

# Today's Transcription Cornucopia: Finding One's Place Within the Maze

by Sidney K. Moormeister, Ph.D.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could.

Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken* (1.1-4)

**M**y involvement with the world of medical transcription has been sporadic and has spanned four decades. Originally sampled as a way to support myself through graduate school, medical transcription quickly became my proverbial golden goose. It became my funding source for my doctoral studies. Decades later after disability forced early retirement from academia, it provided a way to work while I was housebound. It now provides a steady income to support the works of the small Franciscan community to which I belong. Medical transcription, while neither an endowment nor a trust fund, has been a wonderful source of support—and a field which has provided constant challenge and enjoyment.

Today's world of transcription bears little resemblance to the world which I was allowed to enter in 1968 based solely on my premedical education and ability to turn a clever phrase. Today's world is much more sophisticated, challenging, demanding, and yes, lucrative. (My first job earned me the princely sum of six hundred dollars a month and I felt, well, like a princess.)

I recently posed the question of how to find one's place in the medical transcription world on a chat board called MT Chat. (I highly recommend this resource to anyone in our profession. It can be found at: [www.MTChat.com](http://www.MTChat.com).) The participants have varied backgrounds. Highly successful medical transcription service owners (MTSOs) with decades of experience freely share their advice with newbies and wannabes. While we by no means always agree on points of view (nor should we), we participate in a give-and-take dynamic which is not only helpful but inspirational.

Some dynamic and useful ideas were expressed in answer to my question. Here are some nuggets of wisdom that arose from our discussion. I present them in no particular order of

importance, hoping instead that you will prioritize them according to your own needs, taking and implementing what is helpful to you.

**1. Make a “wait and see” assessment of all of the possibilities open to you, then do something positive to move toward implementing one or more of them.** Start small. It is unrealistic to suppose that as a newly-minted MT, you are going to be able to engage in head-to-head competition with a large national in a wide area. You may be able to beat the big guys on a small scale (one or two contracts) and build from there. (Who knows, your fledging company may, over time, evolve into the next big national; the caveat is that these things generally come incrementally rather than overnight.) Do not be afraid to bid against the big folks. I know several people who have done so and won.

**2. Ask tough questions and demand clear answers.** Whether you are evaluating your first contract or making expansion plans, ask probing, pointed questions designed to yield the information you need. If that information cannot be provided, you need not deal with those who cannot answer your questions. If they are unclear about the terms of the deal, how can they be clear about on-time payment and other terms of your contract?

**3. Spend a quiet day or evening with yourself and ask, “Who am I, where am I going, and what do I want?”** Be realistic. If you want to sit in the driver's seat as an MTSO, are you honestly willing to put up with all of the grief and endless details that it takes to get you there? Are you a good salesperson? Can you “schmooze” a potential client? (Yes, that is very important.) Or would you be happier working for someone else who will handle all of the details? I work for a huge national company. I do not want to be bothered with billing, soliciting clients, troubleshooting day-to-day problems, and the myriad of endless details that pop up like snakes on the head of Medusa throughout the day. I want to plant my seat in the seat, focus all of my attention on giving a quality product at the highest speed possible, and be finished for the day. My national has

superb technical support, there is plenty of work, and my check has never once been even a day late. This “hands off” style works for me. Others might indeed want to sit in the driver’s seat. Knowing what one wants is the first step to getting it.

**4. Know yourself, be honest with yourself, and be true to your needs.** Being honest with oneself is essential to making an informed choice among the seemingly countless opportunities in today’s transcription marketplace. Knowing yourself needs to be coupled with the next step:

**5. Play to your strengths.** Although I am a board-certified forensic examiner and routinely work with sophisticated questions of chemistry, I cannot seek a career as a CPA or try to enroll in business school. My own CPA teases me endlessly about the fact that I do chemistry all day but cannot balance a checkbook. I retort that checkbook math is processed in a different part of the brain than chemistry math. And there may be truth to that, since my CPA admits that he nearly failed Chemistry 101. The moral of the story is to play to your strengths.

**6. How broad is your vision?** Visualize where you want to be five years from now. How do you conceive getting there? I frequently make use of a technique called “mind mapping.” You simply take a blank piece of paper and write down all of the various ways of achieving what you want. Don’t even be concerned about writing neatly or in an orderly manner. This is brainstorming on an individual scale. You are not allowed to criticize your choices or statements. Just throw them all out there to be seen and evaluate them dispassionately. There is something about this process that lends itself to clarity.

**7. What pleases you?** At the end of the day, what will give you satisfaction? Money? A title and a corner office? More time with your family? The opportunity to be at home with your children? Don’t make your choice based on what you “should” do—base it on what pleases you and meets your needs. You are not entering the medical transcription world to please someone else (as least I hope you aren’t); you need and deserve to have your needs met.

**8. Count your blessings.** The process of finding one’s niche is not for sissies. Just as you have to kiss a lot of the proverbial frogs in order to find the right prince (or princess), so must you pay your dues in the world of medical transcription. This sometimes means working undesirable shifts, putting up with less than adequate bosses, and gritting your teeth as you learn to accommodate to the unique accents of the ubiquitous ESLs (physicians who speak English as a second language). If you can do all of this with equanimity, with a smile on your face and with hope in your heart, you will survive and succeed. During times of challenge, I actually pull out my journal and write a list of my blessings, the things that make my life real and bearable. Somehow the world looks brighter after I do that.

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**9. Remember that finding one’s place requires a different process than that of acquiring knowledge.** As one seasoned MT put it, it is a process of discovery rather than knowledge-gathering. Knowing the difference between the two is crucial.

**10. Be true to yourself.** To me, this is the most important part of any search; it is the foundational bedrock upon which your career will be based. Do not compromise your ideals or desires. Do not support individuals or organizations whose ethics do not reflect your values. Do not listen when people tell you it cannot be done.

There is a famous story about Robert Fulton’s invention of the steamboat. As he was preparing to launch it, the awaiting crowd chanted, “You’ll never get it started.” Once the steamboat was powerfully making its way down the river, the crowd began to chant, “You’ll never get it stopped.”

Don’t listen to naysayers and predictors of doom. Our profession is not going anywhere but up. You can ascend with it if you will be true to yourself and never, EVER give up.

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