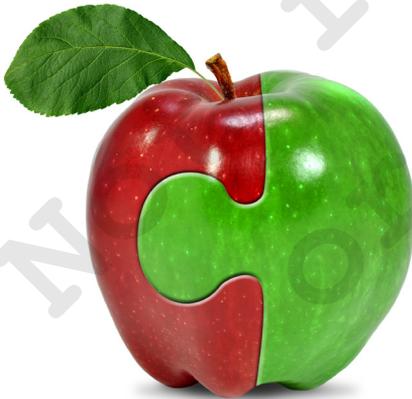


# *Making* Nutrition Your Business

SECOND EDITION



***BUILDING A  
SUCCESSFUL  
PRIVATE  
PRACTICE***

**Ann Silver, MS, RDN, CDE, CDN**

**Lisa Stollman, MA, RDN, CDE, CDN**

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Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Chicago, IL

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# Preface

**Welcome** to the new edition of *Making Nutrition Your Business*. You have made a very wise decision to read this book as you plan to develop a private practice. What an exciting time to embark on this venture to own your own business! There is a lot to learn and understand about starting and running a prosperous business, and we'll share what we've learned firsthand about building our own successful private practices.

First, some history of this book: The very first edition, published in 2004, was titled *The American Dietetic Association Guide to Private Practice: An Introduction to Starting Your Own Business*. It was written by two trailblazers, the late Ann Selkowitz Litt and Faye Berger Mitchell, and it covered the basics of going into private practice, which was considered less traditional at that time. In 2011, the next edition of the book, coauthored by Faye Berger Mitchell and Ann Silver, modified the name to *Making Nutrition Your Business: Private Practice and Beyond*. In addition to addressing the details of starting a private practice, this edition covered other areas, such as speaking and writing, which can be additional ways to diversify a private practice and expand your revenue stream.

Due to the tremendous growth of registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) working with patients in a private practice, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recognized the need to focus this edition of the book exclusively on building and growing a private practice in even greater detail. This book presents the essentials for starting, developing, and growing your own private practice. The following pages contain what we recommend an RDN considering this business venture needs to know:

- Find out if having your own private practice is right for you. You may have the skills to see patients, but having an entrepreneurial temperament is a separate issue to consider.
- Discover the fundamentals of being in business, including identifying your target market, business name, and your niche.
- Understand what's involved in setting up a private practice, from the legal aspects of creating a business to finding your office and setting up the necessary forms and tools you need for billing and for becoming an insurance provider, which are all crucial for getting paid.
- Explore the many options for getting the word out by marketing your business in your community and on various social media platforms, setting up a website, and more.

- Get inspired with real-life stories and suggestions for succeeding in your business from trendsetting private practice RDNs.
- Learn where to go for more information; we provide a list of other resources that we recommend to support your efforts to establish and build your practice.

Since the last edition of the book, we've seen many more RDNs use their entrepreneurial spirit and drive to become their own bosses and hang out their shingles. As the medical community and the public continue to realize that nutrition is the cornerstone of optimal health, the need for RDNs in private practice is at an all-time high. In addition to having freestanding offices, RDNs are delving into telehealth and setting up virtual offices where they can counsel patients from any location using Wi-Fi access. Insurance coverage has expanded for nutrition, but it has also become more complex; this edition now offers more guidance on setting up third-party reimbursement and helps answer the many questions you may have on becoming an insurance provider. Depending on your office location and your practice specialty, you'll learn that being an insurance provider may help you see more patients. Note that throughout the book, we refer to either *patient* or *client* interchangeably. In your practice, you will choose the term that you feel appropriately refers to the individuals you treat.

Keep in mind that this book is not intended to replace valuable advice from accountants, lawyers, and other business professionals. Seek out these professionals when you feel you need them. You may read this book cover to cover, or you may jump around to learn about a specific aspect of private practice. Keep this book on your bookshelf for future reference even once you are in your dream practice. You never know when you will need to refer back to it.

