

Natalie Barr Lecture 2009

2020 — Dear Reader - This lecture was written in 2008. At that time many hand therapy colleagues expressed dissatisfaction adjusting to financial constraints imposed on our speciality. Rather than a research lecture, I address coping methods to manage this crisis without the impulse to change career direction. I challenged the audience to proportion their workday to insure life balance. To promote gratefulness, happiness and personal fulfillment (wellness) was perhaps a concept before its time. In recent years these coping methods have become more mainstream.

KHPLauckhardt 2020

The real Voyage of discovery
Consists not in seeking new landscapes
But in having new eyes
Marcel Proust

Welcome to San Francisco--I am deeply gratified that you have honored me with this award and thank you all for joining me here!! Last year your Nathalie Barr lecture by our esteemed colleague emphasized that knowledge gained by research validity is a fundamental component in achieving treatment excellence. This can not be disputed.

Today I veer away from research to present information that also affects us as hand therapists:

First : **American Society of Hand Therapists** our history:

The Society was created with enormous effort over a period of years. Over the years ASHT has matured into a highly respected entity. It has served us well and proven it's worth in many spheres. All members should be very proud of the progress that has been made since 1976.

Second: Most likely there will be a way to preserve the historic gains we have made and still adhere to the new Medicare coding regulations. We can not control many things in life but we can manage our response to them. If we mentally reframe our perspective and priorities, we might make the necessary changes more palatable.

The Hand therapist specialist has earned a level of recognition now. Earning specialization status for therapists was a hard won battle. It would be a travesty to surrender all the advances we have made in accepting defeat. I am inviting all of us to rethink how we respond to the financial challenges we are encountering. It can be done.
No drop outs please!

This is your ASHT history:

Over the last 30 years all of us have worked tirelessly to meet our goals. From my viewpoint as a Founder and second President of ASHT our efforts were not in vain. ASHT has enhanced our world-wide professional standing, public visibility, supported our educational programs and facilitated our network. Through education and research we can now demonstrate improved treatment outcomes.

Our beginnings:

1973 was an early time for rehabilitation as well as the dawn of my career in Hand Therapy. After working as a general therapist in a suburban hospital, I moved to New York City. I was hired by surgeon Robert W. Beasley MD who had newly completed a Hand Residency with William Littler MD. Specialization was a new medical concept and unheard of in therapy. I had no resources: no books, articles, conferences or experts as role models. As a result my patient treatments were based solely on creativity and imagination. Eager to learn more I visited Evelyn Mackin PT and Jim Hunter, MD at their Philadelphia Hand Center called "The Bakery". We both acknowledged we were desperate for guidelines, educational writings and proven methods for treatment outcomes. That began our lifelong collaboration as hand therapists, friends and crusaders for the cause of a society for hand therapy specialists.

To expand our knowledge beyond surgical texts ,we traveled to the 1974 meeting of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. Though it was strictly a surgical meeting we hoped to connect with other therapists attending. We reasoned that by collaborating as a network of therapists, both OT's and PT's specializing together ,we could build a foundation for valid treatment procedures.

At that meeting we posted a note on the ASSH community bulletin board –

" Therapists meet 8am in the coffee shop".

We found 4 recruits!

Discussions began OT's and PT's together, about how to help each other improve treatments. Our short term goal then was to form a unifying network -a hand therapist support group.

We all agreed our initial goals as therapy specialists should be:

Visibility, Credibility and Education.

Until that time OT and PT therapists were generalists. In hospital settings therapists had to rotate services with no special focus allowed. Only private practices owned by physicians could hire a therapist to specialize.

As specialist therapists we had no clout and no acknowledged credentials. Our only validation was the endorsement of the Hand surgeon who hired us. Our professional parent organizations were aggressively opposed to specialization. Ev and I as the Physical Therapists in the group were ostracized as defectors. They did not want independent factions or elitist spinoffs to "dilute their influence".

We persisted. Inspired by the coffee shop meetings, without experience or support in setting up a club or society, we barreled into fast forward. Many hand surgeons were not in favor of our independence; several expressed their displeasure. At ASSH they denied our appeal to join their society and initially they voted down funds to support us in our independent effort. I believe they termed us: **a flash in the pan!!!!**

We needed to develop a network of like-focused therapists- a support group or club. Inexperienced as we were, we drew up an "application form" to detail a candidate's hand therapy experience. It included the years of specialty practice and the percentage of hand cases seen in daily practice. It was our simplistic version however flawed. Some professionals were offended by the membership application and felt the surgeons stamp of approval was sufficient to join. It turned out to be a moot point in the end because legal incorporation is required before any group can solicit paying members. We scrapped that first attempt.

