

SWEET SPOT:

FIND YOUR PRIVATE PRACTICE GROOVE

WITH PRINCIPLES FROM ACT

*When the therapist is aware that he or she is in service to the soul—and this attitude does not need to be spoken—the therapy room becomes sacred space, the hour becomes sacred time, and the process becomes a ritual in the best sense of that word.*

—Lionel Corbett, *The Sacred Cauldron: Psychotherapy as a Spiritual Practice*

## Introduction

Lack of business knowledge is the single biggest factor preventing individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit from launching a private practice business and succeeding. You've completed your formal skills training and maybe you've further honed your skills by working as an employee. Where along the line did you receive adequate knowledge or training to be good at the many different aspects of running a business? Marketing, fee setting, bookkeeping, project management, revenue forecasting, and so much more can be daunting.

How do you know how to succeed at business? Failure hurts both financially and emotionally. Constant struggling week after week, month after month, and year after year to succeed hurts too. Struggling to succeed at private practice often leads to a lopsided work-life balance. Not knowing how to build your private practice can lead to working with a poor-fitting client base and early burnout, and then what?

Start over.

The attraction of believing you can simply hang out your shingle is a romantic notion that leads to unrealistic expectations of instant success. It simply does not happen. You wouldn't go on vacation without some kind of plan, so why would anyone open a private practice business without a plan? The purpose of this book is to take your current knowledge to a whole new level of understanding. Let me tell you a story about how I know you can "level up" your knowledge base.

While working in corporate America at a Fortune 500 company as a recruiting manager and trainer in human resources, I had the opportunity to hire thousands of people over a seventeen-year period. One group of candidates I interviewed stands out as being hesitant and having doubt about their employability: women exiting the role of full-time homemaker. I frequently heard, "I don't have any work skills." In reality they had a ton of valuable transferable skills. Often they were good at budgeting, project management, creative problem-solving, and soft people skills for team building in the community.

Do you know your transferable skills? What if I told you the training you received as a therapist and healing arts professional gives you the same skills as someone with a graduate degree in

business? Much of the business curricula in colleges is derived from the field of psychology. This is great news for you. It means you have the knowledge and the skills and only need a translator.

My motivation for *Sweet Spot* is to offer you a way to translate what you already know into understandable business acumen and marketing concepts. In the deepest part of my heart and soul, I want to see people reach their highest potential and be fulfilled. To witness people leading meaningful lives, driven with a purpose that aligns with their precious dreams, is one of the greatest joys in my life and one of the core reasons I wrote this book. Along the way, I discovered that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an excellent platform for enhancing the likelihood of entrepreneurial success.

Where are you now and where do you want to be? If you wait until you feel fearless and without a doubt, you might wait a very long time. Start where you are now. Feeling hesitant to move forward is a sure sign your success is important to you. Doubt motivates you to search out the best information available.

*Sweet Spot* will increase your psychological flexibility so you may persist or change your behavior to do what serves you best—and what works! Specifically, I want what serves you best as a private practice business owner and entrepreneur. I do this by exposing you to the six core ACT processes through dialogue and relevant exercises, including mindfulness skills, acceptance skills, and commitment to behavioral skills in taking action. I purposefully steer clear of a technical discussion on ACT. My goal is to have you experience the application of ACT to your life. To that end, I emphasize the importance of completing the exercises!

I have combined ACT with information from the emerging fields of evidence-based management and evidence-based entrepreneurship as a way to access the best available business and entrepreneurial practices. I have chosen the exercises based on studying the progress of two groups I facilitated over a two-year period. The first group ran for a year. Therapists in training explored the option of entering private practice post-graduation. The second group ran for nine months and was comprised of experienced therapists who wanted to grow their private practice. My goal was to bring the concepts, techniques, and skills grounded in ACT into the business arena as a framework for increasing entrepreneurial success. The results are reflected in this book based on the research I gathered from both groups. *Sweet Spot* is a combination of my

experience as an ACT therapist, a corporate recruiter and trainer, and a private practice business owner.-

I also want to help you recognize the people who are a good fit for your client base, so you can get into the groove of living a life you love both professionally and personally, which is why the exercises are also designed with practical business goals in mind. One of these practical goals is a formal business plan—the North Star to help you navigate. Throughout the book you will find references to additional exercises, which you can download from my website. These exercises include a place to start your business plan, your elevator speech and tagline, and so much more. Visit [BookSweetSpot.com](http://BookSweetSpot.com) for the full list.