We have both been fortunate to have successful private practices, and we are thrilled that you have decided to make nutrition your business as well. You can read more about how our practices developed and thrived in chapter 10, along with other successful private practitioners. We hope that this book will provide the support you need to find your office, open up your business, and enjoy the journey as your business grows. Having your own business is like having a baby—you need to nurture it constantly if you want it to grow.

We wish you the very best as you set out to make nutrition your business.

Ann Silver, MS, RDN, CDE, CDN

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- our fabulous colleagues from the Nutrition Entrepreneurs Dietetic Practice Group, who were willing to share their personal success stories, as well as marketing and networking strategies to help this book come to fruition.

We extend a special thanks to our many RDN friends who helped answer our questions and provided assistance as needed: Aarti Batavia, Maria Bella, Lesli Bitel, Rebecca Bitzer, Chere Bork, Jill Castle, Patsy Catsos, Andrea Chernus, Nancy Clark, Marci Evans, Bonnie Giller, Joey Gochnour, Digna Cassens Irizzary, Molly Kellogg, Cathy Leman, Dana Magee, Linda Eck Mills, Lisa Musician, Jennifer Neily, Jill Nussinow, Jan Patenaude, Dee Pratt, Yvette Quantz, Judy Simon, Felicia Stoler, Lori Auerbach Sullivan, Evelyn Tribole, Susan Weiner, Penny Wilson, Lisa Young, and Tanya Zuckerbrot.



# 1 | Private Practice: Is It Right for You?

**Bravo!** You are at that point in your nutrition career where you're thinking about starting your own private practice. Many registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) have been bitten by the entrepreneurial bug and are passionate about going out on their own. Building the practice of your dreams and being your own boss are at the top of many nutrition professionals' bucket lists. But are you sure this is truly for you? This chapter will teach you about what it takes to be an entrepreneur and will help you determine if this would be a good fit for you.

## Why Do You Want to Be Your Own Boss?

The very first question you need to ask yourself is: *What is your motivation for wanting to start your own private practice?* Do you want to spend more time with your patients? Do you want to have more creativity in your work? Do you want to have a more flexible work schedule that accommodates traveling and, perhaps, your family life? Do you want to make more money? These are all valid reasons for wanting to be your own boss, and they are all realities of running your own business. However, not everyone is cut out to be an entrepreneur.<sup>1</sup> Before taking the giant leap out on your own, it is important to know what it

takes to be a successful entrepreneur. There are personal and professional characteristics and traits typical of those who are successful. It is not necessary (or likely) that you naturally possess all these traits. Most entrepreneurs don't. What is important is the ability to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses honestly and to seek help when you aren't capable of doing it all. You can always find people to help you shine as an entrepreneur, whether it's to help you with social media, create your website, or write a weekly blog. Read through the questions in the box below to see if you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur, and then we'll explore some of these important personality traits in greater detail.

### **Do You Have What It Takes to Be an Entrepreneur?**

- Do you dream of being your own boss?
- Are you a risk taker?
- Are you a leader?
- Are you self-confident?
- Can you live with the ups and downs of owning a business?
- Do you have determination and follow-through?
- Are you creative?
- Are you disciplined?
- Can you make your own deadlines and stick to them?
- Do you have common sense?
- Do you have a solid foundation of nutrition and diets?
- Can you multitask?
- Are you organized?
- Are you passionate about nutrition?
- Do you like working alone?
- Are you good at networking?
- Are you able to hear constructive criticism?
- Are you ready for self-reflection?

Adapted with permission from Ann Silver and Lisa Stollman.

Some skills that lend themselves to entrepreneurship can be learned. But for the most part they are inherent to your persona. If you answered **no** to three or more of these questions and aren't sure these are areas you want to work on, being your own boss may not be for you—at least not right away. No worries—this book will still benefit you. You may find that you need more time to develop the skills and confidence to be an entrepreneur. Perhaps starting out you are better off working for an RDN who has his or her own practice. You can learn the ins and outs of private practice from another RDN and in time go out on your own.

