

## Tami Struessel Speech – Fall Symposium 2010

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, *you* are a leader” (Slide)

Good morning!

Preparation for this speech was quite the learning experience for me. First and foremost, I learned that apparently, my most novel ideas show up in my head between 3:30 and 4:30 in the morning, waking me from a complete dead sleep! I learned that it is possible to have 275 versions of a speech over a 2 month period. But, most importantly, I learned a lot by dialoging with people and problem solving. From that, I feel you will find something meaningful in what I have to say today.

Here goes:

So I'm starting with a quote from John Quincy Adams “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, *you* are a leader”

First, I would like to thank all the leaders in my life, both professional and personal. These people have helped me reign in my limitless energy and are trying to help me learn to listen more than talk, which as those who know me can attest, is no small feat...☺..... They have made me the person I am, and helped me to envision the person I could become. Without their mentoring and modeling, I wouldn't have the courage to be standing up here, nor would I have done the things that got me this award in the first place.

For my Mom who, despite a seriously bad turn of events, managed to raise 3 children to be productive members of society. She above all else, taught me to believe the sky is the limit.

To Michelle and the rest of my family, who have provided the kind of support you can only get from people who have seen you at your worst, and still love you anyway....

To my various teachers, supervisors and colleagues from whom I've learned so much over the past 21 professional years.

I'd like to say, I honestly believe we are part of one of the best professions in the world, 4<sup>th</sup> best in the country according to CNN on Wednesday. But what the rankings don't say is that few jobs allow someone to spend time with people, and help them in the way that we can. I know many in this room feel the same way I do, that I am thankful to have found a profession which provides meaning, challenges me, and allows me to make a difference in people's lives.

And one of the reasons this profession is so terrific is because of the experience of people who came before most of us. There are some therapists and non-therapists who have been around for decades and have crafted a strong professional presence here in Colorado. We all owe a debt of gratitude to those who have come before us whose efforts are evident in this presence.

I think it is important to acknowledge that it is the APTA who has spearheaded those efforts. And who is the APTA? For a long time, it seems that the perception was that the APTA was the Chapter office. But the Chapter is actually us, you and me. This will be revisited in a bit.

It's also important to think about where the profession is headed in the future, but most importantly, who are the physical therapists who will lead us there? Who are the leaders of the future? Are we, as John Quincy Adams said, "inspiring others to dream more,... learn more,... do more... and become more?"

Next, I'd like to tell you a little bit about my background, because I feel it is relevant to my topic today.

My first jobs as a PT were in acute care, and a combined rehab/SNF facility, and then as a traveling therapist. These first years really showed me the importance of the diversity of physical therapy practice.

Ultimately, I came back to Denver, to work in outpatient private practice. This clinic had a focus on continuing education that I had never seen before. One of my first memories was seeing the continuing education list of the owner and clinic director. I was astounded that it was many, many pages long. They also supported APTA membership, and it was assumed that all therapists would be members.

Although I had been a member since I was a student, this was the first time I felt like my membership really made a difference. Both the focus on continuing education and APTA membership made quite the impression, and I realize now that that place was exactly where I needed to be and those individuals were some of my FIRST professional MENTORS.

After many years working in private practices, I made a move to teaching at CU. I have to say I have found an incredible environment of friendship, inclusion and growth that everyone should have the opportunity to find. Surrounded by so many people with such diverse knowledge and a constant goal of collaboration, everyday is a growth experience.

I also have to say that now in the academic setting, I use APTA resources on a daily basis. So with that background, I've decided to talk a little bit about membership because although I am a staunch supporter, I feel I look at membership a little differently than some in the Association.

Here's what I mean:

First and foremost, I think membership is important, even essential, and that membership is a personal responsibility, and honestly that every PT should be honored to join. From that point, I take a little different approach.

I've been a member since I started PT School in 1989, but I definitely wasn't an early bloomer. No PT student of the year for me. As a student pretty much what I remember about the Chapter meetings in Pennsylvania where I went to school, is how much I really enjoyed the Saturday evening social events... Hopefully, this conference makes a stronger impression!

I know many in this audience and across the state have been members for far longer than I and have been instrumental in developing the profession at the state and national level in ways I can only imagine. But, interestingly, many others choose NOT to be members. Nationally, and in Colorado, around 1/3 of the Physical Therapists are members. When I've asked why, there are many reasons given, largely centered around money and that sort of thing, but it seems more complex than that.

I've thought a lot about this question, and dialoged with both members and non-members. Why do people choose NOT to be a member of the only organization representing their professional interests? ..... OK, so this is where I start to beat up on non-members and talk about how much the members do for them. Trust me, that's not where I'm going with this.

It seems there are 2 parties who are influential in whether or not a PT decides to become a member. First is the PT themselves, who is the ultimate decision maker. At some point, they decide that membership is a *discretionary* expense.....or an *essential* expense.

I believe pretty early on, physical therapists have experiences or interactions with people like you and like me, during school or shortly thereafter which have an influence. "How are we influencing this decision?" Please remember, they listen and they hear us, occasionally for better or for worse. And, sometimes students come back and tell faculty what they hear.

