

Presidential Address of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

Journey to Excellence—Lessons From Our Mentors

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Thank you, Chuck. Thank you for your great service to our AOSSM.

That was truly the most humbling 100 yards I have ever walked, and I couldn't have done it without being carried for miles by the assistance and leadership of the past presidents of our AOSSM. Thank you all. It has been a great honor and privilege for me to serve our society.

We have grown into a large and healthy family here at AOSSM. While we benefit greatly from this growth, we are experiencing the inevitable growing pains and depend on the wisdom and the guidance of our senior leadership to make sure that we face change with the culture of thoughtfulness, honor, and respect that has characterized our family here at AOSSM. I am indebted to our Presidential line—Ned Amendola, Chuck Bush-Joseph, Jim Bradley, and Mike Ciccotti—as well as our AOSSM Board, who have worked tirelessly to ensure that the initiatives we pursue have maximum member benefit as the most important test.

I am deeply grateful to our dedicated AOSSM staff, who are instrumental in helping this family achieve our mission. To them, I want to stand and applaud.

We have grown from our 75 founding members in 1972 to over 4000 strong. Our journal, *AJSM*, started by the great Jack Hughston, then led by the immortal Bob Leach, and now the rock star Bruce Reider, has the highest impact factor of any orthopaedic journal in the world. Our online journal now also has an impressive impact factor and is read by sports medicine specialists all over the world.

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We continue in excellent financial health as a result of the generous support we receive from our technology partners in industry, membership participation, and especially the success of our sports medicine journal. This allows the funding of the research and educational programs so necessary for the personal growth of our members and the advancement of our profession. Participation in this meeting will exceed previous records and our exhibit hall is sold out with a waiting list. I would like to thank my program chair, Matt Provencher, and his committee for putting together an outstanding scientific agenda. Great work Matt!

Our work this year with our colleagues at the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery (ABOS) has been fruitful in improving the accreditation and certification process, making it easier to navigate and more appropriate for 1-year surgical subspecialty fellowships.

Our Council of Delegates has led the important efforts with the US Legislature to pass the Licensure Clarity Act, which enables our team physicians to care for their players and patients across state lines.

Our Board and Research Committee worked very hard with our technology partners to obtain a valuable patient outcomes data system and global registry (SOS), which is available to all AOSSM members as a member benefit free of charge. We continue to partner with other medical societies, sports-related ancillary societies, and major sports leagues to fund and produce educational events year-round. These meetings have become very popular. They enhance education from many directions, and help us move our specialty forward as team.

We have expanded the mission of our team physician committee to include advocacy for the health of athletes. Madison Kocian was our first honored guest speaker representing this initiative, and we have a generous offer of support from the Cedars-Sinai Medical System to continue to fund this annual session at our annual meetings. We have initiated a program to support and engage emerging leaders in our society to enrich our future. Our growth and global impact is amazing and our future is very bright. We are in good hands with our future presidential leaders, Jim Bradley and Mike Ciccotti.

To all of our members I ask—what makes AOSSM great? You do. What will keep us on the path of excellence?

You will. In his presidential address in 2017, Ned Amendola asked the question “Why AOSSM?” In answering the question, he discussed the pursuit of excellence and cited Peter Indelicato’s encouragement to “Aim High,” Bob Arciero’s discussion of “Embracing Our Craft,” and Chris Harner’s focus on “Lifelong Learning.” Ned also discussed the power of diversity and teamwork. To this, I would like to add that this society exists for you—to provide us all with the platform, tools, and freedom to help achieve our desired potential as sports medicine physicians. Believe me, your excellence and exceptionalism is your most valuable currency. Despite all the change around you, you are more likely to remain a person of value by toiling on the path of personal excellence. As we travel on this path, we in turn enhance the society—the family that supports us.

I’d like to discuss a few lessons from some of my mentors on my personal journey who also helped me.