## Personality Traits of Successful Entrepreneurs

Many RDNs have mastered the necessary educational, clinical, and food-service skills to be effective in their employed positions. Understanding what makes a successful RDN provides some insight into the traits of a successful nutrition entrepreneur.<sup>2-4</sup> However, in addition to expanding upon the skills of a successful RDN and learning new skills that are necessary to become a successful private practice owner, it is also recommended for those going solo to have the following personality traits.

### Being a Risk Taker

It is risky to leave a dependable job, steady paycheck, benefits package, and sense of performance expectations. Questions you never had to think about as an employee will loom large when you are in private practice. How will you establish yourself in your local community and on social media? How will you structure your day? How will you make money? What are your additional revenue streams (if needed)? When do you hire employees or take on a partner? You likely never considered these questions as an employee, but they will weigh heavily on you as a private practice owner.

Taking that first step requires confidence and self-determination, along with the ability to handle stress and the unknown. The Small Business Association (SBA) estimates that one-third of small businesses fail due to inadequate finances within the first two years.<sup>5</sup> You need to be willing to take the inherent risk that comes from moving from an employee to a private practice owner, but you can minimize your risk and increase your chances for success by being prepared. Seek the advice of business advisers, such as other RDNs who have gone into private practice and friends who are business owners. Do your research

and evaluate the environment to determine whether your business idea is viable.

To lessen the financial risk, investigate the possibility of part-time employment or consulting while you develop your private practice. If part-time employment isn't an option, build your practice outside of your usual work hours. You can start by seeing patients in the evenings or on weekends. Eventually, if you choose to enter the world of private practice on a full-time basis, you will need to leave the world as an employee, but it's important to wait until you feel confident and financially prepared.

An RDN will encounter many risks in private practice. That first step is just the beginning. As risk taking eventually becomes part of your job description, you will learn to tolerate risk and see it as energizing rather than frightening.

## Being Passionate

Most successful entrepreneurs will tell you that they are fueled by a passion for their business. They thrive on having the opportunity to solve a problem and make life easier and better for others.<sup>4</sup> You should be passionate about your business idea if you want to be successful. Having a deep love for the work you do will keep you motivated and inspired to nurture your practice and help it grow. Having a true passion for your work is felt not only by those who work with you but also by your patients and referrers. If you ever come to a time in your practice when you aren't feeling excited and driven, it may be time to tweak what you are doing so you don't get in a rut. That is one of the great perks of being your own boss. You can regularly make changes to keep yourself motivated by your work. You have the ability to build a practice that is inspired by the areas of nutrition you are truly interested in. If you aren't passionate about your work, you may not see your vision through to completion and just give up. Now that you are taking the time to think about starting your private practice, take a pad of paper and jot down what you love to do and what you are passionate about.

## Being Disciplined

To work on your own, you need to be disciplined. You won't need to punch a clock, tell anyone where you are going in the middle of the day, or ask your boss for a day off. Without discipline, it may be tempting to not "go to work" because you aren't accountable to anyone but yourself and your clients.

By establishing workdays and hours when you will see patients, posting on social media, writing blogs, or marketing your practice in other ways, you will impose discipline and structure based on when you

are most productive. Determine when you will do paperwork, return phone calls, read your email, and network. Creating a work schedule will force you to be more organized. Don't worry if your schedule doesn't exactly follow traditional hours—remember that one of the perks of private practice is the ability to have a flexible schedule that works for you.

Disciplined practitioners will also need to plan events and schedule opportunities to stay current. As an employee, you may have been able to attend grand rounds, join journal clubs, or benefit from professional dialogue with colleagues. On your own, you will need to make the effort to keep your skills current. You may have to take time out of your schedule to attend a meeting. You will also need to set aside time to stay current by tracking issues online, listening to webinars, or subscribing to and reading many different publications. You might also want to make it a point to network with colleagues on a regular basis just to stay connected.

Make sure to include free time in your schedule, too. It's extremely important to take care of yourself and plan self-care. Practice what you preach! You need to be disciplined enough to take time off to attend a child's field trip, get a workout in, go on vacation, or just give yourself a mental health day. If you're not disciplined, you might find yourself doing paperwork long after the traditional workday has ended. All work and no play will not make a productive entrepreneur and can lead to eventual burnout.

