

Pinky Newell Address- **Looking in the Mirror**

January 5, 2013

Buffalo, NY

Thank you, Jack, for that very kind introduction. And thank you to Johnson & Johnson for their continued support of this Address and the profession as a whole. A special thanks to the Executive Board of the EATA for this great honor. Welcome to our distinguished guests and to my all of my colleagues.

Presenting this address has a special meaning for me. I have had the opportunity to listen to several of my mentors and friends provide this Address, and to follow them is one of the highest honors I could receive. I am also one of the last generations of athletic trainers that had a chance to meet Pinky Newell.

As many of you will remember, Pinky was a frequent attendee of the EATA meeting. As chance would have it, I found myself seated at a table with Pinky, and others during dinner one evening. For those of you familiar with the movie "A Christmas Story", think about the scene where Ralphie is going to see Santa Claus, and while he is waiting, all he sees is this larger than life figure. He has his list all prepared, and is very confident he will tell Santa exactly what he wants.

For a young athletic trainer, Pinky was like Santa Claus. He was larger than life. As chance would have it, Pinky asked me what I thought about a particular issue. Like Ralphie in the movie, I froze. I so much wanted to say, "I want an Official Red Rider Carbine Action, 200 Shot, Range Model Air rifle with a compass in the stock", but what I said came out more like, "A football". Pinky just smiled and nodded his head. I'm sure he was now very concerned about what was becoming of the profession he had worked so hard to promote. He was probably convinced that I would shoot my eye out.

Tonight I plan on presenting a number of observations, opinions, comments, ramblings, musings, and the like, based on my activities over the years with various committees, boards, work groups, and task forces. I will present many

more questions than answers, with the goal being that you will answer the questions for yourself.

The backdrop for my talk tonight will be a poem. I apologize to those of you who thought I would be utilizing some incredible technical device to make my points. The poem I am using is titled, "The Man in the Glass". There are different references regarding the poem, so the best I can do is tell you that there is a claim that it was written by Dale Winbrow in 1934. I didn't feel like I had the knowledge and experience to claim poetic license and change the name, so I also apologize to the females in the audience. I've carried this poem around in my wallet since the summer of 1980. It is a constant reminder for me that I am primarily responsible for what happens to **ME**.

"When you get all you want and you struggle for self,

And the world makes you king for a day,

Then go to the mirror and look at yourself

And see what that man has to say."

First, we have to remember that we belong to a "member organization". It really should be a "members organization", but I'm pretty sure that is incorrect grammar. It doesn't only belong to the elected officers, the committee members, the office staff, or the volunteers. It is the **MEMBERS** that should be responsible for our growth and our progress. Not everyone has to sit on a committee, run for an office, or even volunteer. But you need to look in the mirror and ask "What have you done for the profession?" Are you pushing us forward through your clinical or scholarly work? Do you take the time to promote the profession and the accomplishments of your staff? Do you continue to grow professionally, or are you satisfied with passing the BOC exam and believe that alone will command the respect of the people you work with and for? Do you register for a meeting and collect your CEU's without ever sitting through a lecture? Or attend and participate in the business meetings? Aristotle said, "To avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, be nothing". That's really no way to go through life. Look in the mirror; what do you see? And, no, I did not work with Aristotle.

I know the leadership present tonight wants us all to be involved. They may need to be more creative to accomplish that. We do need to get the members to return to association business meetings. Many of you will remember spirited discussions in our district meetings in the past. Maybe we need to find a way to put “business” back into these sessions. As members, we will need to understand that the elected leaders may take all of what we say, some of what we say, or none of what we say. We elected them to make the decisions, whether we agree or not. Let’s have the discussions. If the members decide not to participate, at least there was a forum provided.

“For it isn’t your mother, your father, or wife

Whose judgment upon you must pass,

But the man, whose verdict counts the most in your life

Is the one staring back from the glass.”