I investigated incorporation but lawyers in my NYC area were too rich for our pocketbooks. In 1976 we incorporated in Philadelphia costing us \$600 to do the deed! Split between the original 6 therapists -\$100 apiece, The American Society for Hand Therapists was born.

Our networking efforts were a challenge. Correspondence among us was letter writing in cursive; my handwriting was legible therefore I became secretary! That winter I fractured/dislocated my humerus. It was tough to correspond with my arm in a sling. 1976 was also before cheap telephone calls and copiers, before faxes, computers, email, web sites, and cell phones. Therapists did not make much money, expenditures were monitored closely as every stamp and long distance call was precious. Progress was slow and we were inexperienced.

Initially none of us could afford meeting in person. Our employee continuing education budget did permit attendance to the annual ASSH meetings. We made do with coffee shop board meetings.

Afterward we gathered in places near a Society board member –cutting costs by sharing rooms and dining in private homes. Perhaps due to these challenges the bonds between us grew deep. Our hand therapist family grew in numbers and lifetime friendships formed.

At first there were only about 100 of us -not enough funds to support our initial goals. We needed help to expand our membership numbers. For two years we hired a central business office but it became too expensive for our limited budget.

A critical turnaround came when media news releases of hand replantations gave us much needed publicity. This surgery fascinated the public and word spread that these delicate replantations required a specifically trained therapist. In time more microsurgeons recognized our value and how our work reflected well on them. Media reports gave us public exposure and credibility. With that some insurance companies began to acknowledge Hand Surgeons and later specialized therapists.

At the time of this media attention we still lacked specific education resources. This was before the “*Philadelphia Hand Rehabilitation*” conferences, before “*Current Concept*” hand conferences in NYC and before the first Hand therapy publication. After about 3 years of persistence the ASSH surgeons changed in attitude and acknowledged our value on the team. ASSH granted us \$1000.00 to assist with an education agenda. This was a major turn around and so began a new chapter in our history.

We are all eternally indebted to Evelyn Mackin PT, Judy Bell OT and Jim Hunter MD for conceiving the first edition of “*Hand Rehabilitation*” published in 1978 -the first published text specifically on Hand Therapy. For the contributing therapists it was our first attempt at professional writing, a bit amateur but a good beginning.

The concept of a hand “team” was slowly promoted thanks to the Philadelphia hand conferences. Therapists and doctors lectured side by side on the same podium—lecturing to the same audience-it was a first and a big step!. As a regular lecturer it makes me smile to remember developing our hand-made title slides in the clinic closet (also known as our dark room) or learning to use a macro lens to photograph hand close ups. How tricky it was to get the slides in the carousel machine just right and being careful not to drop them all over the floor. Don’t laugh it happened! No digital slides or Power Point then!

That was the beginning. We have worked diligently to direct ASHT toward our goals and land on solid financial footing. The current reality is that there is an assault on our manner of operation. The Medicare regulations now limit our reimbursable treatment procedures. This threatens our revenue stream. Therapists have been quitting the speciality. Private hand centers have already been forced to close. In order to remain profitable other centers feel compelled to increase the daily patient quota and slice treatment minutes. This comes at the expense of quality care and professional fulfillment. Insufficient support by doctors, insurance companies and even our own professional OT/PT colleagues has been frustrating. In this stressful environment hand therapists feel powerless and bitter.

Hand therapists ask me:

“Did I make the right choice in specializing? It took so much effort for so little reward.

Was ASHT able to help in this crisis? Does ASHT still meet our objectives and expectations? Was it all worth it?”

What to do?

A therapist's personal wellness and general fulfillment is a vital element in providing optimal therapy care. Our current financial dilemma detracts and distracts us from rendering that patient care. We acknowledge that recognition through proper compensation increases self pride and respect. If the value of wisdom and learned skill is not adequately compensated, self respect and overall happiness dwindles. Our lifestyles have molded around a certain level of income. It is stressful to face a potential loss of income. Given this stress, dissatisfaction predominates over fulfillment. If you must do with less how do you rebalance the scales toward happiness.