Purpose vs Passion

Well . . . you’ve heard a bit about my background from Chuck. I was born to a Lebanese immigrant father and first-generation German-American mother while they were in training at Northwestern. The two most beautiful souls I have known in this life, and I so dearly wish they were with me today. My lasting link to them are my younger brothers, Reid and Dean, and my sister, Robin. My brothers are here with me today, and I am so grateful for the lifetime of love and support I receive from them and my sister.

Our parents raised us in a small dying coal-mining town in southwestern Pennsylvania (like so many of the mining and mill towns). The community, Mt Pleasant, was originally known as Helltown, initially due to the trouble that started there in the Whiskey Rebellion in the late 1700s. Later, Helltown was more descriptive. During the first half of the 20th century, when viewed from the surrounding hills, the town had an eerie red glow at night due to the coke ovens that ran day and night near the mines. My father’s practice was in large part taking care of United Mine Workers, farmers, and public assistance patients in the counties surrounding Pittsburgh. In our school system, 30% went on college. We all had jobs, mostly labor, when we weren’t in school.

It was there that I grew up watching the special relationship that existed between patients and their doctors in communities like that in those times. Intimate. Trusting. Being so much a part of the community and families. My father took good care of them and was reimbursed with everything from farm produce to livestock to carpentry at his office. Even later on, he was given a llama that he named Tricia, after my wife. She was so thrilled. My father was fulfilled and held more than just regard for his profession. He held reverence. He considered it an honor and a privilege. He loved it. He never missed an AOSSM meeting and went to many sports medicine meetings. He returned from one in the early 1980s excited to tell me that he had met the great young sports medicine specialist Jim Andrews. My dad was a lifelong student of medicine.

At that time, in that place, there were no participation ribbons, no awards for effort, no coaching on self-esteem or validation. Self-esteem came from achievement and accomplishment on the sports field, in school, or at work. I don’t recall my parents ever telling me that I was brilliant or more gifted than anyone else, but they thought I was born to take care of people like they were. With my background, I had to work very hard in college at Notre Dame and luckily got into medical school.

But once there, I knew I was home. I fell passionately in love with everything, especially surgery. Every rotation I was on was what I wanted to do. I was at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1980s. Many of the heroes of medicine and surgery had congregated there. I had done some research in orthopaedics, and after my third year of medical school, I was accepted to a residency spot. In my fourth year of medical school, the renowned cardiothoracic surgeon Henry T. Bahnson became my hero. He had been Alfred Blalock’s favorite at Hopkins, senior to Denton Cooley and David Sabiston.

He was a legend—in fact voted by his peers in *Lancet* as 1 of the 9 greatest surgeons of the 20th century. He made Pittsburgh the transplant center of the universe. He and his department gave me the Surgical Award in med school . . . and talk about validation! I was filled with passion and ego, gratification. The validation was filling a hole in me that I didn’t know I had. I took additional electives in cardiothoracic surgery, and ultimately Dr Bahnson offered me an opportunity to remain in the cardiothoracic surgery tracked through from internship—9 years. I would be the first tracked cardiothoracic resident and fellow at Pitt, and I considered a switch from orthopaedics.

Shortly thereafter, I experienced the other face of passion. In 1984 and 1985, Bahnson and his team were doing the first pediatric heart/liver and heart/lung transplants in the world. I was on the team as an intern and very excited. The problem was that the survival rate in those early years was 43%. No matter how hard those amazing surgeons worked and how many sleepless nights we spent managing those sick kids, we lost more than half of them. I couldn’t focus on the survivors, only the ones we lost. I dwelled on those kids, dwelled on their parents, dwelled on the pain.

This was the other face of passion. This passion I couldn’t manage. I knew this would be my life . . . and I didn’t think I could experience this kind of failure without defining myself as a failure. I didn’t yet have what Dr Bahnson had that enabled him to tolerate the failures and setbacks and keep moving forward. What he had wasn’t passion; it was obviously something much stronger, more durable, but whatever it was, I didn’t fully understand it yet.

