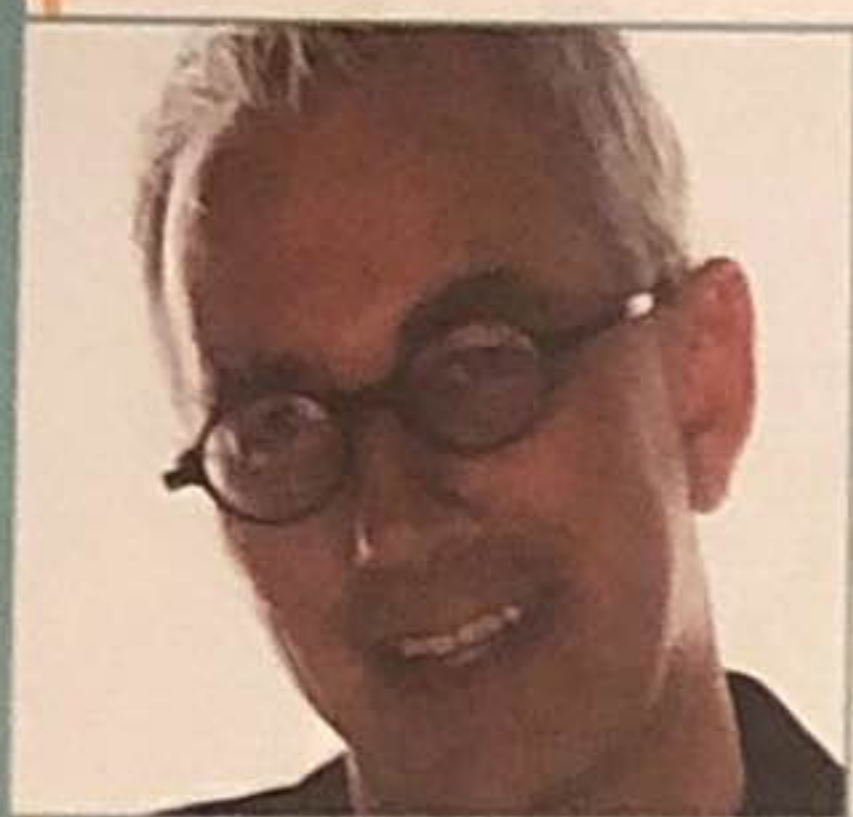


## Profile: Bill O'Hanlon, MS



Bill O'Hanlon, LMFT, has written 29 books, speaks internationally, teaches people how to write books and get them published, how to become successful speakers, to use the Web to spread their ideas and set up ongoing sources of passive income.

### My "Indiana Jones" Life as an Entrepreneurial Therapist

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, there is a moment when Indy is between a rock and a hard place. He is standing at the edge of a chasm that is too wide to jump across. He kicks a rock over the edge of the cliff and can't hear it hit bottom. He can see no way to cross. But he can't turn back. The bad guys have shot his father and Indy needs to cross the chasm to bring back the Holy Grail to heal his father. All of a sudden, he solves the puzzle from his Latin-based guidebook. He must step out into nothingness.

I took that step in 1981. Having been trained as a marriage and family therapist and having worked at addiction treatment centers and community mental health centers, I started a private practice; tired of mind-numbingly boring meetings and endless, needless paperwork and having to work hours I didn't like for small amounts of money. I was ill equipped for private practice, never having been schooled in marketing or business practices. Initially, I had a lot of time on my hands that I used to get a lot better at guitar and read all those books I'd been meaning to read.

Things began to look up when I used some of my free time to plan and deliver a series of seminars for local therapists. I was pretty terrible at marketing and organizing these too, but I read a few marketing books and gradually began to make a little money. I was passionate about my topic (initially I taught about Milton Erickson's work, since I had studied with him in the 70s). But these seminars had an unexpected side benefit, as well. Therapists started referring their challenging clients to me. They also began coming to me for therapy, since they had gotten to know, like and trust me while attending my seminars. One of the therapists who attended a workshop hired me as a consultant for his staff. I began to do more supervision.

