

2007 William “Pinky” Newell Address

EATA Meeting

January 6, 2007

Copley Marriott, Boston MA

Core Values and the Athletic Training Profession

Charles J. Redmond, LAT, ATC, PT

Springfield College

Springfield, MA

It was a very humbling and overwhelming feeling I had when Phil called me and informed me that I had been selected to give the 2007 “Pinky” Newell address. Pinky Newell and Charlie Redmond in the same sentence seemed like a stretch in my mind.

The first thing I did was to look at the list of previous speakers. In addition to seeing the names of so many legends and leaders of our profession it was very special to know that I would be the third Springfield College alumnus to give the address. The previous two were Mike Linkovich the legendary Athletic Trainer at Bowdoin College and Daniel Arnheim, the renowned author of the still published textbook *Modern Principles of Athletic Training*.

So trying to be brief with a message what does one do?

I took some time and reflected on the changes that have occurred to the Athletic Training profession over a short time period, when one compares the developmental history of the athletic training profession to other health care professions. This reflection was fun and absolutely energizing.

Changes and milestones that came to mind and certainly not a complete or chronologically accurate list included:

- Certification
- Changes in certification eligibility
- State regulation
- AMA recognition
- Education
- Accreditation
- A readily accessible and professionally staffed National Office
- Full-Time Executive Director
- Research
- Lobbyists
- Political Action Committees

Fundraising
Practice setting changes
International Outreach
Membership
 Increased #'s
 Demographics

Some of the change noted has been controversial requiring considerable and lengthy discussion, input from the membership and ultimately tough decisions and action by the professions leadership.

Although it would be fun to analyze some of the changes in detail as several previous Pinky Newell speakers have done, my remarks are not going to be about these changes. What I am going to do is briefly discuss what these changes were, and hopefully will continue to be grounded in...what I will call the “Core Values of the Athletic Training Profession”.

What are a professions Core values?

Core Values are: principles, standards, qualities, even behaviors that...
...distinguishes a profession from other professions...

Core Values:
...are observed and experienced by consumers of the professions services...

Core Values
...attract students to study, enter, achieve and persist as members of and contributors to the profession

Core Values
...can energize a profession and its membership

...and most importantly Core Values are used by the membership and leaders in making difficult decisions while advancing the profession.

Characteristics of professions that are successful and most importantly professions that make a difference include: a clear mission, a specialized body of knowledge, skills and competencies arranged in a clearly defined manner, a code of professional practice and are supported by consistent Core Values.

Most will accept that missions are rewritten and tweaked, bodies of knowledge grow, skills and competencies are redefined but Core Values although the terms used to describe them may change over time should remain unchanged.

What I will do is highlight some of the Core Values that may represent the Athletic Training Profession. To develop this list I read some of the history of our profession including a section from Dr. S.E. Bilik's *The Trainers Bible* (1934) written over seventy years ago, where he lists "the essential qualities of a trainer" (p.14), which included: thoroughness, resourcefulness, calmness, patience, and confidence.

I read again *FarBeyond the Shoebox, A 50 Year History of the NATA* (1999). I examined a variety of descriptions and writings of Pinky Newell and other early leaders who obviously were instrumental in developing (consciously and unconsciously) the professions Core Values in its early years. I completed a small qualitative research survey examining core values in the view of athletic trainers, many of them past or present leaders. I sought out the views of our newest members of the profession and some of our future professionals and leaders, our students, and finally consumers of athletic training. I looked for trends and common terms and descriptions.

NOTE: to the future scholars who will be completing graduate research in the future there are some very interesting Research Questions imbedded in examining the Core Values of the Athletic Training profession. On the surface this may not be as exciting as studying ACL Rehabilitation or the like but certainly no less important to the professions future.

To try and personalize my remarks and observations for each of you I would ask you at this point to take a moment and ask yourself what you think are the Core Values of the Athletic Training Profession.

The professions: Principles
Standards
Qualities

Core Values:

I will briefly describe only a few of the Core Values that surfaced in my readings and research.

