

2009 William E. “Pinky” Newell Memorial Address

EATA Awards Banquet

Marriott Copley Hotel, Boston, MA

Kent Scriber, Ithaca College

“A Brief Look Back Before Moving Forward with the Millennial Generation”

January 10, 2009

Thank you Jack, and thanks to the Johnson & Johnson Company for their continued involvement, not only in sponsoring this award, but for all J & J does for our profession. We’re all very appreciative. I’d also like to offer my sincere appreciation to the EATA Executive Board for inviting me to present this year’s “Pinky” Newell Memorial Address. I am both honored and humbled. I guess this officially places me into the “old timer” category. ☺ Congratulations, in advance, to all of tonight’s award recipients, and welcome to everyone here including all of our distinguished guests (Eve Becker-Doyle, Marge Albohm, etc.). As you all know, this presentation is given in honor of Pinky Newell, who is considered to be the “father of modern athletic training”. I believe Pinky would have been quite happy with each of the topics that have been previously addressed. I hope that I can carry on the tradition with my presentation tonight: **“A Brief Look Back Before Moving Forward with the Millennial Generation.”**

First, a few words relating Pinky Newell. Ironically, as EATA President-Elect and program chair, many years ago, I had the good fortune to invite our initial Pinky Newell Memorial Address speaker, Dr. Loyal Combs. Dr. Combs was the long time Team Physician at Purdue University and he worked side by side with Pinky for many years. He and his wife joined us at Kutcher’s Resort where he spoke to us about some about Pinky’s great work and foresight as a leader in the profession. But, the message I took away most was that he also presented Pinky as a human being with some flaws, just like all of us. It made me realize that even the top leaders in our profession must overcome certain personal and professional challenges to be successful.

I was also fortunate to have met Pinky more than 30 years ago through one of my former professors and mentors at Ithaca College, Mr. Robert Grant. “Bob” had worked as Pinky’s assistant at Purdue for 5 years and often spoke with reverence about Pinky, so he had become a mentor to me, even before I met him. I knew that Pinky had been instrumental in the formation of the NATA and I was aware of his early leadership as the NATA’s first Executive Secretary. He guided us to greater recognition as a health care profession and he developed a blueprint for educational standards for the athletic training profession. Additionally, it was under

Pinky's watch that the Journal of Athletic Training had its "humble" beginning. He had many friends in the EATA and occasionally attended our meetings. One particular story he shared at a meeting at Grossingers made me realize just how far our profession has come. He told about covering an all-star high school football game when he was just beginning his career. He was looking forward to working with another experienced athletic trainer, also volunteering at the game, so he could "pick his brain." Pinky was disappointed that this athletic trainer would not share what he was doing and actually shielded himself from Pinky's view during pre-game taping. After the game Pinky was the last to leave the locker room and went to the waste cans to pull out some of the tape jobs so he could unravel them strip by strip, to learn the other athletic trainer's technique. This was the first time I realized that years ago athletic trainers weren't always anxious to share much information with each other and I then understand why earlier efforts at starting a professional organization failed. Today we exchange information so freely that can be overwhelming. A recent editorial stated that we would each need to read more than 15 articles daily to completely stay abreast with each aspect of our profession! The profession has certainly grown dramatically, but I sometimes wonder what would have happened if Pinky and other early leaders in our profession had gotten discouraged and given up after experiences like that.

During the fall semester I teach a Seminar class to our seniors. During a discussion early in the semester I asked the students what they knew about Pinky Newell. I was surprised at the number of blank looks I received. Not wanting to let a "teachable moment" go by, I proceeded to give a short history lesson about the important work Pinky and some of the other early leaders in our profession did. I soon realized I might as well have been talking about athletic training in the "Dark Ages," because the 1950s is the Dark Ages for them! A couple weeks later when I learned I'd been invited to speak tonight, I consulted this same group of student experts and asked them what they thought would be a good topic. Of course they said "Talk about us!" and I agreed it would be a good idea. So, I'd like to spend a few more minutes this evening discussing the "Millennial" generation. At this very meeting last year, NATA Past-President Kimmel stated that he often heard members say "This generation is the brightest and best educated ever, but they don't know how to 'work'." Some feel they give up too easily and aren't willing to put in the time and effort needed to be successful. Upon reflection, I really don't believe the problem lies in the "new" generation's willingness, or unwillingness to work, but more in that they may not want to work exactly how some of us might like them to (e.g. the way we did it!). So I believe it's important to reflect about our newest generation, our future leaders. You may have also heard these Millennials referred to as Generation Y (letter), Generation Why (word), Nexters, Echo Boomers, or the "We Generation". I know that I don't have to tell anyone in this audience that members of this Millennial generation are "different".