“Happiness is linked to how satisfied you are with what you do with your life.” Eric Weiner (Bliss p 15)

In the **right** work situation a therapist can deliver excellence of care, render treatment more efficiently and feel satisfaction in their chosen career. Matching the right work environment to the therapists' individual temperament is key to **happiness** and **gratitude**. If your work schedule dominates your time, this may be your opportunity to amplify other aspects of your life that lead toward wellness.

CHANGE

Let's talk about change. Staff satisfaction produces job loyalty but imposing high productivity is counterproductive. The likelihood is that staff will fatigue under the stress and quality patient care will suffer.

The deck of cards will begin to fall as they say.

Since my graduation from P.T. School 39 years ago, I have changed work environments five different times. Then there were few opportunities, now there are more diverse choices even for specialists. Hand therapists can now obtain loans and own their own practices. With the break of of the private practices, big business has moved in taking over some time consuming management pressures. There are larger hospital centers now allowing therapists to specialize. Each working environment has its own positives and negatives.

I ask you to reflect on your work schedule as it relates to time needed for your personal wellness. If you can not negotiate a balance maybe you need a change?

Don't be afraid of change or challenge

Change and variety can be positive —

challenge is an opportunity for personal growth!

My unsettled personal life placed me on a journey of different work environments. Each change turned out to be a progression in gaining my happy equilibrium. I eventually got that life balance I sought.

My hope is that by sharing my career odyssey –you might ponder your own journey. Perhaps it could give you the impetus to make a change or adapt without changing careers entirely.

My later life passion and challenge is Ballroom Dance. Like a professional career, competitive dance requires hours of practice learning; special tools like performance shoes and a flattering glittery dress. Like a career there are levels for advancement. Competition levels require different skills, the hairdo and the theatrical makeup and styling all factor to get your skills noticed by the judges. Testing makes most people nervous, as you wait in the queue, the last words you hear are:

“And don’t forget to smile.”

You conquer your challenges, master the skills needed and in the final analysis —

What is the journey worth if you don’t smile and enjoy the process???? Life needs a smile!

Just for fun - A video demonstrating the variety of Ballroom Dance:

The **Waltz** demonstrates— shows rise and fall, upper body rotation-grace and beauty personified

The **international tango** – slow steady stalking motions and secure level-no rises on the toes- upper body-legs travel down the dance floor

Foxtrot- same rise and fall, same upper body rotation but smoother flow- long gliding strides down the floor-

The **Viennese waltz** speeds the motion-speed and grace combined

Then the **Quickstep** – level steady movements, traveling at high speed down the floor

Just to complete the picture- the **Rhythm** dances the emphasis is not on graceful beauty but-a joyful sexy passion that lifts the soul as the lower body takes the driving rhythm and the upper body expresses emotion.

From the **Cha cha** – hips and fast footwork to

slower and sexy **Rumba** with tight controlled hip action and expressive arms to

Samba – joyful party mood with sexy hip-pelvic rolls

Paso Doble is flamenco drama personified —and finally

Jive -energetic fun bounce and fast legwork

Psychological research shows that in the long run experiences make people happier than possessions. Research findings presented by Ryan Howell, of San Francisco State University at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Annual meeting included:

The study of 154 subjects who recently purchased either material or **experiential** items in the last 3 months with the idea of making themselves happy. The study revealed a striking difference between the two groups. After 3 months they found that the initial joy of acquiring a material object fades. The purchases spent on experiences led to more happiness than material objects. The experiential purchases led to a sense of relatedness to others like friends / family possibly fulfilling their need for social bonding.

All are focused currently on the uncertainty of income with this financial strain. Instead of abandoning your values to maintain a higher income level, I suggest a possible alternative. Consider what is truly required for your life of happiness. Rethink your mental attitude about your work and alter your daily schedule to include passions for

fulfillment and health. Maybe renegotiate your workday schedule to include swimming, yoga or a creative class - something that takes your mind off your workday for a time. Take a good lunch break - no working lunches, take a walk outside- de-stress.

This correlates with the findings of Thomas Gilovich from the Cornell University Psychology Department in his 2003 paper : “to do or to have: that is the question”, “Consumerism fuels ingratitude”. We must leave time in our lives for experiences, passions and social bonding.

