

1989 ROBERT G. DICUS AWARD  
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

It is my hope and my sincere intent that my response to this very prestigious award can measure up. (Thank you to Francis for his introduction). Sometimes an instant flashback can be a humbling experience. I can't help but feel at times like this, how could I have served you all better, performed with greater skill, or been more sensitive to those of you who I have had the privilege of knowing and working with through all these twenty eight years as a physical therapist. Our fantastic profession has been such an integral part of my life to this very moment. This is indeed a very proud moment for me, my family, my friends and co-workers. (Introductions) How can I, as one of you, attempt to express my deep gratitude for this honor you give me. You who have taught me everything and it is you who have given me the opportunity to convey a few heartfelt messages to you tonight. My response to you will be a brief trilogy. Believe me, it won't be a literary work as Webster would describe the definition of a trilogy, but it will have a related theme. My first message is about doing business and becoming a success as a professional physical therapist. This is why most of us are here at this meeting. The Private Practice Section has always provided us with the opportunity to improve our professional life by making us better business people. This weeks program at our meeting has been graded out as sensational for helping us become better managers of our practices. As I have had the opportunity to visit with many of you this week, it brings home the fact that we have indeed grown up considerably, but still growing. As I was preparing for this

night

I recalled some historical trivia I would like to share with you for a moment. When I attended physical therapy school at the University of Florida I did not dare utter that I was interested in private practice. That was 1959 - 61. There were several of us in that class of eight who were interested in private practice. We had to almost talk behind closed doors or away from the campus about our so called entrepreneurial interests. Today, it is at least a consideration of every student at some point in their educational process. I find it quite rewarding that now I am often invited back to talk to the students about private practice. How times have changed.

Those first days starting practice in the '60s were interesting. (PAY CHECK STORY) I can distinctly remember going to the bank, driving up in my Ford Falcon with my U-haul pulled behind it with physical therapy equipment, parallel bars sticking out with a red flag tied to it, I went in to borrow \$1,000 to go into private practice in the town of Lake City, Florida. Several of the loan officers came out to see my collateral, which I told them I owned, I said I owned it because I was making payments on it every month. Of course there was no equity there, but I can remember the exchange of glances as they signaled for me to come in to the bank and sign my first note for \$1,000 to get started in private practice. I can assure you it was not the last time I went in debt to move the dream ahead.

The other day, we were cleaning out some store rooms during an expansion phase of our new Associated Healthfocus Physical Excellence Lab in Lake City, and came across some interesting memorabilia. One was a patient record card that showed a charge

per visit to be \$3, yep, that's right \$3 a visit was my first charge. Back then we didn't have much more than heat, ultrasound, massage, and a little bit of range of motion. My how our technology and knowledge has expanded.

I would like to share with you a very strong belief I have adopted in those years as a private practitioner. Early on I realized to make it happen it was going to take a full commitment, high energy, and a lot of hustle. I believe in hustle as a strategy to move our practices ahead as well as our profession. For some reason the competitive scriptures almost systematically ignored the importance of hustle and energy as a way to succeed in business. While they preached strategic planning, competitive strategy and competitive advantage, they overlooked the record of a surprisingly large number of very successful businesses in our country that vigorously practice a different management style. These companies do not have long term strategic plans with an obsessive preoccupation on rivalry. They concentrate on operating details and doing things well. Hustle is their style and their strategy. They move fast and they get it right.

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Opportunities to gain lasting advantages through blockbuster strategic moves are rare in any business today. What mostly counts is vigor and nimbleness. Yet strategic planning theologians largely ignore them. Countless companies in all industries, including the healthcare industry, young or old, are finally learning the limits of strategy and are concentrating on tactics and execution.

You know we are starting to live in a world where there are

no secrets, where innovations are quickly imitated or become obsolete. If you have walked through the exhibit hall in the last few days, I think you understand my point.

The theory of competitive advantage just may have had its day. I'd like for you to ask yourself, if all your competing practices or large contracting companies, in your area, gave you their strategic plan, would it really make a difference? I think the answer is no. Traditionally the model of competitive strategy called for companies to seek substantial advantage over their rivals by

erecting massive barriers to competition. When Coca Cola launched New Coke in response to Pepsi's Challenge and when Kodak tried to circumvent Polaroid's patents, or when Apple assaulted IBM's dominance in the office market, each was trying to get at the competition with a big play. Putting so much confidence in the big play theory did not prove as rewarding as all three had hoped. Look at banking as another example, many banks have the same cost of funds, similar products and services, use the same kind of sales force to reach the same customers, and yet some are more profitable than others. Why?

They get it right. They make fewer credit mistakes and don't suffer large write-offs. They get a higher share of individual and corporate cash balances because their account officers get and stay close to their clients. They know their clients so well that they make suggestions before the clients know they need them. They hustle. They're informed. They're fast and they're available.

I also believe the way a business hustles or takes

advantage of transitory opportunity makes a real difference in how consistantly it wins. Again, flexibility, agility, and hustle are more important than a fixed, long term plan. There is no difference in this approach for our industry in the delivery of health care services.

Many of the practices that I have had the opportunity to work with as a consultant had responsible managers who made major decisions. They know, the key to providing excellent quality of care, that will bring the business through the door and eventual appropriate profitability, lies in superior execution and hustle. They don't need to analyze their other competing practitioners in great depth or formulate detailed strategies against them, instead they turn inward to promote a stream of vigorous action in pursuit of patients and their satisfaction. Again, these managers know they must understand human consent.