1. Communication: or what some describe as the Athletic Trainer's ability to "connect" and "work" with others. Across all groups I surveyed, age, practice settings, non-athletic training professionals (coaches, athletes, and physicians) and consumers of athletic training services two characteristics of communication demonstrated by Athletic Trainers were consistently recognized and valued:

1) The remarkable and consistent listening skills, undivided attention, patience, empathy and caring concern demonstrated by the athletic trainer when working with an athlete or patient.

2) The people skills of the athletic trainer: stated differently the ability to connect with, empower and energize others of very diverse backgrounds while developing strong and productive relationships often under very challenging circumstances.

Daniel Goleman in his book *Social Intelligence* (2006) describes the attributes of communicator, empathy, and concern that Athletic Trainers demonstrate as the skill of being:

"wired to connect with others"(p.9)

NOTE: I would strongly recommend that Dr. Goleman's book Social Intelligence as reading for all Athletic Trainers. There is a very interesting section on the Social Intelligence and the helping professions.

2. Commitment and Loyalty:

Athletic Trainers are committed to the delivery of the highest standards of health care, while being loyal to their athletes, patients, peers, colleagues and profession.

Athletic Trainers are committed to be the best educated and professionally prepared provider of health care for the physically active.

Athletic Trainers are committed to be an effective and contributing member of an athletic health care team.

While understanding athletic training is a very time and energy intensive profession with very significant responsibilities athletic trainers are committed to be the first choice of health care for the physically active and never reluctant to get their hands dirty in accomplishing this.

Or as Dr. Bilik (1934) in describing his essential qualities of the trainer 73 years ago suggests the term *Thoroughness* which he describes as:

“having ones heart and soul in ones work...half hearted work nets half-hearted results... to much and to many depend on the trainer for anything less then this”. (p.14)

3. Confidence: knowing that we are well trained, highly skilled and competent members of an important health care profession while making a significant difference in the lives of the physically active across the Life Span from youth to seniors.

The confidence and self-direction to understand that Athletic Training is a highly demanding profession where decisions are made that can affect the future well being of the individuals we work with and are confident in this role.

The professional and personal confidence and willingness to work collaboratively with other health care professionals in providing quality athletic health care. Athletic trainers are often more confident and comfortable in their collaborative roles than many other health care professionals.

This Confidence allows the athletic trainer to be self-reflective and self-directive as individual athletic trainers and as a profession while comprehending our roles, strengths and limitations

The Confidence of the typical Athletic Trainer is intrinsically driven, where they look internally for assessment and evaluation of their efforts outcomes and achievements, not needing to compare themselves to others.

4. Responsibility: Imbedded in relationship building, commitment, loyalty and confidence is the quality of Responsibility. Being responsible and accountable for our actions and behaviors again often under very difficult and challenging circumstances. Understanding our roles while doing the very best we can while not taking ourselves too seriously.

As you listened to the Core Values I have highlighted:

- Communication
- Commitment
- Loyalty
- Confidence
- Responsibility

Do any of these qualities or values match with your reflections completed a moment ago? Do the Values describe you?

If asked for my personal view of the state of our professions Core Values I can confidently say that although the descriptors and terminology may have changed over the years the meaning of our Core Values has changed little. I am convinced that Dr. Bilik, Pinky Newell and others would be excited and proud that although our Core Values have been challenged and tested they continue to be the platform for change and growth of the athletic training profession.

Is there change ahead that will have to be addressed? Absolutely. Could these changes affect the professions Core Values and in turn redefine the principles, standards and qualities that have supported the advance and uniqueness of athletic training? Absolutely!

Indulge me for a final few moments and let me propose several potential challenges to our Core Values. The observations will focus on three areas:

Technology
Role Delineation
Education.

