

I. Why start a business?

Making a decision to start a business can be based on many factors, such as need to make a living, put children through college, save up for retirement, create something that no one has ever created before, work at your own pace, work in your environment of choice (i.e., near adult children and grandchildren or in a fair weather climate), and/or resolve an early childhood experience. Identifying your motivation is an important step in starting a business. Starting a business is often a decision made during a transitional point in one's life. Who are your mentors? What is motivating you to start a business? Read what Robert Chope, one of the first private career practice entrepreneurs in the United States, has to say about starting a career development private practice. Perform his Exercises 3 and 4 in Appendix A to identify your motivation(s) for starting a career development business.

Robert C. Chope, Ph.D.

Establishing the Career and Personal Development Institute: Factors that Drove Me To Start a Career Counseling Business

As one of the founding associates of the Career Development Institute in San Francisco, I've been a principal of a private career counseling and consulting practice for over two and a half decades. I now have five associates. The group is called the Career and Personal Development Institute. We changed our name in the late 1980s when the Control Data Institute's Career Development Institute assumed our CDI moniker. Their business folded in the 1990s, but we continued on with the CPDI logo. The Institute is unique among career practices because our counseling model intertwines career and personal issues with a thoughtful developmental perspective. I am proud to be a founder of one of the oldest, private career-counseling firms in the United States.

At every career counseling conference I attend, people who know about the Institute query me about how it was started, what keeps it so successful, and how it accrued such celebrated tenure in the community. I usually give quick, cryptic answers to these inquiries because I haven't felt bold enough to deeply reflect on why I did what I did when I did it. In truth, I haven't wished to address the variety of different responses I could give.

Being asked to write about the motivation behind starting my practice has inspired me to develop this brief, personal career narrative. In so doing, I'm also able to explore the influence of the many contextual and relationship factors that gave me guidance and support over the years. Indeed, as Senator Hillary Clinton noted, it does take a village of support. I feel I've had that support in creating and sustaining my business.

Let me offer a few biographical tidbits. For the

record, I've been a professor in the Department of Counseling at San Francisco State University since 1975. Prior to that, I served a year as a research associate at the University of Wisconsin Madison Regional Rehabilitation Research Institute, collaborating with George Wright and Ken Reagles, two major contributors to the rehabilitation research of that time. I joined their team three months before I earned a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota Department of Psychology under David P. Campbell, my advisor, dissertation supervisor, and author of the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII) and Campbell Interest and Skills Survey (CISS).

Why Did I Start a Practice, Especially Since I Was Already a College Professor?

I think that it's helpful for fledgling entrepreneurs to consider that there are a variety of factors in the decision to open an independent career counseling business. For me, these included the following: a lack of complete professional fulfillment as a professor, a degree of theoretical alienation from my colleagues in career counseling, a desire to make a difference in the world, the encouragement and support of other colleagues, the presence of entrepreneurs as role models, and a willingness to take risks. I will try to address succinctly each of these factors.

Lack of Personal Fulfillment as a Professor

The primary reason I embarked on a private career counseling practice was that teaching was not enough for me. I've always been a person devoted to service, a practitioner, and a counselor.

After graduating from Harvard in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam era, I served for four years as a counselor and senior counselor in a juvenile detention facility in northern California as an alternative to military service. During that time, I also earned a master's degree from San Francisco State University (SFSU) in the same department where I would even-

tually be employed for so many years. I figured that since I enjoyed the vigor of counseling disenfranchised and troubled youth, I ought to learn something about what I was supposed to be doing. Two years after receiving the degree, I became licensed as a Marriage, Family and Child Counselor.

I was accepted into the Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota. During my three years at Minnesota, I was a psychology intern at the Minneapolis Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital. The VA gave me a stipend in return for 2700 hours of psychological service. With mounting interest in career development, I asked to be assigned to the Vocational Psychology Service of the VA. I believed, and still do, that the greatest impact any counselor can have, especially on those who are most difficult to serve, is through helping them obtain work.

David Campbell, originator of the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey (CISS), encouraged his advisees to graduate as expeditiously as possible and make a living. He didn't care what we did. Paul Meehl, on the other hand, thought that students should learn how to counsel in order to get a nonbookish feel for what a patient is really like and then return to the academy to think, research, write, and teach (in that order). As it turned out, both of these mentors influenced my career path.

Theoretical Alienation from My Colleagues

I founded the Career Counseling program at San Francisco State University in 1980. It has been one of the few CACREP approved programs in the United States. As successful as the program has been, I felt alienated in promoting career counseling because it always played second fiddle to the other, larger programs in our department. I wanted to bring more prestige to Career Counseling and regardless of what I did, students, faculty and administrators were all seduced by and gave attention to the larger programs like Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling.

The major idea I had for the career counseling program at SFSU was the incorporation of personal and emotional issues into the career counseling process. I've written two books about how these issues can affect career development (Chope, 2000; Chope, 2006). I felt that the emotional state of mind needed to be addressed during the job search. But this was very difficult to bring into the classroom at the time, and my colleagues thought that this material was better taught in other programs.

Establishing the Institute gave me an opportunity to take my ideas and test them out in private practice. I managed to get myself licensed as a

psychologist to avoid any scope of practice issues, and then I set out experimenting with my new model. With this clinical material, I was able to come back to the classroom with an approach that was quite different from that which appeared in most career counseling texts. In the meantime, I developed clinical models for other psychological issues that incorporated the use of family members into treatment protocols (Chope, 2001).