Good practice managers have an institutional vision, a shared understanding of what their practice is all about and where it is headed. To me, a vision is that glue that holds together the practice with its many diversified and sometimes unrelated activities along with its procession of recruits and defectors. It provides continuity amidst the turbulence. It's the advantage that transcends the fluctuating fortunes of any individual practice. A vision differs from competitive strategy. In a vision vagueness is not a vice, it is wide enough to allow individuals the right amount of latitude in finding opportunities. A vision does not require exhaustive analysis, it is sketched over time from the deep knowledge of the

practices internal capabilities, traditions and values. A vision is only as good as the energy, resourcefulness, and professionalism that combines to service every patient - and every new opportunity - every day. The only way to make that vision real is through superior execution. It is the resulting hustle that will out last your practices ups and downs and will usually win against any odds.

My second message tonight concerns our professional community and the need for more togetherness than ever before. Yes, we have grown up as a profession, but it is like any maturing creature, we do have growing pains. You know, few men and women have the opportunity to shape the face of their own industry as do present day physical therapists. What physical therapy will be tomorrow depends on what we accomplish today. This much hoped for success for our profession is not just a destination, it is a journey. We must live that journey. For every destination is a door way to another. As we have continually cultivated our professional careers, we must be willing to evaluate our strengths and our weaknesses. We must systematically study our profession, investing

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both time and effort into its development. We must know our market and we must establish clear and specific objectives. Ask yourself. Will we consistently, and honestly evaluate our efforts? Are we bold enough and unafraid of failure? Are we willing to challenge tradition, to set precedent to innovate? We have learned that not all of our efforts bring success, but please always remember that the seeds of success often sprout from the soil of seeming defeat. We must never stop trying to improve.

William James, who is known as the Dean of American Psychology, once said "Man alone of all creatures on Earth can change his own pattern, man alone is the architect of his destiny". "The greatest discovery of my generation", he said 'is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind". How many times have we really taken time to consider our attitudes and to really attempt to determine if they are appropriate for our professional needs and goals. Usually the more negative reasons we find for resisting attitude change, the more we refrain from them and the more we become accustomed to the status quo.

Our fantastic instructor of today taught us so many things about enthusiasm. Just look around you tonight, aren't you proud, are we looking good? You are the leading edge of this profession, the doers, the leaders. You are where you are because of what you are. No man is an island unto himself. Together we can nurture this profession to provide the stage for our performance. A performance backed by your professional skills, your unending tenacity, and hopefully a good bit of hustle and enthusiasm to make it all happen.

My last, and perhaps most important message, that I would like to convey to you tonight is concerning friendship. We all have a need for each other as professionals and as human beings. The recent tragedies we have experienced both on the east coast and the west coast with hurricane Hugo smashing into South Carolina and the earthquake just a few weeks ago shattering San Francisco has had a tremendous impact on all our lives. Did it take this

earthquake in California and the storm in South Carolina to bring about the community spirit that we have been hearing and reading about for weeks. For a period of time these very leading edge cities, as well as other communities across this nation, shifted back to basics. Survival and interdependence on others became a way of life. It was a real spirit of community. Once the earth shifted and the winds blew there was a change in human response. There was evidence that altruism is also an instinct. Thoughtlessness could even be heroism. But do disasters and turmoil make people connect. We simply reorder what is trivial and what is important. Do we need the ground shaking and the wind blowing to remind us of our connection and draw us out of our isolated lives. All of this was a rumbling, blowing, awesome reminder, from mother nature that we are all in this together.

We as physical therapist in our profession have had our own earthquakes and storms. Salary equivalency, DRG's, Physical Therapy Screens, Medicare denials, Lessor of Cost or Charges, POPTs, Non-Covered Care, and on and on. To some of you young and new, some of these words may be meaningless. To some of us these words were swords that ran deep into the heart of our practices and altered our approach to providing care and sometimes, sadly, our perspective on providing that care. There will be more storms in our professional career, more awesome problems that we must solve again and again to continue to grow as a professional physical therapist. (PRESIDENT JANE MATTHEWS LETTER) I truly believe, through the friendships and interdependence that we develop among ourselves is the key to



solving our problems and discovering our opportunities. For me, at this point in my life I just wish there were more time to enjoy all the wonderful relationships that have been spawned by my association with you, my fellow physical therapists and friends. As I look around this night I see so many of you that I have known for years. In you I have found my needs answered. Many of you allowed me to work with you as a consultant, or as a friend, as you developed your practice or faced the problems we all do in the management of our services. I have been to your clinics, I have been to your homes, I have learned so much from your sharing. I could not stand here before you tonight and feel so honored, if it were not for you. I knew coming in here tonight my major challenge would be to appropriately thank you who have taught me so very, very much. I am deeply humbled by this opportunity. Last week as I was thinking of tonight, it came to me what I might do. It was a page from the past and from our valued friend and speaker of today, Bob LeVoy. Remember, when he taught us about potlatch. Bob taught us that potlatch was an old expression meaning I give you more than you give me. Well, I know I can't do that. But potlatch is simply doing more than people expect, so if one of you will kindly reach to the middle of the table you will find a gift that is wrapped there for all of you. Would you kindly unwrap it and share the contents with everyone at your table. I present these thoughts to you tonight. To some old friends, to some new friends. This encompasses my philosophy about success. It is my small gift to you. Perhaps I am just pretentious enough to do it but I want you to know that it is given with a humble

heart. I call it Tennants for Professional Success, may I read  
it to you: Would you follow along with me.

(Read Tennants)

(Describe Shirley Dicus Conversation)

I thank you for allowing me this opportunity for expression  
and this very wonderful award tonight. Good night.