Before moving on about this generation, I think a couple quotes are worth citing. The first is by someone much wiser than me, "The children now love luxury, they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love to talk in place of exercise. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble their food at the table, and tyrannize their

teachers.” It may surprise you to know that this quote was credited to Socrates in 399 B.C. Another interesting quote is from author George Orwell. He stated “Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.” No wonder there have always been generational “clash points.”

For the first time in the workforce we have 4 distinct generations of people, the Traditionalists (born pre-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-mid 60s), Generation Xers (1965-late 70s “me” generation), and Generation Ys or Millennials (early 80s “we” generation). Most recently, I’ve seen a reference to only 2 generations: the digital “natives” and the digital “immigrants”. When we realize each of these generations has its own personality, work ethic, style, values, attitudes, expectations, etc. we better understand the many potential clash points. Clearly, the Millennials are a generation that’s interested in “now” more than they are in the “past”. We must realize that some of this current generation view what we refer to as a “good work ethic”, as an “overwork ethic”. This generation wants time off and balance in their lives now, not when they are 65! This generation doesn’t think that just because many of us have “Chronic Responsibility Syndrome” and often worked 60 hours a week, that they should do the same. The fact that previous generations did something a certain way doesn’t particularly impress them. A harsh reality is that we all can, and will be, replaced at some point. Change in attitude and action has not always been embraced by many “older” professionals. However, we must find ways to keep all of our generations well connected so progress will continue. This generation inherits many major challenges: health care, social security, environment, economy, education, energy, etc.

There are many other characteristics attributed to the Millennials that are important to mention because it impacts each one of us. They are said to be: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. They have been told since they were born that they are special and they want to be rewarded and given positive feedback (e.g., no one wins or loses and everyone gets a trophy). Millennials sometimes struggle with handling feedback, and they often wait to be led and rely on parents or other authorities to handle problems.

We also know that many in this generation feel a sense of entitlement. Some have described them as sheltered and in need of structure and clear instructions. The Millennials are team oriented, social, and enjoy collaborative work and learning activities. This generation also feels pressured and stressed to continually perform whether it is their involvement in school, with scouts, music lessons, or youth travel teams. They want immediate feedback to match their high achiever status. Many arrive at college having already achieved a number of college credits, and they often challenge the grades or testing formats. Some have never received a grade of “B”! When they are told to do something, they are more likely say “Why?” or “What’s in it for me?”, when earlier generations would have simply said “OK”. It’s also not unusual for the parents of these students to get involved with these challenges as well. Many of us have had to deal with these “helicopter” parents. Parents want their children both educated and protected.

Interestingly, a majority of current college graduates immediately move back home with their parents after graduating. According to the Dept. of Labor, those currently in their 20s change jobs (sometimes careers), every 18 months! So, I guess it begs the question “Will the current generation be able to move our profession forward?” Simply stated, in my opinion, there is no question about it.

There are certainly reasons we should be concerned with some aspects of our profession as the Millennials begin to take leadership roles. Last year at this meeting a couple troubling thoughts were presented. We learned that for the first time ever, more members left the NATA during the previous year than joined. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of our graduating students are not going directly into the profession. Why aren't they pursuing the profession many of us have found to be rewarding and enjoyable? Today, change and progress are necessary ingredients for socio-economic mobility. Many of our young professionals are preoccupied with the here and now and seek immediate gratification for security and prosperity. We must ask ourselves, “What is our profession providing?” Human resource specialists tell us the main reasons people stay in jobs are: the benefits they are given, the respect they are afforded, and recognition they receive. Can our graduates expect to receive excellent benefits? Do we respect our young professionals' and students' values and beliefs? Do we recognize what they do in a positive manner? There are still some pretty unrealistic jobs our graduates are faced with (e.g., multiple responsibilities with long hours and low pay). Joe Iezzi reminded us last year that we must make jobs better and continue to convince athletic administrators, parents, school boards, insurance companies, and the public of the value of an Athletic Trainer! Recent salary surveys do reflect some encouraging progress and these data also indicated the average number of hours worked by ATs decreased, perhaps leaving more time for quality of life issues.