Second, we have to move ourselves out from the shadows. I am not a farmer, but I’m pretty sure the only thing that grows well in the dark are mushrooms. We do a great job of selling ourselves to ourselves, but many athletic trainers are still afraid of calling attention to themselves. Why? People all around us are doing it, and quite often gaining the respect that should be ours. Our PR people are working hard to get athletic trainers into the various forms of media, but it’s not enough.

There is, every few years, the discussion about changing the name of our profession. The complaint is that the general public does not know what we do. The complaint is that the public confuses us with personal trainers. Why don’t they know what we do? Why is there that confusion? Because we don’t tell them what we do. The personal trainers are right there up front, telling the public that they can make them better athletes; that they can help with the rehab, that they are the experts. We sit back and clench our teeth and ball our fist and say, “Darn them.” Changing the name isn’t the issue; changing the attitude of the members is the issue.

Not everyone has to be in the national media, or even the state or local media. But we do need to be up in front of our administrators. We do need to be up in front of the people we desire to take care of. We need to be in front of the parents. We have to take the time and make the effort to share with them just exactly what it is we are doing for them. Provide them with as much data as you can. Wear them down. They are not going to seek us out. That should be evident.

Why are people so afraid? Do they feel that they are not prepared to speak intelligently on subjects? Do they believe that someone else has that responsibility? Do they believe that AT's should remain behind the scenes and not call attention to ourselves? Do you worry more about being called an athletic trainer than standing- up and proving you are one?

You have to be willing and able to take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate the value and the worth of what it is we do. I make it a point to ask people who were complaining about their situation to describe just what it was that they had already done for themselves. That oftentimes created a great deal of uncomfortable silence. They haven't done anything. Remember, we are only conspicuous by our absence, so it is important to provide detail regarding the value and worth we provide. The people we work for are not going to seek us out to determine if we are under paid, under staffed, and over worked.

Look in the mirror. If you are willing, are able, and you take the time to sell yourself and your profession, I applaud your efforts and thank you. If you're not willing or able to demonstrate a level of knowledge, then stop complaining about your position and your profession. And don't criticize those that are prepared and are willing to speak publically about what it is we offer.

"He's the fellow to please,

Never mind all of the rest.

For he's with you right to the end,

And you've passed your most difficult task

If the man in the glass is your friend.”

Third, we are obsessed with comparing ourselves to other medical professionals, especially the physical therapists. Why? I understand the issue of reimbursement, and its ramifications to the profession in general. But stop blaming the PT's for being in positions that we want to be in. It's not their fault. It's ours. As much as we'd like to think differently, they have sold themselves better than we have. They convinced people that they have the “knowledge and experience”. We hid behind the notion that we are merely support staff. Now, we are paying for it.

Why don't we talk more about the skills that we possess that make us different? And in many cases, make us better? What are the skills that we possess that make the biggest impact on the population that we work with? Providing for injury rehabilitation is just one service that we provide. Everywhere I looked, we list it fourth on the list of domains of athletic training, after Prevention of Injuries, Evaluation/ Diagnosis of Injuries, and Immediate/ Emergency Care. Can you name me one aspect of rehabilitation that has a bigger impact than expertly and expediently spine boarding an athlete with a possible cervical spine injury?

At the end of the day, when you look in the mirror, what action has the most significant impact? This past Fall, I had my first experience with an expanding intracranial lesion, the result of a congenital abnormality. The impact of the actions that took place to save this young man's life, is immeasurable. And there were no billing codes for what we did. But, the reaction from the family and our administration was incredible. My guess is, any AT that has gone through a life-threatening, or life altering, situation, remembers every detail like it was yesterday. I can't think of any rehab I have done that has had that effect.

“You may be like Jack Horner and “chisel a plum,

And think you're a wonderful guy,

But the man in the glass says you're only a bum

If you can't look him straight in the eye.”

Next, much like the society we live in, we have found it necessary to label ourselves in so many different manners that we have created a significant “disconnect”. Pinky recognized this trend back in 1984. In an address to the membership at the Annual Meeting, he stated, and I quote, “As we look at ourselves as a profession, we must ask if we are a truly unified group, or are we a group of individuals only concerned with the issues which affect our own individual spheres of interest and professional involvement? Evidence shows that we are a somewhat fragmented group. We seem to have great difficulty in recognizing that any issue which affects one special interest group has a potential impact on all of our members.” That was 1984. This is now 2013, and, in my opinion, Pinky was spot on.