I don't know for sure how it is in other states, but the bottom line is that we hear that there are some individuals who are virulently anti-APTA, who feel completely disenfranchised, and others who feel frustrated with the Chapter. First, if you are one of those people who have had more negative than positive things to say about the APTA, remember, you make a lasting impression on that student. Ultimately, since the APTA is our ONLY organization, it is likely that venting to this audience serves no one. A number of clinicians seem to feel that the APTA "doesn't represent them." Why is that?

I can't say I've always agreed with National or even Chapter decisions. I wasn't the first one on the DPT bandwagon, and there have been some things at the Chapter level I haven't agreed with. But I also know that differences in opinion can be expected, and that if I want something done differently, becoming more, not less involved is the most constructive option. And what I know overwhelmingly is that because of APTA, we are a stronger profession.

Some leaders believe that individual therapists themselves are the only ones in on the decision of whether membership is *discretionary* or *essential*. I believe this approach, which emphasizes how much the members are doing for all the slackers out there, could be summed up as the "either you're with us or you're against us" approach.... This approach relies on making others feel guilty. In my opinion, I believe the "guilt" approach to growing membership actually breeds resentment more than truly encourages involvement.

I would argue that the second parties involved in the decision of any one individual to join or not join, are the existing Association members, non-therapist decision-makers, and Chapter leaders who make decisions everyday which may entice people to become members, or actually drive them away.

So what if we took a different approach than the "make them feel guilty approach?" Perhaps the "toot your own horn" approach, where we make membership seem so valuable, they can't resist?

In the last couple years, the profession has embarked on a laudable PR campaign aimed at the public called Move Forward. I think it's a great idea, and have great hopes that it might at least reduce the number of people who think PT means personal trainer, or who say "I wonder if you need a degree to do that job?"

So in that vein, is there a way to spread a new message within the profession? A message that says, we want you,.. we need you,.. you are valued. Or maybe we want you, we need you, help US Move Forward!...

A few personal experiences have shaped how I feel about this issue. Years ago at a conference just like this one, I guess I was in some way inspired, and I remember filling out the "Becoming Involved" form and returning it with the expectation I would get a call. Interestingly, I never heard back.

Awhile later, I remember having a conversation with Kim Bozich about her membership on the Governmental Affairs Committee of the Chapter. She was very encouraging and asked if I would be interested in joining. Although I didn't immediately join, that discussion really stuck with me. I don't believe that until that time I knew you could just "join" a committee. I think I thought you had to be appointed or something, but I definitely didn't know you could just show up.

After becoming more involved several years later, I reflected on these contrasting experiences, on both filling out the form, and on Kim's invitation. I thought both ASKING people individually to become involved was important, and following up when interest was expressed EQUALLY important. These experiences really drove home how important communication can be.

So instead of just talking about problems, how can we make this happen? Here are some thoughts on how the Chapter, its administrative office and every member might encourage growth and participation.

Let's talk first about ways to enhance communication and participation amongst existing members.

- First, would it make sense to create a Membership Committee with a focus on Outreach and Communication, and especially Transparency, so people might better understand where their dues are going? Now, I'm not saying we need to enhance communication so much that we start Twittering, but it seems that we could better take advantage of available resources to grow membership.
- Another challenge is to grow diversity. Does our current membership, and Board of Directors look like the face of PT as a whole? I would like to recognize Nicole Parker, Lisa Hymes, Jessica Fuentes, Krista Welch and Lisa Dannemiller for spearheading the battle to develop the Pediatric Special Interest group, and the Programming Committee for offering the first pediatric specific programming in many, many years. As I work my way through this speech, remember efforts of members like these to advocate for inclusion in the Chapter. The next time you vote, whether in person, or by proxy, consider Chapter leadership diversity in your decision.
- Another area of potential growth is of Physical Therapist Assistants. I believe many PTA's have felt disenfranchised in this state, not the least of which is because of the lack of license or regulation. There is still some work to be done based on the DORA Sunset Review, but with an APTA goal of PTA regulation I hope PTA's can feel that they are valued and welcomed to participate more fully in the Chapter.
- Next, I've heard a ground rule used in many situations, most recently by Jody Gandy at the CU Clinical education Strategic Planning meeting last Spring. It goes something like this... "Instead of saying how it can't be done because of this rule or this barrier, instead, take the attitude "how can we make this happen." Can this become the motto of the Chapter?