## Having Confidence

Some individuals are born confident, and others need to find their confidence. If you are going to be successful, you will need to develop confidence and act as if it were always there. The more successful experiences you have in practice, the easier this becomes.

Confidence will help you promote yourself 24/7. According to James Robinson of [entrepreneur.com](http://entrepreneur.com), self-promotion is one of the most beneficial yet most underused marketing tools that the majority of business owners have at their immediate disposal.<sup>6</sup> No one really feels comfortable relentlessly self-promoting, but being confident can help. Be sure to assess the environment and determine when it is appropriate and when it just doesn't feel right to sell yourself. Always have business cards on hand, just in case.

Confidence also means you are able to admit deficiencies and look for ways to correct them. A confident RDN will readily refer a patient to someone more experienced in another area, send a reporter to an RDN who might have more expertise in a particular subject, or call upon a web designer to create a website if he or she lacks this skill. Assessing your skills and determining what you are capable of handling and what should be delegated are also signs of confidence.

## Being Adaptable

Being in business requires you to be a visionary. You must be able to spot nutrition trends in the marketplace and adapt your practice as appropriate. You don't need to be a trendsetter or compromise your beliefs, but you do need to be open-minded enough to see the existing trends and recognize that your clients may want information on topics you don't agree with.

Being adaptable means knowing when to let go of an idea that isn't going to fly, regardless of how much you like that idea. Moving on and getting over a failed project or an idea that isn't feasible now is part of being an adaptable entrepreneur. Perhaps your idea to have weekly group nutrition classes for teens in your office is not doable now. But hang on to your idea, as it may become worthwhile in the future.

You will meet many personality types in private practice. Although you are not required to become best friends with clients, referral sources, or others you may encounter while doing business, being kind and having a flexible personality will enable you to keep many people on your side—an important asset in private practice. People will not remember you because you are smart or attractive; people will remember you because you are kind and easy to work with.

Another important aspect of adaptability is having a backup plan for days that do not go as scheduled. If you have a canceled appointment or meeting, you can still be productive. You can use the time to send letters to physicians, update your social media pages, or write a new blog post. Always have a to-do list that you can work on to keep your private practice successful.

## Being Tenacious

Entrepreneurs are driven self-starters who never give up. They don't necessarily act impulsively, but they tend to grab opportunities and take advantage of them. An entrepreneur will always see the glass as half full instead of half empty. You may make many mistakes, but learning how to turn disappointments into learning experiences is an important lesson for anyone in business.<sup>7</sup>

Owning a private practice is demanding, exhausting, and exhilarating. To realize the exhilaration, you will need to be strong to endure the emotional and physical demands placed on a private practitioner. It may be difficult at times to remember why you even wanted to be your own boss. Although your tenacity and drive will help you accomplish your goals, it's also important to know when to take time to reenergize and recharge. Make sure to write a to-do list at the beginning of each week and check off completed tasks when they are finished. Set boundaries for your time so you get things done but still have time to enjoy life.

# Professional Skills of Successful Entrepreneurs

Unless you had a successful business career before you became an RDN, you will need to develop a new set of professional skills. Most dietetics programs provide limited business training. Although many RDNs are very comfortable with their clinical expertise, professional skills beyond clinical training are needed to run a private practice. Gaining real-world experience will be helpful before you go out on your own. Subscribe to business publications and listen to webinars and podcasts that can help you obtain business skills. Learn how to use accounting software such as QuickBooks so you can manage your money. Most important will be your ability to assess what you can and can't manage on your own as a private practice owner.<sup>7</sup>

## Being Business Savvy

Being an entrepreneur requires a transition in thinking from being an employee to being a business owner. You likely got into this profession to help people, and while you will never leave the helping profession, you will need to expand your thinking to include how to reach out to your target market and provide quality goods and services that offer consumer value. This expansion in thinking helps you become a more skilled private practice owner. What counts in private practice is the bottom line.