We now think of ourselves as clinicians, educators, and researchers. We brand ourselves as secondary school, college/ university, professional, performing arts, law enforcement, and clinical. The list of job settings the NATA now has is incredible. I think it is great that we have entered so many different markets, so many different areas where we can demonstrate our worth. I realize that has been a significant part of our growth.

My fear is that we will lose focus on the fact that we are all athletic trainers. This may sound hypocritical coming from the former Chair of the CUATC. I realize that each setting has its own set of issues. I would be lost if I had to suddenly switch to certain settings after so many years in the college setting. But this should not preclude us from supporting an agenda that will primarily benefit the profession as a whole, as opposed to an individual setting. We still, **ALL**, have a responsibility to the whole of athletic training. It is incumbent on us all to make sure that Pinky’s fear proves unwarranted.

How do you see things? At the end of the day, how do you label yourself? How do you promote yourself and what you do?

The subject of athletic training education is a frequent topic of discussion, a source of some frustration, and an area where we need clear direction and mutual agreement. There is a perception afloat, and I will underscore the word perception, that something is missing from our education process. Sometimes

perception is reality. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire”. Personally, I believe there is a problem. I also believe there is enough blame to go around, and I do not lay this solely at the feet of the educators.

Since I am primarily a clinician, I’m going to start there. Back in the days when we had the internship avenue to certification, we turned out many very good athletic trainers. We did this with limited formal coursework. As a colleague has often said, it was survival of the fittest. Since they weren’t formal programs, only the best workers were asked to participate. There were no expectations regarding how many internship students you had. If you couldn’t or wouldn’t work, you were asked to leave.

That being said, we were fortunate that someone realized that the internship process was no way to educate medical professionals. Eliminating the process was a move that took great courage, as it caused significant wailing and gnashing of teeth from our members and others. I give great credit to those that carried out that process.

Another key reason why we were able to develop athletic trainers out of this system was we had great mentors. Remember that concept? We had people that cared about teaching us how and why of every aspect of athletic training. As clinicians, we have to recognize that it is our duty to provide that mentorship to our students, and to our younger professionals as well. We have to challenge them to apply the knowledge they have acquired so that they can figure out “Why?”

We have to mentor them in the processes that are not in the text books- how to interact with coaches; how to prepare for events; how to deal with parents. We can extend this mentoring to how **WE** interact; how **WE** handle emergency situations; how **WE** handle requests for our time; how **WE** manage our programs; how **WE** continue to educate ourselves. The notion that we don’t have time to do this is unacceptable. Our mentors always found the time.

Our mentors also taught us how to think for ourselves. They didn't allow us to fail, as they were available as a safety net. The point being they taught us how to figure things out; how to navigate from point A to point B.

At the end of the day, when you look in the mirror, do you see a mentor? Do you see someone who has provided a valuable lesson to a student or a young professional? Were there any words of wisdom, any tiny tidbit of information you provided that someone could take forward and utilize someday? Any corrective actions taken? Any constructive criticism or positive reinforcement provided? Were your own actions such that someone learned how to act or react, how to carry themselves, how to be a professional?

We tend to consider mentoring when discussing undergraduate students. The problem just may be worse at the graduate level. I can't tell you how many institutions I visit where I hear the same story. Graduate students plopped down at a remote facility, with little to no interaction with full-time staff. This is not graduate education. This is not experience. This is failure to increase full-time staff to keep up with demands.

While I'm on the subject of graduate education, I need to digress and step up on to my soapbox. I can't help but comment on my disappointment every time I receive an email that starts like this. "I am a graduate student in athletic training and am conducting a survey" Really, surveys pass as graduate research? Finding out my feelings, my attitudes, my favorite color, is not research, in my mind. We have compounded the lack of mentoring with a lassaiz faire attitude toward their research. I'm Ok now, just had to get that out.