The methods you're about to read have proven results. Apply what you read in *Sweet Spot* in a wholehearted manner and you will reap the benefits. Each chapter provides an opportunity for new ways to use your current knowledge and skills in a fashion uniquely suitable to you. Let's take a quick look at ACT before you get started.

## What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?

The first ACT book, *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An Experiential Approach to Behavior Change*, was written by Steven C. Hayes, Kirk D. Strosahl, and Kelly G. Wilson in 1999. I read it in 2009 while completing my internship. What immediately fascinated me about the model, and still does, is the lack of focus on getting rid of symptoms. Rather than spending time focusing on how to cure the pains of everyday living, the focus of ACT is on living well through a process called *psychological flexibility*. The underlying six core processes contributing to psychological flexibility are embedded in *Sweet Spot*: acceptance, defusion, values clarification, committed action, self as content, and self as context.

- **Acceptance:** a willingness to hold gently or lightly your internal experience of discomfort that will show up from time to time as you navigate life.
- **Defusion:** an ability to stand back and create an internal space between you and your thoughts, feelings, sensations, urges, or other internal experiences quite often labeled as unwanted, uncomfortable, or undesirable. You will learn about defusion techniques so you can make effective choices. Defusion is not about how to get rid of or fix your thoughts or discomfort; rather, you are better able to turn toward and engage in behaviors in connection to your values.

- **Values clarification:** knowing what matters. Values clarification is often accomplished with structured exercises that facilitate a deeper understanding of the self.
- **Committed action:** doing what it takes to move toward what matters; bringing your values into fruition as a way of living a purposeful, meaningful self-directed life.
- **Self as content** and **self as context** are linked: Think of the metaphor of a book. The cover of the book is *self as context*—you are the holder of the content; in other words you are the holder of your life, the story. *Self as content* is the story of your life. There is a “you” that has been you all your life with a learning history unique to you that unfolds in the process of living your life. You will have a chance to experience both *self as content* and *self as context*. (If these two concepts seem blurry, you will gain clarity through the experiential exercises in the book.)

I invite you to hang out with me as we uncover your private practice “sweet spot” and find your groove.

## Section One: Anatomy of Change

In this first section you are going to assess your readiness to change from student or employee to a small business owner of a private practice. You will find that entrepreneurship is a creative process, as you begin to define your vision and contemplate formulating a simple yet workable business plan that will act as your North Star on your entrepreneurial journey. Along the way to clarifying your dreams you may encounter roadblocks. Some will be external, and others will appear in the form of thoughts or feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, fear, or ambivalence. I assure you the internal and external roadblocks you encounter are part of the journey. The uneasiness that turns up and the arrival of a lack of confidence belong to the territory of the entrepreneurial endeavor. You can do this.

In this first section are exercises that include concepts taken from ACT, Motivational Interviewing, and the Small Business Administration. I have sprinkled in some of my story as well as a few stories from others. Keep in mind you will have your own unique story as you travel into the world of entrepreneurship. If you discover your preference is to take a different path and not pursue private practice, this section will illuminate a path that is useful and in alignment with your heart's calling.

## Chapter 1: How Do I Know I Am Ready?

Before opening a private practice or, as far as that goes, any small business, it is useful to take an honest look at some basic questions all entrepreneurs need to answer. Below are a few questions I have gathered along the way, which I call the Entrepreneurial Readiness Inventory.

Be honest with yourself. Answering honestly will save you a lot of heartache and money down the road. Being achievement- and success-oriented are helpful entrepreneurial traits, but it is necessary to take a 30,000-foot view of the whole process from the beginning. The questions are meant for you to start thinking about your strengths and weaknesses in regard to your time, money, and energy from this perspective.