How you price your services is only one factor in determining your bottom line. Learning how to control costs, when to cut corners, and where to invest valuable dollars requires a business mind. If you are unsure, solicit input from colleagues already established in a private practice, other allied health professionals in practice in the community, and business organizations such as the SBA. This topic is covered in more detail in [chapter 2](#).

To promote your services, you may initially have to do some volunteer work, such as providing free lectures and volunteering at health fairs. However, you need to determine where you draw the line—after all, you need to earn a living.

You will also need to become comfortable with determining appropriate fees for your services. Chapter 3 covers this topic in more detail.

A wise business owner learns to make decisions under pressure. In nutrition, you make decisions about patient care, so the foundation for decision making is in your training. Private practice situations may be unfamiliar, and you might have only your gut instincts to guide you at times. Thinking like a business owner is a work in progress.

## Being Organized

Knowing how to delegate, organize, and multitask are tremendous skills. A private practitioner will be required to plan, organize, and implement everything related to his or her practice. You may not have the luxury of hiring information technology (IT) support to help you create a presentation, an assistant to schedule your appointments, or a custodian to clean your office. You will need to determine what you can and can't do. If cost is an issue, consider hiring a nutrition student or intern to help you out.

Planning is an important aspect of organization. In private practice, be sure to plan for administrative tasks such as scheduling appointments, contacting other health care providers on the treatment team, sending follow-up letters, and spending time on billing and accounting activities.

You will need to multitask, but be careful when doing so. In some cases, you may not be as productive while multitasking. Carefully evaluate what you need to get done and determine whether you can do the tasks simultaneously or whether certain tasks need your full attention. For example, tasks that lend themselves well to multitasking are sending a fax while checking emails and being on hold with an insurance company over the phone. Avoid multitasking when you are doing a task that requires your complete attention. A good rule of thumb: Always recheck your work for typos.

## Communicating Effectively

Excellent communication skills are important in everything you do in life. In private practice, you must be able to communicate in a confident, positive way. You need to put a positive spin on your practice as you communicate to the public. Being a good communicator means being a good listener, too. Whether you are communicating with a patient, a reporter, or an audience, you need to be comfortable with the give-and-take of conversation.

The first introduction to your services may be an initial telephone call to schedule an appointment or hook a client. You need to be persuasive without making promises that can't be kept. Learn how to speak succinctly and effectively. It is also quite possible that the first introduction to your services is a written inquiry through email. Make sure that your written communication skills are polished, and consider having a few blurbs available to explain your services to a potential client. You can save these in a document to then cut and paste into an email.

There are many excellent resources available on communication. If you are not a natural communicator, effective communication is one practice skill you will need to develop to be successful.

## Being Professional

Remember that first impressions do count. Your appearance makes a statement about you and the quality of your work. Putting your best foot forward will help market your practice. It is particularly important to dress for success. If you are seeing patients or speaking in public, dress appropriately. Avoid jeans, rumpled clothes, or excess scented products, makeup, and jewelry. Dress conservatively in clothes that fit well. You may even dress differently depending on the situation. For example, if you are seeing patients, you may dress in formal work attire, such as blazers, tailored shirts, ties, trousers, dresses, or skirts. If you are teaching a nutrition class to a group of teen athletes, you may feel more comfortable dressing more casually.

In addition to having a professional appearance, you must be aware of how you conduct yourself in your phone and email communications. It is always important to treat others with respect and maintain diplomacy, even when dealing with difficult situations.

## Being an Expert

Experience in clinical practice is a good foundation for private practice. A clinical position in a hospital, clinic, or corporation can provide you with some business-related skills, which can be a stepping stone to opening your own private practice.

If you plan to have a medical nutrition therapy (MNT) practice, it's essential to have a strong clinical background and hospital-based work experience. The experience you gain and contacts you make while practicing in a traditional role are irreplaceable. Having clinical expertise can also help you develop your niche. See [chapter 4](#) for more in-depth advice on finding your niche. If you plan to practice primarily in the areas not commonly classified as MNT—such as sports nutrition, wellness, or general nutrition—you might find your clinical skills to be less important. However, if you don't have a strong knowledge base in MNT, this will limit the types of patients you can see in your private practice.