So, my question for those of you that utilize graduate assistants, how much time do you spend educating them, mentoring them? Are they an answer to a staffing problem that you don't want to address? Do you feel that it's enough that you are allowing them to "gain experience"? Is it really experience when there is no clinical instruction, no mentoring? At the end of the day, when you look in the mirror, are you pleased by the education you are providing them? When they look in the mirror, are they convinced that coming to work for you was a great idea?

When I look at the level of didactic education we are offering to athletic training students today, I am impressed and concerned at the same time. I am impressed because they are learning things as students that I learned as a professional. I am impressed with the type of student we are getting today- some of the best and the brightest. Today's education process can be considered a legitimate health care education.

I am concerned because there appears to be a disconnect between the didactic information and the clinical application. Someone once said, "Knowledge without application is merely information." Today's students often know "How" without knowing "Why?" A quote that you can find applied at many leadership workshops is, "The person who knows how will always have a job. The person who knows why will be their boss." The "Why?" has to become more important.

In my opinion, you can't teach "Why?" if you don't know "Why?" Can someone effectively teach something that they have no experience with? I would hope that the expectation for someone to teach "Why" would be to find out "Why". You can't always find "Why" in a text book. In our profession, it involves having the experience. This is not a profession that is learned from a book, nor should it be taught only from a book. Albert Einstein, who also worked at Princeton (I'm just saying), once said, "Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school." That's probably the case with many professions.

Some will argue that, in order to teach, one should have "X" number of years of experience. I have often had that same thought, but I would be happy if there was an expectation that the educator spend time in the clinical setting. The best educators I know, either, continue with a clinical assignment when they enter education; OR, they previously spent significant time working in the clinical setting; OR, they make a point to spend time in the clinical setting, observing, discussing, and understanding the concepts that they present in the classroom.

I mentioned earlier that I have noticed an increase in the "volume" of knowledge that we are presenting to our students. Is "more" really the answer? Einstein also said, "More is not better. Better is better. True intent and precision of action is the secret. Don't confuse action with accomplishment." Are we ignoring the

basic concepts that allow graduates to successfully move into a job? Are we increasing the volume only to provide teaching opportunities to everyone that wants to get out of the clinical setting?

So, as an educator, when you look in the mirror, do you see someone who is teaching what they know, or teaching what they read in a book? Do you understand the clinical application of what was taught in the classroom? Do you spend time observing whether or not the students are grasping the concepts and are applying them in a clinical setting, exclusive of a classroom based evaluation process? Do you consult with the clinicians to see if the students are understanding “Why?”

And the big question, can the clinicians and the educators agree on an educational process that will improve the profession? Can they agree that it will only work if both entities work together, utilizing the expertise of both groups? This will only work if the clinicians, the educators, the ECE, CAATE, and the BOC, and whomever else, all agree to work together. If we are not unified, we will fail.

Our profession often forces us to make quick decisions, some critical to actually saving a life. How do we teach our students and young professionals how to react, especially in critical situations? In his book, Blink, Malcolm Gladwell talks about the value of experience and discusses the premise of intuition, and demonstrates that sometimes “science” is not the best answer. How do we get to the point where intuition takes over when there isn’t time to look in a book? Remember, the way our system is set- up, as soon as someone passes the certification exam, and they meet state credential requirements, they are allowed to work as an athletic trainer.

How confident are you that your graduates are prepared to provide care in the most critical situations? How will they react when there is no time to consult “the book”, or review a study? How do we incorporate these concepts, this critical thinking, into our education? How do we teach our students and young professionals to look beyond the obvious, to look beyond what it says in the book, to be able to react? We probably all agree that this critical thinking is paramount

to our education process, but will we, can we, agree as to just what constitutes critical thinking in athletic training.

