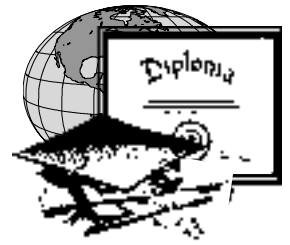


# Getting Started: What They Didn't Teach You in Graduate School

## Part 1: Steps to Take NOW

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Graduate students work long and hard to prepare for professional practice. After years of course work, internship, and post-doctoral supervised experience, students face the exciting, yet daunting transition to earning a living as a psychologist. Unfortunately, many wait until they are licensed to begin planning their careers. Instead, students should realize it is never too early to start considering their professional future.

This article is part of a series for new psychologists that addresses how to prepare for entering professional practice as a psychologist. Issues to be discussed include steps to take while in graduate school, generalist vs. specialist tracks, internship selection, career options, joining vs. opening a practice, individual vs. group practice, responsibilities as an employer, and marketing and business aspects of practice. While the information presented in no way replaces solid academic preparation, it should help neophyte practitioners prepare for the more practical aspects of entering practice.

Regardless of what year of training you are in at present, the time to start preparing for your career is now. As was implied above, there is no substitute for a well-rounded solid education. Take a variety of courses and seek out a wide range of supervised clinical experiences to develop good fundamental clinical skills. Be an active participant in shaping your education and training experiences. If possible, seek out experienced supervisors who are committed to your professional development and training.

Spend time meeting with your professors outside the classroom. Get to know them, let them get to know you, and discuss career-related issues. Find out about their training, career choices, and experiences. See what advice they have for you. Learn about career options you had never considered. And again, seek to learn from their varied experiences. Do this repeatedly over the years. One cautionary note: be sure that advice about the

practice environment today comes from faculty who are currently engaged in clinical practice.

Actively utilize your clinical supervisors in the same way. Don't limit supervision to your clinical casework. Ask questions about your supervisors' background, training, career choices, and advice based on their practice experience. Focus on issues such as how to strike a balance between career and family. Find out how they planned their own careers. Did it go according to plan? What obstacles did they face? What are their plans for the future? Find out about the practical aspects of opening and running a practice.

Another important step to take immediately is to seek out one or more mentors outside of your training program, successful practitioners who can share their hard-learned lessons from over the years and give you intimate glimpses into the real world of the practice of psychology. You'll also have someone to bounce ideas off of, to discuss your concerns and fears with, or to ask what you think may appear to be 'stupid' questions; all outside of the evaluative environment of your training program.

Become a student member of MPA and request a mentor. An experienced psychologist will be assigned to you to offer professional development assistance. They will have much to teach you that you will not learn in graduate school. Mentors will also help you to become integrated into the professional community, such as by introducing you to colleagues at professional meetings, so you can begin the very important process of networking that all successful practitioners engage in. You may request a mentor with a particular type of practice or expertise or in a certain general geographic area.

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