## The Advantages of Going Solo

Starting a private practice is appealing for many reasons. You may be excited to transition from being an employee to being your own boss. There's a thrill and prestige in being on your own. Having creative freedom, the potential for unlimited income, and the flexibility to make your

own schedule are three huge selling points for RDNs to start their own private practices. The following sections highlight some of the specific benefits a private practitioner can enjoy.

## Ability to Control Your Schedule

One of the biggest draws to owning your own private practice is the ability to control your schedule. When you set your own office hours, the days you work and when you take vacation are dictated by you. You can also select an office location that's convenient for you. Take advantage of this flexibility by structuring your day around when you are most productive. You must keep in mind that your office hours need to work for your clients, but if you are a morning person, you can try to set up early office hours or do most of your work at that time. If you want to take vacation time during the busy winter holiday season, block out that time from your schedule. Many private practices are slow during this time of year, so have fun and enjoy it, too. As your practice grows, you will be able to see patients during the hours that are ideal for you.

Private practice offers the luxury of flexibility. A private practice should allow you to practice when, where, and how much you want. You might be able to choose the hours when you see patients and select an office location that is convenient for you. However, be prepared to work more than you did as an employee—in addition to counseling clients, you might need to put in long hours managing your books and paying bills. The difference is that you will decide when you will put in those long hours to have a profitable private practice.

## Balanced Life

Going solo appeals to many people looking to find the perfect balance between work and personal time. A home-based office or a private office close to home may seem like ideal places to work. The reality is that starting a private practice is extremely demanding. The days of working 9 to 5 are gone. However, you will find that you can schedule in your workouts and time off without answering to anyone else. Depending on the type of practice you have, you can work when and where you want. The flexibility and ability to have unlimited freedom is an appealing advantage to anyone seeking more control over his or her personal life.

## Potential Earnings

An RDN in private practice can earn more than an RDN working as an employee.<sup>8</sup> However, starting a private practice, like starting any other business, is not a get-rich-quick scheme. Financial rewards take time. It is estimated that a new private practice takes three to five years to realize a profit.<sup>5</sup> Starting your own practice carries risks, but the benefits should

include making more money than when you were an employee. Keep in mind that some of the income boost can come from the many potential tax advantages that private practitioners are afforded.

The earning power of a private practice is not limitless. Money is made by billing patients as well as third-party payers, and there are only so many billable hours in a week. You may increase your earning potential by branching out into other types of consulting. Oftentimes, you can realize more profits by having additional revenue streams, which may include writing, public speaking, online classes, or webinars.

## Expressing Your Own Style

Your private practice will be a personal extension of you. What you say, how you say it, and to whom you say it should reflect your style. You are the boss. You only have to answer to your professional code of ethics and yourself, not the clinical nutrition manager of the hospital or facility that employs you.

Regardless of where you work, you need to maintain a professional image, as discussed previously. However, you can always make small tweaks to your work attire based on your personality or the specific event you are attending.

## Professional Pride

One of the most gratifying aspects of private practice is pride in knowing that you work hard for your personal and professional fulfillment. It is thrilling to see your patients improve their health and to see your practice grow. Success will be self-perpetuating. You need to be passionate about what you do and sell that passion along with your services.

## The Disadvantages of Going Solo

Of course, you need to think about the disadvantages as well as the advantages of your new potential venture. Anyone in private practice can speak to the pros and cons of going solo. Listen carefully. There are risks and struggles involved in being on your own. Those of us who are successful private practitioners can see the cons, but the pros far outweigh them.

## Doing It All by Yourself

Nutrition counseling or coaching may be the main focus of your private practice, but you will be wearing all the hats to make your practice

work. When the fax machine breaks, electronic health records need to be updated, or bills need to be sent out, you will be the one responsible. The challenges of learning many new things will seem overwhelming at times.