1. Technology: As we move more toward expanding technology in education and the practice of athletic training (Pod-Casts, PDA's, e-mails, distance learning, text messaging, blogs, web-sites, etc.) the opportunities for athletic trainers to come in regular and direct personal contact with our leadership, colleagues, and students decreases. Will our professional and personal lives become increasingly fast paced, with expectations of accomplishing more, thus challenging the Professions Core Values of Communication and Relationship Building?

Certainly we can share information and declarative knowledge more efficiently and possibly get more accomplished. However, will it be at the expense of less time spent with our students/colleagues/athletes/patients/ etc. Less direct opportunity to be the quality communicator athletic trainers are known for. We may get paid a little more for more work, but this begins to sound much like the concerns and complaints stated about other health care professions.

Dr. Goleman (2006) in his book notes that the skill of connecting and communicating, what he calls full attention:

“so endangered in this age of multitasking, is blunted whenever we split our focuses. Self-absorption and preoccupation shrink our focus, so that we are less able to notice other people's feelings and needs, let alone respond with empathy”. (p. 88)

2 Role Delineation: As times change it is natural for a profession to examine its role in comparison to other professions and consider and in some cases to expand the “skill sets” of the profession. In our role as health care providers does Athletic Training want to become the “physician extender” of all physician extenders or do we want to focus on what we uniquely do well while working collaboratively and professionally with other health care providers in delivering care to our athletes and patients..

Will we have enough time to educate our students while providing the diverse clinical experiences necessary to make them competent in these new skill sets? Can entry-level athletic training education programs do this in a reasonable amount of time and at a reasonable expense? Some students I spoke with felt that 5-6 years of college for the same entry-level opportunities and salary as exists today would have made them think again about pursuing a career as an athletic trainer and consider other health care careers.

Would the Athletic Training profession want to have lost any of the students who received scholarships tonight and their peers sitting in the audience to another health care profession?

Several I spoke with remarked on the changing roles and practice settings of athletic trainers. One response of confusion focused on the recent cover of the NATA News showing an Athletic Trainer (although they were also a Physical Therapist) working in the Home Health Care Setting.

Should our Role Delineation and organizations efforts become more directed at Health Care for the Secondary School Athlete where the need may be greatest?

I heard asked several times why the profession does not focus more on the role of Athletic Trainers in Injury Prevention and Wellness. Agreed it is not as exciting as Rehabbing a Shoulder Reconstruction or back boarding a Spinal Injury and is not reimbursable. However, are we not the only health care profession or at least in a minority of Health Care professions whose Role Delineations, Domains of Knowledge and credentialing specifically include Prevention?

Are we a profession that lists Prevention as its first Domain of Knowledge: but as individuals or a profession are not “fulfilled” as health care providers unless we have injured or ill individuals to work with? If the answer to this is yes this is an interesting paradox.

With Reimbursement at the forefront of much of the discussion of the professions near future we are correctly examining the outcomes of Athletic Trainer supervised injury rehabilitation programs. Are we or will we examine the outcomes of Athletic Trainer Prevention interventions with the same energy and rigor? Would engaging “Third Party Payers” with demonstrated positive outcomes on the Prevention side of Health Care and the corresponding positive impact on Wellness and the costs of health care, make insurance companies stronger advocates for athletic training services and possibly more willing to support athletic training as a viable reimbursable profession?

3. Education: How are Core Values introduced, modeled, reinforced to our emerging professionals. I think the term used today is “Professional Socialization”. Professional Socialization described by Teschendorf and Nemshick (2001) is a process where individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, principles and qualities or culture of a group in which the individual wants to become a member.

Professional Socialization is a gradual process and difficult to achieve. In the professional Socialization of the Athletic Trainer the professions educators are the first professional with opportunity and responsibility for transmitting and reinforcing the culture and core values of the profession. Pitney, Isley and Rintala (2002) in their research on Professional Socialization and Athletic Trainers describes this early socialization as Anticipatory Socialization. They suggest it is critical to how an entry level professional transitions into the profession, their continued professional socialization and continued career in the profession.

