founder and developed a close friendship with the best role model I could envision. During the same time period I also gave free workshops to local mental health groups and asked colleagues to attend these workshops and give me brutally honest feedback about

what was good and what was poor in my presentation.

This approach paid off for me over time. When I finally was paid to teach workshops, I was able to do a reasonably good job. My initial workshop sponsors were willing to hire me again. Therapists in the audience recommended my workshops to other sponsors. I read workshop evaluations looking for consistent feedback themes and took these to heart, changing my content and delivery style innumerable times over the past two decades. Over time, I developed a reputation for teaching reliably informative, engaging, and in-depth clinical workshops.

Such a reputation is crucial for someone who wants to innovate. In recent years I began to introduce new formats and CBT innovations into my workshops. For example, I developed one workshop in which participants learned CBT principles in structured exercises by actually treating from start to finish over 2 days a co-participant's recurrent problem. With a strong track record for quality, audiences were willing to come to these more experimental workshop formats because they trusted me to provide a quality learning experience.

### Commitment to Science

For a cognitive behaviorist, commitment to quality is commitment to science. How does someone outside a university setting maintain scientific involvement? First, by reading. Every year I read a number of books regarding CBT and related fields. I subscribe to a half dozen journals and professional newsletters and skim them when they arrive, choosing two or three articles per month to read more thoroughly. I subscribe to at least one journal outside North America to keep abreast of developments elsewhere. When I write journal articles, book chapters, or books I have an impetus to study specific CBT areas in greater depth. Thus, I encourage entrepreneurs to write as well as read. And if you don't want to write, teach. Teaching also motivates you to read broadly and critically.

Second, attendance at CBT conferences is a great way to expand your knowledge in a short time period. I have attended AABT conferences over a 25-year time span. At AABT I attend research symposia to learn the latest findings (often still unpublished) and theoretical developments related to topics of interest to me. I attend workshops by others to learn new ideas and to study teaching methods used. AABT is also a chance to build friendships with other cognitive behavioral therapists, researchers, and entrepreneurs. Networking is invaluable, even more so when you work outside a larger institution.

I also attend international conferences as often as I can. For me, these have included AABT equivalents in Britain (BABCP) and



Europe (EABCT), World Congresses of Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies, and International Congresses of Cognitive Therapy. International conferences give a broader perspective on CBT ideas. Some Americans don't even realize that many great CBT contributions have come from outside the USA and Canada. Highly effective clinical protocols, especially for anxiety disorders and schizophrenia, have been developed in Britain. International conferences introduce me to ideas years before they reach American journals. Also, international conferences provide rich social opportunities. You can swap ideas and develop friendships with others abroad who care about the same things you do. And travel to exotic locales as a business expense is, as they say in the ads, priceless.

Membership in CBT organizations can be as helpful as conference attendance. Organizations such as AABT offer newsletters, journals, and opportunities to get to know other CBT leaders through committee membership and member discussions on the Internet. Many students belong to AABT as students and then quit after graduation. This is a mistake. National networking opportunities become more important postgraduation than before.

In addition to AABT, I belong to the Academy of Cognitive Therapy (ACT). ACT membership is only available to therapists who qualify for certification in cognitive therapy. Certification can be a big plus for attracting clients if you have a clinical practice. Those who do not yet qualify for certification can still visit [www.academyofct.org](http://www.academyofct.org) to find a referral list of certified cognitive therapists around the world. ACT members can participate in an invaluable on-line Internet discussion group that links research with theoretical and clinical applications. Because I frequently work and learn in Britain, I am also a member of the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (BABCP).

In addition to CBT organizations, psychologists can stay current with other areas of psychological science through membership in the American Psychological Association (APA). Those with a clinical practice will also want to join their state psychological association. APA and state psychological associations offer updates on laws, ethical guidelines, discounts on malpractice insurance, and informative journals/newsletters that keep you current with trends in psychology. Membership is also an opportunity to bring CBT science to non-CBT therapists. For example, I chaired a day-long CBT "expertise track" at the 2004 California Psychological Association's annual convention. I offered to do this when I noted how little coverage CBT received at the state convention. It is as important for cognitive behavior therapists to bring CBT science to other psychological meetings as it is to attend

CBT conferences and enjoy the collegiality of sharing findings with each other.

A third method for staying up-to-date on science postgraduation is attendance at workshops, either live or via audio/videotape/Web-based programs. When reading workshop brochures or tape catalogs it is usually easy to tell if the presentation is based on empirical findings or on a personal theory of the presenter. Most empirically based presentations refer to empirical research in the brochure. In addition to workshops, it is possible to arrange individual or small group consultation with CBT leaders around the world in person, on the telephone, or via videoconferencing.

