

Profile: Ralph H. Earle, PhD

In 1973, Ralph H. Earle founded Psychological Counseling Services, Ltd, or PCS, in Scottsdale, Arizona. His son, Marcus Earle, Ph.D., and he continued to build the group private practice specializing in the niche field of intensive outpatient therapy. Dr. Earle truly believes PCS could not have happened without relationships. Aspiring entrepreneurs can reference Dr. Earle's book, *Independent Practice for the Mental Health Profession, Growing Private Practice for the 21st Century* for more insights. Following is his story, as told to Kelli Forsythe Croissant, LAMFT.

I have always been an entrepreneur at heart. I say this because as far back as I can remember I enjoyed marketing. I started out selling refrigerator defrosters in high school and later went door-to-door selling Electrolux vacuums. These experiences taught me that I had a knack for interacting and connecting with people.

In college I realized my passion for impacting people would play out by either teaching religion or becoming a minister. At 21, I subsequently became a full-time pastor. I never envisioned that this would evolve into a full time career in counseling. However, while completing my master's degree at Harvard Divinity I found myself limited as a "preacher" working with hurting people. While witnessing marriages and families that were falling apart I concluded that I didn't have the skill set or competency I wanted to help these people. Hence, I went back to school for a Ph.D. in family psychology. My hopes were that by becoming proficient in both the fields of psychology and marriage and family therapy, I could better address family needs.

Marriage and family therapy quickly stole my heart. By the conclusion of my education, I was convinced that I was meant to work full-time counseling families. Thus, I founded Interfaith Counseling Center in 1970, which was funded by 19 churches. Within a year, a compilation of factors along with an insatiable desire to be as unlimited as possible in helping clients, I felt compelled to make yet another transition in my career.

The decision to transition from my role as a pastor into private practice was gut-wrenching. The night before I was going to resign I was pensive. Stepping outside of my church role for the first time required that I redefine myself. I also had to reconcile the idea that I could both help people and make more money; I could be both a therapist and a businessperson. Thanks to the loving guidance of a close friend, who was a part of the medical community, I made the leap into private practice by joining an OB/GYN group with him from 1971-1973. This experience paved the way for starting my own private practice in several ways by: helping me attain a level of legitimacy in the medical community, allowing me to connect with clients and professionals in a more comprehensive way, providing a supportive venue to express ideas that I was very passionate about, and letting me earn some name recognition along the way.

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The evolution of my career in private practice continued as I was extremely blessed to serve in state and national leadership positions with AAMFT. Not only did I get to know the people in the field who were the first generation of marriage and family therapists but many of them became close friends. It was invigorating watching the field grow and gain recognition and validation. Consequently, when I founded Psychological Counseling Services, Ltd., (PCS) in 1973, the subsequent growth of my practice was very organic; I was able to do what I loved with the leverage of knowledge and support from amazing leaders in the emerging field of marriage and family therapy.

PCS has continued to provide the venue to synergize all the things that I love, the relationships and experiences that have enriched my life. I have been able to help and minister to people through marriage and family therapy while having the autonomy to create my own schedule. I have thrived in an environment where I can think freely and creatively while receiving support, encouragement and feedback from the people around me. These values shape the environment I have tried to cultivate at PCS.

The PCS family has allowed me to be both a therapist and an entrepreneur and this is part of what makes it such a successful experience for our clients. The Intensive Outpatient Process provides a product that is both meaningful and marketable. This process was born out of my love of being part of a team of professionals, and out of my intrinsic impatient personality when it comes to helping people grow; I wanted to be a part of a group that valued impatience in terms of how it can help people in the shortest amount of time possible. Being a part of a group that in a fairly short period of time can be life changing for people who come here gives me much joy.

The success of PCS is also dependent on our ability to function as a team. This is why I strive to endorse people who do things differently than I do. Just as my development as a therapist was a result of the relationships and the combined knowledge of my peers, the intensive process is structured to benefit our patients by drawing from the strengths of the various therapists within the PCS family. Our clients are not dependent on me; rather they benefit from the unique, diversified experiences and skill sets of the team. The practice has grown to include a talented staff of 18 therapists. I am blessed that in my own practice, we model the systemic thinking and relational therapy that originally stole my heart.

To summarize, my creed to aspiring entrepreneurs is: I firmly believe we all have the choice to connect with the people around us, to learn from one another and abandon the all too typical hierarchical way of thinking where one person's ideas and experiences are more valuable than another's. By practicing the family system orientation in the way we approach other professionals, we can be part of a movement that transcends the turf battle of varying mental health degrees.

Lastly, I don't think there's a better product in the world than marriage and family therapy! I have always loved selling products but this by far beats selling Electrolux's! Most importantly, what 'keeps me going' is the stories told by our clients' families of new hope and new tools for a more fulfilling life.