The concepts of Evidence Based Practice and the use of outcome studies have become the issue de jour. There is the perception that we can't progress without them. Like the issue of reimbursement, I understand the need for both concepts, and don't want to give the impression that they are not necessary. But what happens to "experience based practice"? It's experience that provides the basis for intuition. We need to involve the clinicians in all settings to determine what is that we have to study. What techniques are the clinicians using that appear on the surface to be successful? There is a difference in how something works in a controlled, lab situation, and how they work in the world. I would hope that, as we develop these research projects, that we would look for the cutting edge techniques being utilized in all of our settings, involve the clinicians, and come up with a true picture of exactly what it is we are doing that makes a difference.

"You can fool the whole world,

Down the highway of years

And take pats on the back as you pass.

But your final reward will be heartache and tears

If you've cheated the man in the glass."

The last items I'd like to address revolve around the issues of salary, work hours and life/ work balance. A common refrain from my generation of athletic trainers is the new generation doesn't know how to work. That they don't understand the commitment required to be an athletic trainer. The younger generation says they don't want to work like that. They don't want to work the ridiculous hours. Especially for the salary they receive. They want a living wage and balance in their life.

Well, the world of sports is not going to change to fit in our preferred schedule. It will happen on weekends, at night, and sometimes in the morning. It will happen over the holidays, on birthdays, and on days when your friends are getting

married. Sometimes it requires you to work seven days per week. Sometimes it's significantly more than 40 hours. That is the life of an athletic trainer in some settings.

Today, you have options. Find one that suits your lifestyle and interests. Maybe your first choice doesn't work out as you'd like, or you want a different challenge. That's fine, as long as you are approaching each opportunity as a challenge to improve as an athletic trainer and to represent the profession in a positive manner.

You need to remember this. The reason you have those options is because of the vision, dedication, and passion of people that came before you. They left it better for you. Ask yourself, "How am I going to leave it?" How will I make the life of future athletic trainers better? Do I have a passion for what I do? Or, am I more interested in watching the clock? What have I given back, what have I contributed?

Those athletic trainers of the older generation, especially those in a position of authority, need to make sure their staffs are working smarter, not more. For those that were paying attention, I mentioned a quote that talked about more not being better, but better being better. It is our responsibility to make the lifestyle more palatable for the younger generation. Find ways to balance the 12 hour days with a morning off here and there. Take the time to schedule your staff so that people aren't sitting around with nothing to do. Find ways to provide some time off to do the things necessary in their life. Create some balance.

It is also our responsibility to make sure that our staffs are being compensated for their time. Because we worked ridiculous hours at one time, or worked for salaries that were embarrassing, doesn't mean they have to do the same. We should be making it better for the next generation. Do you have any idea what their hourly rate would be? If you are thinking that you don't want to know, then you better find out. Would your administration even be aware that the staff responsible for providing the medical care to their student-athletes may be making minimum wage, and probably less than most of their other hourly staff?

We have to ask ourselves, what am I doing to make this profession desirable for the younger generation? What are we doing to improve salaries? Are we comfortable with staff members barely making minimum wage when you compare salary to hours worked? How have you fought to make conditions better? This is on us. This is our responsibility.

I'll be honest with you. I don't look in the mirror every night with pride in how my day went. There are many days when I realize there was something I said that I shouldn't have, or didn't say that I should have; something I did that I shouldn't have, or didn't do and should have. Doesn't make me a bad person; doesn't make me a bad professional.

As I mentioned at the outset, I decided I wasn't going to be presumptuous and try to convince you that I had all of the answers. My hope is that you will take the time and provide the answers yourself. At the same time, with all that has been said tonight, and with the tragic events we have witnessed over the past few months, especially those that occurred within the EATA borders, that we don't take ourselves or what we do too seriously. Life is too short, and we should be enjoying what we do every day

To put it into perspective, I am going to leave you with a quote I keep posted next to my desk as a constant reminder of that. The quote is from Dr. Daniel Drake. The reason you probably never heard of him is that he lived from 1785- 1852, but what he said is so pertinent even today. It is as follows: "Medicine has been defined to be the art or science of amusing a sick man with frivolous speculations about his disorder, and of tampering ingeniously until nature either kills or cures him."

Thank you for your time and for this opportunity.