Finally, the Internet has made it possible to follow scientific developments more easily than ever before. If you read about an idea or a researcher that interests you, you generally can enter that information into a search engine such as Google and find pertinent articles and research summaries within seconds. Of course, the Internet does not always distinguish between science and nonsense so it is important to pay attention and be critically minded in evaluating the sources of data cited.

Finally, stay in touch with all your friends from your graduate school years who are academics and make new friends at conferences who are researchers. Dinner conversations at conferences are often an enjoyable source of scientific updates. I am fortunate to have many researcher friends. When I come across a new idea or research finding I can e-mail them to find out how this idea fits within their area of specialty. If you don't have friends doing key research, the Internet discussion groups provided by CBT organizations are the best informal source of scientific information.

### Hard Work and Partnerships

As is clear from this brief article, successful entrepreneurship requires self-motivation and a willingness to work hard. Sustained effort can be a pleasure when you are working toward goals that ignite your passion. Sometimes my friends offer sympathy if they hear I was at the office on a Friday evening. Some have a hard time understanding that a late night at the office often means I was so caught up in my work that time flew. People who do not love their jobs often cannot comprehend that work can be joyful. Of course there are aspects of any work that are tedious. Entrepreneurial pursuits involve tedium as well. But even tedium feels more worthwhile when you perceive it as advancing progress toward meaningful goals.

A common problem for entrepreneurs is the temptation to do everything yourself. When support services are paid from your own money pool, it is easy to decide to be your own typist, cleaning service, and delivery driver. In addition, many entrepreneurs are highly autonomous. It can be hard to share

projects with others, especially if partnering involves compromises in your vision. However, projects are enhanced by a diversity of input. My own career would have been much duller in both process and output without the ongoing contributions of my partner, Kathleen Mooney. In addition, partnerships with other colleagues have led to some of my most successful ventures. In choosing partners, it helps to choose people who have talents and resources to bring to the table that complement your own.

### Summary

In my career I combine the roles of scientist, practitioner, educator and entrepreneur. Over the past 20 years my work emphases have shifted. My clinical practice began as a full-time solo practitioner, and then grew to a clinician-owned clinic, and now I am an occasionally practicing clinician. I now primarily work as a workshop instructor, writer, and producer of educational audio and videotapes. The diversity of work roles available to me outside academia has allowed me to reinvent my career multiple times. Because I have a tolerance for risk and confidence in my own ability to develop meaningful work projects, the role of an entrepreneur has been energizing for me rather than unnerving.

I am fortunate. Twenty-three years after graduation I still feel the same enthusiasm and interest in cognitive behavior therapy that I felt as a graduate student reading about Beck's cognitive therapy for the first time. Students and recent graduates who have passionate ideas and a commitment to quality as well as science can be highly successful in academia. If you are self-motivated, have a high tolerance for risk, and are comfortable working outside an institution, you could also consider becoming a scientist-practitioner-entrepreneur. Although this is the road less traveled, if you look around AABT you will find many others on similar paths.

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*award from the California Psychological Association. She is co-author of 5 books including the best-selling self-help manual Mind Over Mood, voted the most influential cognitive behavioral book by the BABCP. Further information regarding her workshops, books, and audio/video training materials are available at [www.padesky.com](http://www.padesky.com) (for mental health professionals) and [www.mindovermood.com](http://www.mindovermood.com) (the public).*

- **When you started graduate school, what did you think you were going to do after you got your degree?** I honestly did not have any idea. I only knew I was interested in psychology.
- **What did you want to do when you finished graduate school?** I wanted to be a community psychologist and teach people psychology principles that would help them improve their own lives and communities.

- **How long did it take before you got over the “imposter syndrome” (the feeling that you’re not as much of an expert on topics as other people think you are, or that they will “figure out” that you actually don’t know what you’re talking about)?** I felt this on and off during the first 7 or so years whenever I did some new activity or taught a new topic.
- **What helped you get over the imposter syndrome, if you have at all?** Even in the first years post-Ph.D., I tried to tell people when I had minimal expertise. I learned that such honesty actually boosted my professional credibility. In the last decade I tell people I’m not an expert, sometimes even when I probably am. This is because I have grown to respect that “expert views” change over time. And even if I am an expert, what is important is that people test out ideas through their own experience. So, instead of

relying on (or cringing from) expertise, I try to express ideas in an engaging fashion and invite people to compare these ideas with their own personal experiences. This is more fun for everyone and challenges me to rethink my “expert” opinions if they don’t match the experiences of others.

- **How has AABT helped you in your professional development/career?** I’ve made so many friends through AABT. These are people I can now e-mail or call when I need quick information, references, or advice. They also sometimes buy me a glass of wine at the convention. My first large workshop co-taught with Dr. Beck was at AABT. I’ve presented many clinical ideas, both new and polished, at AABT workshops and institutes over the years and received useful feedback from attendees. I’ve learned about research at the convention that improved my clinical work and teaching. ✍