I did have some moments of trepidation. I would stop and think: If I don't bring in the money, no one else will pay me. I won't be able to pay the bills. But, despite some cash-flow challenges at times, I stayed out of the poorhouse and bankruptcy court. After several years of being on my own, I relaxed a bit.

After 10 years of doing seminars, participants were beginning to pressure me to write a book about the material I was teaching. Write a book? Me? No way. I was a terrible writer; had little patience for sitting at a typewriter (yes, this was in those ancient days), and I knew nothing about the publishing industry. But the pressure continued and to my surprise, I wrote two books (blood on the keyboards) that came out the same year (1987). The first one took me three years and the second seven months. This brought more invitations to speak, sometimes from international sponsors.

At this point, I began to cut back on my clinical practice, since I was busy and since my speaking engagements were bringing in much more income than the practice. First, I went to a 2/3-time practice, then to a half-time practice.

I wrote my first 10 books or so for therapists, then got an agent and started to write some books for the general public. One of my books (*Do One Thing Different*, HarperCollins, 1999) got me onto Oprah as a featured expert and that led to a big influx of cash from that book, almost as much as I made in a year from speaking three times a month.

But I was busy. Way too busy. I worked much more than I would have if I had been working for someone else. Because the more I worked, the better job I did. And the more money I made. I became a bit work-obsessed. When most of my work started coming through e-mail, being an information junkie already, I spent most of

Having worked for myself for so many years, I feel surprisingly secure.

my days at my home office on e-mail. I loved what I did, perhaps too much. I slept less than I liked. I got out of shape. My relationships with friends and family suffered.

Several years ago, a confluence of two books created a big shift for me. I was listening to a book on tape by Michael Gerber called *The E-Myth Revisited*, in which Gerber took people like me to task for thinking we were entrepreneurs. What I was, Gerber explained, was a professional service provider. No matter how much I worked, I was trading my time for money. If I became disabled, so that I could not work, I would have no income (aside from my book royalties, which heavily depended on my speaking to promote). An entrepreneur is someone who builds a business with systems and products that make money when he or she is not there to work or run it. This hit me hard. I thought I had a business and was an entrepreneur, but he persuaded me that I didn't have a business and wasn't really an entrepreneur. I resolved to correct that and create a business.

The second book I read that affected me strongly was by Tim Ferriss. It was called *The Four-Hour Workweek*. In it, Ferriss told the story of being an e-mail-addicted workaholic who melted down and

realized he had become an entrepreneur to free himself, but that he was actually a slave to work. I identified and went to work changing my work habits and business so that much of what I did was automated and I needed to work less.

I stopped my clinical practice. That freed up some hours. I invested time creating a Web site that automated the process of sponsors hiring me and getting all the materials they needed to organize and advertise the workshops or talks I would be doing for them. That freed up about 12 more work hours a month. I used this "extra" time to automate and eliminate other time-wasters and create more and more online products to spread the ideas I am passionate about around the world and bring in even more automatic income.

I now work only a few hours a week, when I am not traveling and teaching seminars. I exercise almost every day of the week. I've lost 15 pounds of the mid-life tummy I put on during the frantically busy years. I have a long distance relationship that wouldn't be possible if I hadn't made this change, since I spend a week or so a month in another city with my partner.

I remember when managed care came in to therapy-land. Most of the therapists I knew were freaked out about it. It

barely registered for me. I made most of my money outside my clinical work and had mostly paying clients (or people I saw pro-bono because I could afford to). Now I see a similar reaction to the economic meltdown and decreases in people's retirement accounts or financial strains due to layoffs. Having worked for myself for so many years, I feel surprisingly secure. I also have a source of retirement income that does not require my presence or that much time.

I don't know if you remember that Indiana Jones movie and what happened, but when he finally worked up the nerve to step out into nothingness, it turned out there was a bridge there all the time that was virtually invisible from his angle. He made it across safely. So have I. "It's a leap of faith," Indy declared. That's what it takes to be an entrepreneurial therapist. You need to step out in faith. If you work hard and work smart and follow your passion, the bridge will be there. ■