- For example, and this is hitting home today. Are there policies or actions which unintentionally discourage participation in Chapter activities? For instance, why are there requirements to pay to participate in what are clearly administrative Chapter functions like this awards ceremony or a lunchtime business meeting. These types of policies and decisions have a chilling effect on people's willingness to be involved in the process. Orthopedic programming is more financially viable, and will continue to be the primary offering. Knowing that not everyone will choose to go to this programming, why is there a link either to Programming attendance, or a separate fee to participate? Instead, let's *encourage* people who want to come and participate, whether or not they are interested in, or choose to come to the clinical programming.
- Next, in order to grow sustained involvement after graduation, I encourage further development of the new graduate and student mentoring initiatives. Both Universities have made efforts at increasing student involvement. Although the tactics have been different, I think both schools can be proud of its graduates and the involvement in the Chapter. But what happens to the other students after graduation, and to people who move here from other places? According to the DORA Sunset Review, in 2008-9 147 new therapists were licensed by examination, but another 231 came in by endorsement.
- I challenge all committees and task forces to invite both students and enthusiastic new graduates individually to directly participate in their Chapter activities. Tell them: We need you, we want you, and you are valued.... With ever growing loans from 7 plus years of school, we need them to feel APTA membership is an essential, not discretionary expense.
- And in a similar vein, can we solicit members regularly to become involved in special task forces or committees so members all feel they are part of the solution. A key point to remember is that active members rarely see the expense of membership as discretionary, so a focus on not only gaining members, but also encouraging more people to be involved is essential.
- Perhaps create a goal of 1-2 new members for every project or task force developed, and every time an appointment is considered, try to include folks from as many settings and areas around the state as possible. A great example is the Sunset task force. This is a terrific group, full of involved members who truly have the best interest of the profession as their motivating force.

These people would be the perfect role models for someone who has never been involved in the Chapter. This would have been a great mentoring opportunity and chance to increase Chapter diversity. Again, a message that we need you, we want you, help us Move Forward could gain some new interest in these types of Chapter activities.

- And another very important point-let's be sure that the person who sticks their neck out by coming to a Committee meeting where they know no one or, running for office, win or lose, feels fully supported and are thanked for their participation. That gratitude may make the difference between a one time event, and a new active member.

And now, let's talk about something that has the potential to recruit new members, make existing members happier, and maybe even enhance communication with those on the fence about writing that check.

Does each PT in the state know the VALUE of membership? There are tremendous resources available, and governmental actions and lobbying that I believe go unnoticed by your average PT. Could we make it a goal to show non-members what they are missing through enhanced communication? Every one of us likely knows someone in the clinic, or even sitting next to us that isn't a member. Do we dare ask them to join us in our efforts to Move Forward?

I believe enhancing Communication at the Chapter level may change some people's perception out there and help Physical Therapists to see the value of the Association. Could we as a Chapter be more transparent, and do more to promote our good works? I think we all know from our own experiences, people will spend money, if they feel that what they are receiving in return is of value.

Because of email and email newsletters we now have an opportunity to share our good works including the works of the Committees and Task Forces, with very little cost. Word of those good works will likely trickle down to other PT's around the state.

How, you may ask, can the word start to get out to non-members? If we truly believe that each of us, you and I, are APTA, we can help spread that infectious enthusiasm ...

- Tell recent graduates every time you hear about APTA's efforts nationally on the hill at getting physical therapists included in student loan repayment programs.
- Talk about it every time the APTA website is used to solve a clinical problem using Open Door, or when an administrative problem is solved by the abundant resources available.
- Be sure everyone knows when you see the strong position our lobbyists Betsy Murray and Ellen Caruso have established over many decades of relationship building at the state capital, putting us in the ideal place as we face Sunset. Or when you notice Ellen is on a first name basis with Rose McCool who regulates our practice at DORA.

- Talk about the great work of the Chapter Programming Committee to bring in nationally known speakers to share their expertise.
- Celebrate efforts like the new pediatric Special Interest Group, and encourage others to move forward with creation of additional diverse SIG's. Tell everyone how important it is that each and every committee and task force has diverse representation, and invite them to be one of those people.
- Participate in the Combined Sections Meeting and talk to everyone about what an incredible educational and networking experience you have.
- Be sure every PT knows about the Chapter Sunset task force and the great work this group has done over the past year. Efforts which will eventually affect every PT, members and not, every day....
- Play a part in being a mentor by participating in the Student and new graduate Mentoring Committee, or taking students in YOUR clinic. Use the opportunity to model and talk to the students about the benefits of membership, take them along to a Committee meeting, and generally let them know the value you place on membership...

Some might say we are giving away the farm if we share too much information, or that broader sharing may get out to those who wish to do us harm, or that we are benefitting non-members on the financial backs of existing members... But if people don't know what is going on, how do they know what they are missing? Non-members are already reaping the benefits, they just don't know what those benefits are.

Can we all approach goals of Chapter growth and diversity as something that is achievable, rather than fraught with insurmountable barriers? No one is intentionally limiting participation, but we need to consider the effect of rules which may inhibit the growth of diversity in the Chapter such as restrictive or expensive SIG rules or voting rules which restrict paid member access to voting. Are we willing to take the attitude "how can we make this happen"?

Can we get to the point where writing that check feels a little less painful because it is a small price to pay for the ways we KNOW APTA makes our practice better?

Again, I think it is essential to honor those individuals who have indeed been carrying the load for PT's in this state for many years. And now I also challenge each and every member to participate individually in the growth of new members, by telling them "we need you, we want you, help US move forward".....

I would like to thank the Chapter and its leaders for this honor. I can say that through APTA membership and activities, and because of many of you, I have grown as both a physical therapist and as a person.

And remember that in the Challenge of growing membership, and encouraging others to be active, we are getting to the heart of John Quincy Adams quote: by your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more.