One of the downsides to having your own practice is the pull to always be working. Work demands can put strains on personal relationships. Try to focus on the flexibility you have as a private practitioner. Be careful not to overextend yourself. There are times you will have to say no, and that can be frustrating. Remember your priorities when it comes to outside obligations, such as family vs work. You must prioritize the demands on your time. To accomplish this, keep in mind that you will often feel that there is still work to be done. Keep a schedule and a to-do list so you don't get stressed.

You will carry all the responsibilities on your shoulders. You will take all the blame when things don't work out. This can be draining, both emotionally and physically. Recognizing you can't please everyone is a reality of private practice. Going solo means just that: You are on your own.

You must make an effort to network with others. There are ways to avoid feeling isolated, but it is up to you to make that happen. Make a point of connecting with other professionals regularly. Join relevant electronic mailing lists (EMLs), meet colleagues for lunch or dinner, or just go out for an afternoon with a friend. You will need to recharge to stay motivated.

### **GETTING HELP: HAVING A BUSINESS PARTNER**

Although many RDNs decide to go it alone, at least initially, taking on a business partner or hiring other RDNs to join you can help you build and expand your private practice more quickly. Working with someone of equal stature can help you join forces as you build your nutrition practice together. You can bounce ideas off each other and provide inspiration for new projects. Having a partner can bring new skill sets to your business. Perhaps your expertise is in working with adult clients who require weight management. Maybe your partner(s) or RDN employees specialize in sports nutrition. By teaming up, you can expand your client base. Working together can also bring in more income. You can also share in all expenses, which can reduce your overhead. Many RDNs today are joining forces with other like-minded nutrition colleagues to establish a joint practice. This is a great option for those who don't like to work alone and want to share the workload.

## **Financial Concerns**

There will always be financial risk involved in owning a private practice. Cash flow may be a problem. To keep your business afloat, you may need to consider having additional revenue streams. You can develop webinars and online classes that can bring in additional income. If money is

tight, you might need to invest your own savings, take a part-time consulting job (so you have some steady income), or obtain a business loan to stay solvent. In any situation, the financial arrangements may create stress in your life.

If you have advanced skills in a specialty nutrition area, are well known locally or in the media, and have many years of experience, make sure that your fees are in line with your skill set. Never undersell yourself! Refer to [chapter 3](#) for more information on setting fees.

Financial issues ultimately affect those dependent on you as well. It is important to have the moral support of your family when you take on the risk of having your own practice. They may need to feel that the initial sacrifice is worth it for you to succeed.

Financial concerns can become more intense should you become ill or need to take time off for other reasons. Whether you are ill, want to take a day off to attend a conference, or have to cancel patient appointments due to inclement weather, these are all situations that will affect your bottom line. If you are financially independent, you may want to consider getting disability insurance in case you need to be out of work for an extended period of time.

Last, be aware that your income will be erratic. Eventually you will come to know the normal fluctuations and patterns. Pace yourself by learning which months are busy and which are slow. Try to schedule vacations when your patient population seems more likely to be taking time off as well or when your workload is a bit lighter.

## Is Private Practice Right for You?: A Summary

Here are the key takeaway points from this chapter:

- The personality traits of successful private practitioners include being a risk taker, having passion, being disciplined, having confidence, being adaptable, and being tenacious. You may not possess all these traits, but you need to identify your strengths and weaknesses and reach out for professional help as needed.
- Professional skills needed for stepping out on your own include being business savvy, having good organizational skills, being an effective communicator, being professional, and possessing expertise in some area of nutrition.
- There are pros and cons to being your own boss. Be honest with yourself and look at the whole picture before you jump into building your own private practice. If you feel you need more guidance

before setting up your practice, consider hiring a business coach to help you develop the skills you need before starting.

- If you don't want to work solo, you can take on a partner or hire other RDNs to work for you.
- As RDNs consider private practice, they must carefully assess the environment and their own commitment. There is nothing more gratifying than building your own successful business. Being a successful entrepreneur should be financially rewarding as well as professionally and personally fulfilling.

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