

# HOW TO BECOME A PSYCHOLOGIST

William Doverspike, Ph.D.

Drdoverspike.com

770-913-0506

*“Without dreams, there is no need to work. Without work, there is no need to dream.” Anonymous*

## Becoming a Psychologist

Many years ago, when I dreamed I could change the world, I wanted to be a doctor, a teacher, a theologian. I had never even heard of being a psychologist. That was something I discovered when I began taking college courses in biology, theology, and introductory psychology. Later, when I changed my college major from pre-medicine to psychology, my father threatened to cut off my funding because I was wasting my time studying atheism rather than medicine. In retrospect, it was my first experience in learning how to live with managed care: I diversified my career by finding alternative funding sources, earning money as a fitness trainer in a gym at night, coaching a swim team in the summer, working in a hospital lab on weekends, and studying psychology in my spare time. It was my first lesson in learning how to finance a career in psychology.

Twenty five years have come and gone, and I am still finding new ways of funding my career in psychology. I sometimes laugh when I realize that I earn more money training dogs than I do when providing emergency mental health services to multi-million dollar corporations. It is still a curious but profitable paradox to me when corporate officers pay cash for coaching services, rather than leaving their executive fingerprints on a mental health case manager's record form. I earn more money advising hospital administrators how to do things right than I used to earn when I was telling their patients what they were doing wrong. I have learned from my lawyer how to make money doing that which I do best--writing long reports--as well as doing that which I do most--talking on the phone.

It has been even more enjoyable to work for free. It is a paradox that I now charge for the services that I used to do for free, so that I can give away for free the services for which I used to charge. It is rewarding to hear the dreams of adolescents whose futures have no bounds, and to listen freely to the childhood stories of nursing home residents who have no memory of yesterday. It is satisfying to provide pro bono consultations to religious organizations trying to develop counseling centers. It is even more satisfying to give my time freely teaching minority students who are young enough to be my children. Best of all, it is gratifying to provide Sunday dinners to the poor preacher who paid my college tuition.

Many years ago, when I dreamed I could change the world, I wanted to be a doctor, a teacher, a theologian. Now, when I sometimes still struggle to change myself, I discover that I am all of these and more: I have become a psychologist.

At the 2002 convention of the American Psychological Association, a psychologist named Steven Walfish reported results from a career survey of psychologists. Dr. Walfish identified a total of 180 areas of profession practice, including a dozen of the activities which are woven into the above narrative.

Footnote: Here is a list of 25 career activities suggested in the editorial: (1) majoring in psychology (2) teaching graduate and undergraduate psychology courses; (3) contracting with managed care companies; (3) conducting motivational counseling, seminars, and workshops; (4) providing sports psychology services; (5) conducting research and laboratory experiments; (6) training animals such as dogs, dolphins, and primates; (7) providing critical incident debriefing; (8) providing executive coaching; (9) providing peer review and case management; (10) consulting with medical directors and

hospital administrators; (11) providing organizational and management psychology services; (12) conducting inpatient hospital consultations; (13) providing forensic services, expert testimony, and consultation; (14) writing reports, articles, and books; (15) providing telephone consultations, Internet counseling, and video-conferencing; (16) assisting in pet therapy and pet-assisted activities; (17) performing cognitive testing, neuropsychological evaluations, and neuropsychological rehabilitation; (18) teaching and consulting in geropsychology; (19) providing hospice care and nursing home consultations; (20) consulting with religious organizations; (21) practicing community psychology; (22) working in public mental health centers; (23) teaching and tutoring private students; (24) leading a support group; and (25) providing volunteer work and pro bono consultations.

### **About the Author**

*Dr. Doverspike is an Adjunct Professor in the doctoral clinical training program of the Department of Psychology at Emory University. He is also an Adjunct Professor in the counseling program at Richmond Graduate University, where he has taught Addictions Counseling since 2011. He holds board certification Diplomates in Clinical Psychology (ABPP) and Neuropsychology (ABPN). He was a President (2003-2004) of the Georgia Psychological Association (GPA), Editor of the Georgia Psychologist magazine (1997-2008), member of the GPA Executive Committee (1997-2008), and member of the GPA Ethics Committee (1995-2008). He maintains a private practice at the Atlanta Counseling Center.*

### **References**

Doverspike, W. F. (2002). Becoming a psychologist, *Georgia Psychologist*, 56(1), 4.

**Copyright © 2002 by William F. Doverspike, Ph.D.  
Content last updated 2018**

The correct citation for this article is Doverspike, W. F. (2002). Becoming a psychologist, *Georgia Psychologist*, 56(1), 4. Retrieved from <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>