A Desire To Make a Difference

The serendipitous experience as a counselor in detention and probation services and as a psychology intern working with disabled veterans guided me in directions that continue to shape my professional career. These experiences forced me to recognize that I wanted to advance my work in a direction that would lead to social change. I've been caught up in social justice causes as a counselor and advocate for close to 40 years.

The Institute, unlike the university, gave me expanded opportunities for consultation on social justice issues. Rather than working from grants through the university, I developed contracts with people who were in need of services. Through the Institute, I worked with the Oakland and San Francisco police departments addressing employment discrimination issues among new recruits, and I assisted the San Francisco Fire Department in integrating women into the fire services. I also worked as an advocate with the Community Rehabilitation Workshop, World Institute on Disability, and the Community Alliance for Special Education.

Encouragement and Support of Colleagues

When I sought guidance from my professorial colleagues about starting a practice, I was startled that many were quite supportive. But the real joy of setting up the practice came from the students with whom I had worked. They were always chiding me to open a practice to add personal experiences with the cases taught in class. I loved the idea of bringing my own clinical material into the classroom.

When I finally opened the practice, it was with a group of colleagues and former students with whom I had maintained contact. While none of them are part of the group now, five of the six current members of the Institute were former students of mine. Beginning a practice with a group of trusted colleagues is an absolute joy. Not making decisions alone, sharing creative ideas about marketing and advertising, and sharing expenses made the early aspects of the private practice easy. Were I to do this again, I would do it in

exactly the same way, partnering with colleagues who could enrich me. That support was crucial to my deciding to begin a practice, and it has remained a vital ingredient to our success.

Entrepreneurs as Role Models

I have had the distinction of being David Campbell's last doctoral candidate. He departed Minnesota and the Center for Interest Measurement after completing the 1974 retooling of the Strong Vocational Interest Blank, which he titled the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory. Although I had little direct contact with Campbell, he has been a curious kind of role model for me throughout my career. He was a psychologist who enjoyed empirical test development, research, writing, teaching, and consultation, but also enjoyed the tangible fruits of working as an entrepreneur to create new products and service ideas for the clientele of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Campbell was the quintessential example of a person who had a portfolio career before that word became fashionable as a part of the career counselors' lexicon. He was also willing to leave his position at Minnesota, still young and at the pinnacle of his career, and move away from academic life into a career filled with business consultation. While Campbell inculcated a spirit of entrepreneurial creativity in me, he also exemplified how many money making activities my education and training could provide.

A Willingness To Take Risks

For those of us who studied with risk-taking innovators, it's disappointing to work in a situation that does not allow for the chance to take your own risks and try out approaches that are distinctively your own without the critical, dictatorial eye of a senior supervisor saying that you can't do this or that. Many independent practitioners take an approach that moves beyond the conventional approaches of their time. These people should not only believe that they can provide a service to the public, but also believe that they can practice at a level that not only competes with but goes beyond that which is offered by other services.

Successful practitioners will always find gaps in the marketplace where services are needed, and they will capitalize on those gaps by offering new approaches. Moreover, practice changes regularly and those who are adaptable can continue to be successful. Practitioners need to maintain flexibility. The Institute today does not in any way resemble the Institute that was started 26 years ago. We have stayed in business because of that.

Deciding Whether To Start a Private Practice

My advice to those who want to assess whether to begin a private practice is to try Exercises 3 and 4 in Appendix A. The results of these may test your own creativity, so when you are ready to start a business, you will offer services that are new and different.

Summing Up

As I look back on the years that I've been in practice, I've had to make certain judgments about what it gave to me and how it limited me. Because my practice was part of a portfolio of writing, teaching, and public speaking, I never had the time to pursue work as an academic administrator. On several occasions, I was asked to consider being chair of my department. While I was willing to serve as the associate chair, I never accepted the chair position because it would mean that I would have to curtail my practice. I was unwilling to do that. The practice worked as a part of a portfolio career, but limited what I was able to do in the academic area.

That brings me to a second dilemma. I allowed the safety and security of the university to dictate how much I was able to practice. Make no mistake: I have enjoyed my 30 years in the classroom immensely. And with that enjoyment I have been able to have the comfort of a stable income with moderate wages, generous health benefits, sabbaticals, and a secure retirement package. The sabbaticals have enabled me to write.

On the other hand, the fees generated from my practice far outstrip what I am able to make as a college professor. I think that if I had this to do over again, I would leave the academy much like David Campbell did at the age of 42. At that time I would have had 12 years of teaching experience and been ready for larger training programs and newer opportunities. I didn't take that final risk. Knowing how successful we have been at the CPDI, that decision cost me financially.

For those who are thinking of creating your own business, you will have to decide what you're willing to risk in order to move on. My practice was an "add on," developed within elements of state-supported security. I think that it was a wonderful way for me to develop my practice because at no time was I ever totally financially dependent upon it. One might say that the portfolio career worked for me. But I still wonder how it might have been different had I created a large national firm like Right Associates or Challenger, Grey and Christmas. I think that while I had the know-how and inspiration to do it, I had some but not enough

of the risk-taking personality. And I suppose that I will always wonder about what might have been.

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