Once we incorporated ASHT it was clear we had a mission to gain respect as therapists and visibility for our speciality. We envisioned ourselves as quality specialists with high standards aiming at superlative patient treatment outcomes. As we struggled to make gains, mastering excellence was a driving force.

Given this imperative to excel, all my time and energies went into becoming the best therapist role model possible. I never lost the excitement of working with complex patient issues. Daily problem solving and the interaction with the surgical team fascinated me. I relished accepting all teaching opportunities and prided myself as a worthy master of the art of therapy. My career was my identity as was common during the 1970's women's liberation movement.

My work consumed my life-7days a week. All my time and energy was invested in career and it was too much. I failed at personal life balance.—And I burned out.....

In retrospect I ask myself could I have achieved the wellness I sought much earlier in life? What could I have done differently to balance my daily workload with my personal life?

Firstly Reduce the Stress:

The HeartMath Institute of in Boulder Creek CA, Hans Selye Founder is familiar to many. A study on heart brain interactions specifically looked at subjects' heart rhythms during different emotional states. During emotions of caring, love and appreciation smooth rhythms indicated cardiac efficiency, hormonal balance and improved immunity.

During the stress of anger they documented:

- jagged heart rhythms -(Stress activates the amygdala via the sympathetic nervous system thus increasing heart rate)

- blood vessel constriction (the adrenal glands secrete cortisol and adrenaline)
- elevated Blood Pressure (constricted vessels create sodium and water retention in kidneys)
- and the immune system weakened

Findings: Institute of HeartMath, p72 fig3-1

Other studies documented the mechanism of how prolonged stress relates to low serotonin levels and Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

WOW !

‘Stress is a slow burn; unhappiness ages us faster, we die sooner.’ Stanford News, March 7,2007 “Physiological Effects of Stress”

The physiological science is clear, emotional stress depletes the body and robs you of a chance to shine.

How DO you change your attitude, balance workday strains against de-stressing activities. How to find your happiness?

Happiness, Flow, Gratitude and Self esteem

Happiness Principle #1

Happiness can be described as a balance between career pursuits and personal relationships. It is a spiritual journey that includes full body and mind fitness. As therapists we can all do better.

Did you know there is a “World Database of Happiness”?

The database at the Erasmus Univ of Rotterdam has a continuous register of scientific research on subjective appreciation of life.

Studies lead by **Ruut Veenhoven** at that institution find that the United States ranks quite low on the scale judged by responses to satisfaction questions about life and life goals. Their research began in some countries in 1946!!! The USA averaged +-6.5 out of 10—low on the scale compared to the other 135 nations monitored. Many themes or components of happiness or life satisfaction were included such as consumption; cultural climate; crime, demography; government ; happiness; health inequality; lifestyle; modernity; risks; social climate; values; war and wealth. The USA did not factor well.

Happiness Principle #2 of FLOW:

- Engagement in or reaching a state of **flow** is an experience characterized by a match between the present challenge and one's skills.
- It is the excitement or rush of feeling of being in control. Having the confidence to meet the challenge.
- In a state of FLOW the mind churns with highly focused attention or in a highly active state of mind.
- When in Flow there is a mental enjoyment of the activity for its own sake.
- Flow is the state of mental engagement that allows one to get lost in time.

Wellness of mind, body, and spirit reduces stress and allows for FLOW. Where / when do you get your FLOW ??

Happiness Principle #3—THE SCIENCE of GRATITUDE:

The word **Gratitude** derived from Latin “gratia” –favor and “gratus” meaning pleasing. Gratitude feels good, is pleasing and is motivational.

“Whatever we are waiting for –peace of mind, contentment, grace-it will surely come to us, but only when we are ready to receive it with an open and **grateful** heart” Joel Osteen

“Thanks: How the new science of gratitude can make you happier”-Robert A Emmons, PhD Houghton Mifflin co 2007

Positivity as an offshoot of gratitude helps you find strength in adversity. An attitude about a stale or stressful job can be redirected. You may not be empowered to alter your situation but through the practice of gratitude and positivity you can redirect how you respond. An altered response could be key to finding new satisfaction in your current workplace diminishing the deleterious effects of stress.

Barbara Fredrickson PhD says “Positivity is life saving” in her work “Positivity” - I recommend reading it.

Happiness Principle #4 : Self Respect

There are three sectors in our society: the Economic engine; Democratic Government and a Civil Society. The Hand therapist is in the civil servant category.

