



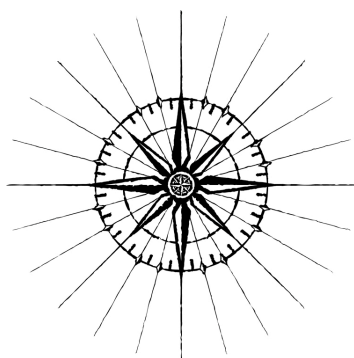
# THE PRACTITIONER'S JOURNEY

*The Path to Success for Holistic,  
Alternative & Integrative Health Professionals*

DAN CLEMENTS & TARA GIGNAC, ND

*Authors of Escape 101*

# THE PRACTITIONER'S JOURNEY



DAN CLEMENTS & TARA GIGNAC, ND

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction

*The path to Success*

-9-

## Part I: The Cave

*Solving the mystery of why practices fail*

-17-

## Part II: The River

*Attracting new clients*

-77-

## Part III: The Boulder

*Getting the most from your client base*

-133-

## Part IV: The Valley

*Finding balance and building a sustainable career*

-185-

## Epilogue

*The summit*

-255-

## Afterword

*Love, life and legacy in health care*

-259-



*Never accept the idea that, because you are in business, you don't have the opportunity or time or personal qualities which a true spiritual life demands, or that maintaining a deep inner life is somehow contradictory with leading a business career.*

*The wisdom of The Diamond Cutter says that the very people who are attracted to business are exactly the same ones who have the inner strength to grasp and carry out the deeper practices of the spirit.*

*-Geshe Michael Roach  
The Diamond Cutter*



## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In this book we use a number of terms interchangeably. That's partly for convenience, but mainly because there's no generally accepted way of referring to the practitioners and consumers of the alternative health industry.

To describe the diverse industry we work in, we use the terms alternative, holistic, integrative, and complementary as they best suit the flow of the book, most often settling for "CAM" (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) as a catchphrase for all.

You might think of yourself as a therapist, a doctor, a healer, a practitioner, a coach or a counselor. You may own a practice, a business, or a clinic. You might work with clients, patients, or customers. Regardless of what language you use, this book will help you do what you do better.

In short, let's start by doing what great health care professionals have always done: forget about the labels and focus on what's inside instead.

And as for the people described in *The Practitioner's Journey*? They're all real. Just like you.





# INTRODUCTION

## *The Path to Success*

*Many roads lead to the path, but basically there are only two: reason and practice.*

-Bodhidharma

*I* f you're like most practitioners, your current practice is likely to take you to one of three places in the long run.

The first place is the scariest. It's called No Longer Practicing, and it comes as a result of just not being able to make it. After a few years of struggle, you still don't have enough clients to pay the bills *and* pay yourself, so you pack it in. It's a sad outcome, but sadder still is the fact that it's not that uncommon—in some CAM professions, it's rumored that as many as 50% of practitioners are no longer practicing within a few years.

The second place is called Getting By, and it's not nearly as scary, but it's not that great either. Practitioners in this category manage to find enough clients to get by, but they *just* get by. They feel like their practice sucks up all their cash, and they never really find financial freedom. They pay themselves when they can, but it's unpredictable. Cash on hand at the end of each month is usually zero, or a little less. Debt slowly creeps up. Enjoying work is a distant memory. Work and life are a constant struggle with little payback.

If that doesn't seem terribly enticing either, then consider the third possible destination: Burnout. It's a place of deception because on the surface it seems like a good spot to be. You have

plenty of clients, a jam-packed schedule, and cash pouring in. The hidden dark side of this place, though, is the long hours, the deterioration of health and relationships, and, surprisingly, the continued financial struggle. After all, lots of cash doesn't necessarily mean lots of wealth, and many of these "super practitioners" are in just as much financial trouble as those who are Getting By. Burnout, it turns out, is simply a longer and more expensive route to No Longer Practicing.

There is good news, however. As of right now you're *not* like most practitioners. In discovering this book, you've just taken the first steps on a path toward an entirely different destination.

This destination is one that we've all heard of. It's called Success, but for all the legend surrounding it, few practitioners seem to find their way there. It's the Shangri-La of practice—a mysterious place where life is the way you imagined it before things got in the way.

Some pay a brief visit to Success on their way to Burnout, but they don't seem to be able to settle there for long. But we do hear the stories of those who have found their way, and those stories circulate through our professions in whispered tones at conferences, schools, and lunch dates. They are stories of a place where you find joy in your work. Where, in fact, you can't *wait* to get to work each day. Where you have the money you need. Where you work as much as you choose to work, but you love every minute of it. Success is the practice we dream of as students and covet as practitioners. It's a place where you help others find health and are healthy yourself.

The job of this book is to show you the way there.

## **TROUBLE ON THE PATH TO SUCCESS**

By far the most extraordinary thing about Success is that so few practitioners actually find their way there. After all, a good look at our current state of health suggests that by all accounts, it should be a remarkable time to be in the healing professions.

Our aging population, deteriorating environment, and dangerous lifestyle habits are combining to create a tidal wave of

chronic and acute illness the likes of which the world has never seen. To ride out the tide of this sickness tsunami, we're relying on an overloaded medical system that lacks the resources and philosophy necessary to cope. The result is a crisis of health, and a crisis of health *care*, that's driving people to seek alternatives.

Those alternatives are you and your colleagues: the chiropractors, acupuncturists, nutritionists, ayurvedic practitioners, massage therapists, naturopaths, and thousands of other holistic and alternative professionals out there. You're the life raft, and people should be climbing over each other to get on board.

