The field of Suicidology has, since its inception, been considered a subspecialty of mental health. In the past half-century, the field of Suicidology, while growing, remains a rather specific area of expertise even though we recognize that all mental health professionals should be trained in the assessment and management of suicidality. Given the small community of suicidologists, only a small number of these individuals will go into forensic practice. While this is usually done as a part-time or side aspect to one’s professional endeavors, I am, periodically, approached by people inquiring about “how do you become a forensic suicidologist?” This is a rather straightforward question, with a less than easy response. The short answer is that there is no clearly delineated pathway into this professional endeavor, at least regarding forensic Suicidology. As for any subject-matter expert, it is critical that one well be well versed and trained around the subject for which one is being approached to be “an expert.” However, once one has the core education, skill, and clinical practice experience, then what?

Fortunately, there is an incredibly useful resource that succinctly, yet clearly, outlines how one can go proceed in Developing A Forensic Practice. William H. Reid’s guide for forensic practice is a very clear roadmap on how mental health professionals can become more effective and successful forensic experts. The divergent views, approaches, thought processes and needs of attorneys intersects with mental health professionals in the role of forensic practice and there can be challenges and issues in bringing these paradigms together in one role. Reid’s position as past-president of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law uniquely qualifies him to provide the expertise and guidance to mental health professionals, including suicidologists, entering the legal fray. The book itself is a reflection of Reid’s assertion that being brief, wherever possible, is to be chosen over excessive verbosity, while ensuring that the core and salient features of one’s writing be clearly stated and transparent. In fact, the actual “text” of the book comprises only one third of the volume. Reid’s ability to synthesize the most salient elements of forensic practice into, roughly, one hundred of pages of wisdom makes for a powerful, practical, and convenient resource.

Somewhat surprisingly, though likely due to his NOT being a lawyer, Developing A Forensic Practice; Operations and Ethics for Experts is easily readable and quite engaging with a wonderful dose of humor and levity, while still remaining focused on delivering the key pillars of a forensic practice. This “how-to” manual covers everything from how to respond to initial inquiries and billing to ethics, report writing, and examining the lawyer-expert relationship. Even more helpful is Reid’s inclusion of a plethora of appendices that provides readers to numerous templates and suggestions on the various documentation requirements that can arise in forensic practice. The applicability and utility of the appendix documents cannot be understated.

The hidden gem in this book is the concluding chapter, written by an attorney, Skip Simpson. Simpson’s contribution in providing a front-line “this is what I look for and need in an expert” is the perfect conclusion. The combination of Reid’s years of forensic practice and Simpson’s blunt, attorney perspective make this book an essential tool for any mental health (or medical)
professional who is considering, or is already in, forensic practice. Even experienced forensic experts will find easy-to-apply ways that they can improve their practice.