Change is often difficult and frustrating, but inevitable and I don't believe we can continue to do “business as usual.” We must understand that when change happens we are often taken out of our “comfort zones”. Many of us from an “older” generation may have difficulty accepting the attitudes and expectations of the “new” generation. Regardless of what generation we may fall into, there will be change. Spencer Johnson's 1998 book “Who Moved My Cheese?” provides an interesting parable that may help us better understand how change affects us as we move through life's maze. This story presents 4 characters and each of their different reactions to change. When the cheese, representing happiness and success, was moved each character responded differently. Throughout this book the author states makes several key points to reflect upon. Change will happen, so we should learn to adapt to it, and even learn to enjoy it. Today's continuous advancement of technology has certainly contributed to changing all of us forever! The Millennials have grown up with it and become very technology savvy. They can't imagine how some of us ever survived without computers, the internet, cell phones, Face Book/MySpace, text messaging, etc. since these things have always been a part of their daily lives. Although technology can connect us, it can also isolate us. Some of my current students (and our own children) think I'm joking when I tell them as a kid, our black and white TV (with no remote control) only picked up 3 channels. And, the third didn't always come in very clearly unless the aluminum foil attached to the rabbit ear antenna was adjusted just right. So, not only do we need to

better understand the younger generation(s), I think our current students need to learn about our generation(s) and better understand us and why we are sometimes so strange! At Ithaca College, faculty members began being equipped with computers in their offices starting in 1994. Not that long ago! I remember the early challenges of learning to send an e-mail, and the joy of finally successfully sending one with an attachment. Now, some tell us e-mail is too slow as a mechanism for effectively communicating with Millennials.

Around the same time we were becoming familiar with the e-mail system and learning to utilize the internet, I viewed a PowerPoint presentation for the first time. I was “blown away” and I remember thinking, “If I could do 4 or 5 of my presentations for each course in that format, it would be great!” Up to that point, many of us viewed a “high tech” presentation as one where we were using 2 screens and slide projectors at the same time. Now we have PowerPoints available for almost all of our presentations on WebCT, Blackboard, etc. Of course now, we can find articles that tell us presenting using PowerPoint too often has become passé, and isn’t always most effective from a teaching/learning standpoint.

I guess my primary message tonight would be to “trust” the Millennials. They are bright, articulate and leaders are emerging at this very time. They want to be involved and we need to involve them. I am confident that our young professionals and current students will move us forward. It is unlikely that they will achieve success in the same manner that previous generations have, but they will achieve success! Anyone involved in the student program at this very meeting can easily see the talent, leadership, enthusiasm, and energy that will carry us in the future. We must remember, it’s not “Us vs. Them”, it’s all of us working together.

The NATA has certainly done a terrific job by starting many new initiatives to get the new generation of athletic trainers involved and connected within our profession. Meetings such as this one continue to reach out to be more conducive to involvement from students and young professionals as well. Next month’s Educator’s Conference in Washington, DC is titled “Reaching the Millennial Students.” These are all great investments. My wife and I have always felt the best thing we can invest in is our own children. When we support our students and younger professionals this is exactly what we’re doing. I believe all these actions will pay great dividends for our profession in our future.

As many of us do when we are facing challenging times, we ponder about what our mentors would tell us. So I wondered, “What would Pinky say about all of this?” What would he think about the Millennials, constant change, and our advancing technology? Most likely he would remind us we are in a “people” profession, we need to stay passionate about our work and those we work with, we should continue to mentor our younger professionals, keep improving our academic and clinical education programs, continue our research interests, continue fight the professional battles, treat each other with respect, and most importantly, continue to communicate with, and understand each other! I think he would also tell us with a smile not to worry that there will be excellent leadership that will advance us to the next level. All professions are dealing with this same challenge. In conclusion, we need to

connect, and stay connected with the new generation. If we continue to do this, I am confident that our future is bright, and our new leaders will take the profession to its next level. Thank you.