Yet practitioners still struggle. On one side, we've got a market with a seemingly bottomless demand and desperate need. On the other, we've got practitioners barely getting by, or going out of business altogether. What's wrong?

After nearly a decade of running our health care business and teaching others to do the same thing, we've learned one critical thing: all practitioners face the same challenges. Whether you're a homeopath, a herbalist, a massage therapist, or a naturopath, the barriers to reaching Success are the same. Chiropractors, osteopaths, energy practitioners, and acupuncturists—they all face the same hurdles. **There are four challenges on the path to Success, and they're common to every holistic, alternative, or complementary practitioner.** Each challenge threatens to move practitioners off the path and send them wandering toward Burnout, Getting By, or No Longer Practicing.

This book is built around those four challenges. We'll get to them (and their solutions) in detail, but for now, here's a snapshot:

### **Challenge #1: Understanding the real reasons why practices fail**

Why is it that some practitioners flourish and others fail? Why does one practice thrive while another disappears, even when they offer the same service? What is it about practices and practitioners that makes the difference between a trip to Success and a downward spiral to No Longer Practicing?

**Challenge #2: Attracting a steady flow of new clients**

A practice with no clients has no revenue source, and even an established practice that loses its supply of new clients will eventually shrink. How do you keep new clients arriving at your door, and how do you do it in a way that becomes less difficult and less expensive over time?

**Challenge #3: Making the most of existing clients**

Although new clients are critical, attracting them can be time consuming and expensive. It's very hard to reach Success without leveraging the clients you do have. How do you escape the constant treadmill of time and money spent seeking new clients?

**Challenge #4: Building a balanced and sustainable future**

Eventually, a busy practice leads to a busy life. And just as eventually, young practitioners become, well, less young. (Hey, it happens to everyone at some point.) How do you maintain your own health and energy as a practitioner while creating something of lasting value?

Those are the big four. Every book, video, course, conference, website, blog, and coaching program in the world of CAM practice development is about solving one or more of these challenges. It's that simple.

What's not so simple, as it turns out, is the way we *think* about solving them.

**BEGINNING THE JOURNEY**

For many of us, starting our practices is the day things become *complicated*. Confused by bills, leases, marketing, staff and other pressures of practice, we get caught up in worry, uncertainty, and fear. And once we reach that point, it doesn't take long for us to do what we do best when we're overwhelmed: shut down. And so we get up, we put one foot in front of the other for the day, and then we come home. Then we get up and do it all over again.

As a result, we keep pushing on without really pushing ahead. We go in circles, feeling like we're never quite making the progress we should for all our efforts.

The reason we find ourselves treading water like this isn't because the challenges of practice are too *hard*. It takes no special genetic or social advantage to reach Success. If you can attend school to learn to be a practitioner, then you're already blessed with all the advantage you need to succeed as one.

No, the hardest thing about the four challenges of practice is *thinking* about them in the right way. We have a habit of making these barriers too complex, too scary, or too overwhelming. And the more complex they become in our minds, the *less* we work to overcome them. We take one look at our to-do list and turn away just as quickly. We revisit the goals we carefully set six months before, and don't even know where to begin.

The more complicated we make the challenges of private practice, the further we drift from Success. **The challenge of practice, as it turns out, isn't solving complex problems. It's keeping things simple so that we can continue to move forward.**

Our job in this book is to simplify the four challenges that keep practitioners from becoming successful. *The Practitioner's Journey* is designed to take the thinking and actions that deliver success in private practice and distill them into a framework that you can easily grasp, easily remember, and easily put to work. Whether you don't know what to do, or you just don't know what to do *next*, this book will help you move toward the practice that fits you, your clients, and your life.

And your part? For now, that's the best part of all. You get to enjoy the ride.

For just a little while, forget what you think you know about this business of health care. Allow yourself to have what Zen Buddhists call *shoshin*, or "beginner's mind," and what we call "cutting yourself some slack." For just a few moments, shut down your internal critic and let yourself be willingly open to one phrase: *What If?*

*What if* your journey to Success as a practitioner doesn't start with trying to find new clients? *What if* it doesn't begin by developing a new marketing campaign or wondering if you should buy the latest technology? *What if* finding your way to Success isn't about how to choose the right office space or hire a new receptionist?

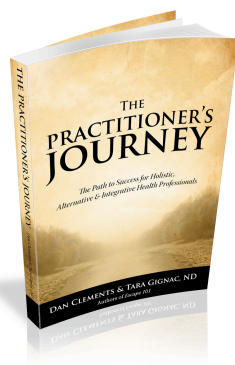
What if, instead of all those things, your journey to Success is much simpler?

What if getting from where you are now—whether it's the first day of school or the latest day of a long practice career—starts with something different?

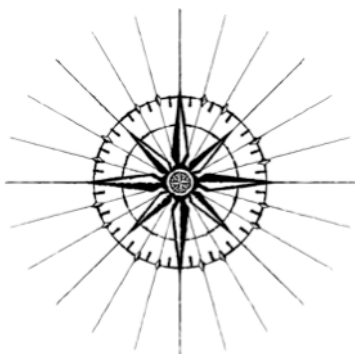
## THE PATH TO PRACTICE SUCCESS STARTS WITH A SINGLE STEP...

You've been reading an excerpt from  
***The Practitioner's Journey:***  
*The Path to Success for Holistic, Alternative and  
Integrative Health Professionals.*

To read the entire book, visit  
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your favorite bookseller.



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