In this era of financial frustration and change, income for **civil servants** is not proportional to the knowledge or skill of the practitioner. The reimbursement tables do not factor in the time, education and difficulties intrinsic in providing specialized treatment and individualized care.

Yet civil service professions have their benefits:

- ✓ There is the reward of giving NOT taking for a living.
- ✓ The associations gained with a kaleidoscope of patient personalities stimulate us and at times foster long term bonds of lasting friendship.
- ✓ There is a mutual respect among the network of intelligent, knowledgeable colleagues.
- ✓ The reward of self respect from a foundation of ethics, integrity of care and the constant quest for quality of service to their patients.

The Hand therapy civil servant has noble purpose, value and is worthy of self respect and self pride.

The principles of happiness have effect only if you can take control of either the actual situation or your response to it. In the case of remuneration, therapists do not have total control. Income comfort is a personal issue. Your wealth, savings and salary alone however are not the cure for happiness and wellbeing.

How much is enough? How much will you sacrifice to keep your level of income? Will you exhibit smooth heart rhythms of long term health or chance the effects of stress to maintain an income level?

Marriages, divorces and stepmom roles each changed my priorities and schedules. Each phase necessitated adaptation in time management as well as a switch to a distinct work environment. My guess is that every five years one should critically analyze overall life satisfaction. Your own personal values and emotional makeup should guide your choices. Do not choose to stay in a job simply because it is there, available or pays more. Now there are different possibilities in hand therapy jobs. If you are stressed and not able to balance things, it is time to either mentally reframe your thinking or make a change of environment.

Truly I have stayed in situations way beyond the healthy point because :

- I could not envision other options,
- I lacked the confidence to speak up or
- I felt insecure in my ability to make a change.

I wondered how to evaluate my 5 different work environments. How do other hand therapists analyze their situations? I developed this rather small survey to find the answer:

Questionnaire for Certified Hand therapists:

Choose your particular work setting. Place a value on a scale of 1-10 indicating the positive or negative perceptions the factors in your work environment at the moment- 1-4 meaning how negative the aspect of the job situation and benefits package; 5 neutral and 6-10 indicates a positive perception of the job setting and benefits. Factor in stress and pressure as a negative or positive value for your temperament.

P paperwork /admin	HR staffing / personnel	TI schedule independence	E education al stimulation	F Financial Rewards	BC Business control	SCOR E	
H							
POS							
TO							
TOS							
UH/H S							

KEY: Settings

H – Hospital setting non specialized clinic
POS – Physician owned specialty practice
TO- therapist owned non specialized practice
TOS- therapist owned specialty practice
UH- University teaching hospital specialized clinic setting

Work requirements:

P- Paperwork necessary; administrative desk tasks
HR – Responsibilities for staffing and personnel
TI-Independence to set time schedule and ability to take time away
E- Educational opportunities, stimulation, collaboration, networking
F- Financial remuneration
S-Inherent stress factors -personal tolerance
BC- control over business decisions

Karens realizations and scoring:

Hospital – non specialized setting score	23
University Hospital- Large university teaching hospital	31
POS- physician owned specialized practice	27
OS -ownership of hand therapy specialty practice	47

Analysis of my five work settings revealed that I was best matched to controlling my own private practice. I did miss the educational component however.

Factors that I considered carefully:

HR -Control over staff decisions and office schedule was a positive variable. Responsibility for success or failure of the business was a neutral score-has positives or a stressor.
TC- Ability to set my time schedule was positive but varies with the dependability of staff members.
UH- Only in the university setting did I have access to the vast educational resources. In that regard private practice was a negative.

The next time you find yourself about to boil over in frustration or toy with taking that boring, unstimulating but lucrative job, consider the variables on the chart. Which ones to you positively verses ones that bring on too much stress.

Consider the variables as you sort out the setting that jives with your personal temperament for wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

You are all valued quality professional specialists. Hang in there through this rough patch, don't get defeated. We don't want to say goodbye!!

Embrace an attitude of gratitude and positivity. Tap your abilities and skills necessary to suppress the strain associated with financial stress. Reflect on which portions of your life produce FLOW. Adjust your daily schedule to proportion times of flow with those of stress. In finding that equilibrium you may achieve a level of happiness, health and wellbeing that supersedes concerns of income level.

After a considered analysis, be the best therapist YOU can be within the framework of what works for YOUR happy life.

THE END

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