I heard on several occasions that today’s young professionals are entering the profession with a less than adequate understanding of the roles and responsibilities of an athletic trainer, a lack of Professional Socialization. This is not suggesting that today’s graduates are unprepared in the didactic and operational skills and knowledge needed by today’s athletic trainer. Quite the contrary, today’s entry-level athletic trainers are well prepared.

What this may suggest however is that the entry-level athletic trainer may not have a complete comprehension of the professions Core Values and in turn are surprised with what they discover is expected of them as they enter the profession. Although I cannot provide you a published source for this, on two occasions I was anecdotally told that over the last decade or so 5 years is the average time entry level athletic trainers practice athletic training before changing careers. Although I cannot connect this directly to an issue of professional socialization nor verify this data is accurate, if it is accurate it would be a disturbing trend for any profession.

As the Professional Preparation of the entry-level athletic trainer has changed there has been a move away from those teaching athletic training student's classes and laboratories also being the students field based clinical educators. In addition many of the classroom and laboratory faculty although possessing terminal degrees and in many cases competent researchers have spent nominal time practicing athletic training.

Much of today's Clinical Education is supervised by instructors who do not see the students in the classroom but only at practices and games. Although these clinical educators have been designated Approved Clinical Instructors they may not be trained, skilled or committed educators although they are very competent athletic trainers.

Entry-level athletic training professional preparation standards have redefined acceptable Clinical Education Supervision mandating that acceptable clinical education occurs only when the student and instructor are in close visual and auditory contact. Other field based experiential learning experiences where supervision does not meet this standard are not considered valid clinical education opportunities and are in fact discouraged.

Under this Clinical Education model of direct contact between student and instructor being the only acceptable clinical education model many opportunities for student critical thinking, self-reflection, self-evaluation, self-direction, self-discovery and professional socialization can be lost.

Some will argue this is the instructional model other health care professions use to prepare their students and entry-level professionals.

Others will argue the uniqueness of Athletic Training's Core Values with our professional confidence, commitment and autonomy does not mandate we need to do things like other professions do.

My remarks have not been an attempt to be the Core Values Police. Reflecting on my own admission that I had not thought very often about our Core Values over an almost 40 year career I assumed others may not have as well. So my remarks had several simple objectives:

1. Sharing the observations, comments and questions of the sample I had spoken with I wanted to engage each of you for a few moments in thinking about a possible set of Athletic Training Core Values in the context of the past, present and future of our profession while considering possible challenges to these values.
2. Encourage each of you in the future to periodically reflect on Athletic Training's Core Values and how they relate to the profession and to your professional and most definitely your personal lives.
3. Encourage that Core Values continue be part of the equation in the decision making process when future change and initiatives are considered.

I will be very candid and suggest that the an unwillingness or inability to do the late would fail to honor Athletic Training's remarkable history and traditions as well as the efforts of those who have gone before us in developing our uniqueness and impact as a Health Care Profession

I am confident that future decisions to change or not to change will continue to be based not only on a comprehension of issues in education, demographics, health care particularly the ever growing economics and politics of health care, but will continue be based on our Professions Core Values.

Because of our Core Values Athletic Training is a unique profession, which is standing the test of a successful profession, that of making a difference. We need to continue to be a profession that is committed and confident to practice collaboratively with other professions while guided by a set of principles, standards and qualities, our Core Values. It is each of our responsibility as members and leaders of the Athletic Training profession to be certain that this continues.

References

Bilik SE. *The New Trainers Bible*, New York, NY: The Atsco Press; 1934.

Ebel G. *Far Beyond the Shoe Box*, Forbes Custom Publishing: 1999.

Goleman D. *Social Intelligence*, New York, NY: Bantam Books; 2006.

Pitney W, Ilsley P, Rintala J. "The professional socialization of certified athletic trainers in the national collegiate athletic association division I context". *JAT*. 2002 37(1): 63-70.

Teschendorf B, Nemshick M. "Faculty roles in professional socialization". *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, Spring, 2001: 4-10.