When I was running my first twelve-month coaching group, a member I'll call Sara came to the group uncertain as to what the next step on her career path should be. The benefits of realistically taking the Inventory can be seen in Sara's story.

### Honesty Is the Best Policy

Sara was an intern. Her husband was in graduate school as well and would graduate a year after she did. They had a teenage daughter at home.

Private practice deeply appealed to Sara—it was her dream! Working at an agency did not appeal to her. I enjoyed working with Sara as I watched her stick with the commitment of honestly assessing where she was in the present and where she would be in a year. She was committed to understanding the impact that being a business owner would have on the entire family. After much soul-searching, Sara decided to open her private practice after her husband finished his graduate program. She wanted to be in a place financially and energetically to devote herself to creating a private practice successfully.

Although Sara postponed opening a private practice, she found clarity about her passion, which helped her focus her job search. Clarity is beneficial regardless of whether you decide to go into private practice, defer it for later, or decide this choice is not for you. Clarity still leads you to your calling. In the coaching process, Sara created a vision and a mission statement for her private practice that ended up facilitating a focused job search: “I aim to help people suffering

from the effects of abuse, trauma, and grief to heal and to live with more self-compassion, connection to others, and reliance on their inner wisdom.” Furthermore, she planned “to achieve my vision by providing group and individual counseling that focuses on authenticity, compassion, balance, and creativity. I envision a counseling practice in which my clients come to embrace themselves and all of their emotions with acceptance while empowering change.”

I hear she had a great interview and landed a job that would strategically prepare her for the next step into private practice. Plus, when she does open a private practice, she has completed the first step in creating a business plan. The plan is here to help you develop a cohesive philosophy that resonates with your ideal client and others in your community. You can complete the business plan piece by piece as we go along (download the worksheet from my website [BookSweetSpot.com](http://BookSweetSpot.com)). Go ahead and take peek—the plan is pretty simple.

Let’s do a short present-moment exercise, then get on with the Entrepreneurial Readiness Inventory.

### Present-Moment Exercise

Close your eyes for a few moments (about twenty to forty seconds) to bring yourself in contact with the present moment. Take a few breaths while you bring your attention to the tip of your nose. Notice the temperature and direction of the air as it enters and exits through your nostrils. Take about twenty breaths. OK, are you ready to read on? Feel free to make a few notes in your journal.

### Entrepreneurial Readiness Inventory

As you read each question in the Entrepreneurial Readiness Inventory below, take your time. Notice if you feel excited or anxious. Being a small business owner is a lifestyle choice and feels much like jumping out of an airplane, free-falling, and hoping you packed your parachute so it will open.

Some of the questions below ask you to consider your needs and wants. If your business cannot satisfy your needs and wants, chances are you will be an unhappy business owner. The Small Business Administration notes unhappiness as one of the leading causes of business failure. You may mark your answers in this book, or on a separate sheet of paper.



1. I think I am ready to start a private practice: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
2. I have the support of family and friends for starting a private practice: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
3. I am comfortable with uncertainty, even if it means not being guaranteed a regular paycheck: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
4. I want to be my own boss and like taking charge: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
5. I want to be in charge of my financial destiny: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
6. I like to leave my work at the office at the end of the day. I think about it only when I return the next day: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
7. I am willing, and able, to concentrate on the business to the exclusion of family and friends: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
8. I want to work \_\_\_ hours per day, \_\_\_ hours per week.
9. I like to spend \_\_\_ hours per week engaged in my hobbies or other leisure time activities.
10. I must make \$ \_\_\_ per year to meet my financial responsibilities.
11. I want to make \$ \_\_\_ per year the first year, \$ \_\_\_ the second year, and \_\_\_ within five years.
12. I am in good health and have the time and energy to devote to launching a private practice: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
13. I am able to make decisions early, based instinctively on my own judgment, and without having complete information: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
14. I enjoy taking risks: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
15. I consider myself well organized: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
16. I am effective at time management: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
17. I am capable of seeing the big picture and all the small pieces that fit in the puzzle: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
18. I am a self-starter and like to see projects finished to the end: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
19. People describe me as being a hard worker: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
20. I am able to take criticism and rejection and bounce back with a positive attitude: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
21. I am a creative problem solver: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

22. I am willing to invest money to start my private practice business: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Amount:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_
23. I am prepared to use some of my personal savings to start a private practice:  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
24. I enjoy competition: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_
25. I plan ahead: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

**Scoring: Each “YES” is worth 1 point, with the exceptions of questions 6, 8, and 9, where “NO” is worth 1 point. The higher the score, the more ready you are likely to be. You judge for yourself.**

*Adapted from the Small Business Bureau of Minnesota and Small Business Association of Colorado.*

Rarely does someone answer all the questions in the Inventory with 100 percent certainty. I have seldom heard someone say they were ready, without a doubt that opening a small private practice business was exactly what they wanted to do. Even people who have been in private practice who want to take their business to the next level feel apprehensive and ambivalent. Both, apprehensions and ambivalence, are a part of the change cycle.<sup>1</sup> So if you are feeling a little unsure, that’s normal. A little uncertainty will help you take the necessary steps and do the research needed to make choices in alignment with your dreams. You already know opening a business involves risk. And anytime we have risk and change, we humans feel uncomfortable. It is our hardwired nature to keep us safe from risk. So the real question is, are you up to it?

Ask yourself, *Am I willing and able to take the chance at succeeding in a business of my dreams?*

## Percolation

One attitude I advocate for everyone considering private practice is creative exploration—give yourself permission to daydream, as this holds the door open to your imagination. Percolation is an attitude of trust; your imagination is at work. The imagination is most effective when judgment is set to the side. Let your mind explore possibilities. Let it be creative in the process.

As you give yourself permission to engage in creative exploration and to percolate, you incubate your ideas—nurture them until they are ready to blossom. If you find yourself literally sitting at

the kitchen table with a cup of coffee staring out the window—cool! If you get an idea, jot it down. I suggest you carry a small pad and paper or use your smartphone for those eureka moments that come into your mind in an almost mystical manner. You can record your eureka ideas as notes or as a voice memo, or even call yourself and leave a message. Capture the brilliance as it occurs.

Most of all, remain playful. Be curious like a child, with wonderment rather than judgment. If an idea or picture seems particularly sticky, take time to observe it from different perspectives.

Have you heard the tale of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant?

### Six Blind Men and the Elephant—An Ancient Buddha Parable

*Once upon a time there lived six blind men in a village. One day the other villagers told them, “Hey, there is an elephant in the village today.” The six blind men had no idea what an elephant was. They decided, “Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway.”*

*All of them went where the elephant was. Every one of them touched the elephant.*

*“Hey, the elephant is a pillar,” said the first man, who touched his leg.*

*“Oh, no! It is like a rope,” said the second man, who touched the tail.*

*“Oh, no! It is like a thick branch of a tree,” said the third man, who touched the trunk of the elephant.*

*“It is like a big hand fan,” said the fourth man, who touched the ear of the elephant.*

*“It is like a huge wall,” said the fifth man, who touched the belly of the elephant.*

*“It is like a solid pipe,” said the sixth man, who touched the tusk of the elephant.*

Remember entrepreneurship is a creative endeavor. Exercise a flexible perspective of how private practice might look for you in your life now and how private practice might look for you in the long run. Be watchful of prescribed descriptions of what private practice is *supposed* to look like. If you find yourself talking in *shoulds*, take a break. Let your imagination run wild with possibilities.

## Overview

Do you think of yourself as an entrepreneur? Was your Entrepreneurial Readiness score low? I propose this thought: You made it through graduate school; you have the makings of an entrepreneur. *How so?* you ask. For one, I know you are persistent and most likely tenacious. I'll bet you even did some percolating in graduate school, most likely as part of pondering ideas in your learning process as you distilled information into useful data. Now let us turn our attention to persistence and tenacity to take a look at how each can work to help you succeed.



<sup>1</sup> James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente, *Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively Forward* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 110-111.