So . . . for my own happiness and sanity, I needed to pursue orthopaedics. Those guys were happy. Now that was quite a gang. It was truly exhilarating and rewarding working with them every day, and I really was never happier. I became most interested in what Freddie Fu and Chris Harner were doing. My best friend, Jim Bradley, had gone off to a sports fellowship at Kerlan-Jobe, and I wanted to interview there too. It was during that interview that I finally understood that strong, enduring sense that

is the first sense necessary to identify on your path to excellence. That thing that the cardiac surgeon Dr Bahnson had.

In the Kerlan-Jobe interview, Dr Kerlan's first question to me—and by the way, Jim Tibone interviewed the applicants with Dr Kerlan—was “What is your purpose here?” I replied how much I loved orthopaedic surgery and how fulfilling and happy sports medicine made me and how much I admired what he and Dr Jobe and Jim Tibone and the other KJOC surgeons were doing as team physicians . . . blah blah blah. He looked at me like I was an idiot, and I sensed that Tibone was embarrassed for me. Kerlan said, “I didn't ask you about your passion. I asked what your purpose is here?” That scared me into a moment of clarity. I said, “Well . . . I'm in medicine because I know that I was meant to take care of people. Orthopaedics and sports medicine is the way I want to do it. That is my purpose, and I'm here because I hope you will make me as good at it as I can be.” I don't know if that was the right answer, but it was the truth and I got the fellowship.

Lesson 1: Find your purpose. It's purpose over passion. Learn to experience failure as well as success without being defined by either. Passion is about you and all the baggage you carry—your ego, unbridled feelings, your fears, your needs, your vices. Purpose is about the task. Your goal. Passion will exist, but on your path toward excellence, it must be controlled. It must be subordinated to the purpose, or you will fail.

Humanity—Relate and Build Trust

It is impossible to be effective at taking care of people, let alone achieve excellence, without humanity—the ability to relate to others. Sensitivity is a necessary ingredient in humanity. High achievers have been shown to have heightened sensitivity, heightened awareness of their environment, a heightened radar. However, acute sensitivity is not selective and increases one's awareness of all sorts of feedback, positive and negative. If coupled with insecurity about one's self, this can lead to a neurotic mess. But in a person secure with his or her own imperfections, heightened sensitivity is a critical asset. It helps you detect the needs of others and how best to relate to them.

Joe Torre, the Hall of Fame manager, was at the helm of 3 consecutive World Series Championships with the Yankees. Truly sustained excellence. I worked with Joe when he managed the Dodgers, and we became very close. He attributed his effectiveness to his innate ability to understand what his individual players needed to be successful, what each of them was bringing into that clubhouse, what their strengths were and how to bring them out, and how to protect them from their weaknesses. He could manage egos. This takes sensitivity and humanity.

Dr Kerlan was second to none in his humanity and ability to relate. He thought it was a critical trait to embrace and develop in his fellows. For instance, he always encouraged us to spend time in the training room and locker room of the teams we covered. He said it was the only way to truly understand what it takes for these athletes to compete and what they had to deal with. It was the only way

to speak their language, to develop trust. He taught that to Jim Tibone, Clarence Shields, and Pete Indelicato, and those 3 were masters of the training room. Dr Kerlan could relate on just about any level with anyone. He could go from an exam room seeing Jack Youngblood to Magic Johnson, to Fred Astaire or Angie Dickinson, to a guy who cleaned the stables at Hollywood Park or a kid from Compton hurt from playing football. They were all treated like they were important, and they felt he cared. He made the effort to understand them . . . to relate . . . and they all trusted him.

These lessons of purpose and humanity from Dr Kerlan, the importance of relating, the sense of deep appreciation for the intimacy, and especially the trust that can develop between physicians and patients are the greatest lessons I have learned as a physician. They form the foundation that enables us to be most effective to help our patients when they are in their darkest hour. We are members of a noble profession. We have the privilege to experience a greater level of intimacy and trust with other human beings than any other profession on Earth, including the clergy. Your patients want to hold you special among others. Conduct yourself that way. We need to push back against changes imposed by government, third-party payers, and large hospital systems that diminish our intimate relationship with patients and de-emphasize our personal excellence at taking care of them.

Aspire With Humility

Frank Jobe was one of the most gifted surgeons I have ever seen. He was a true surgeon scientist. We owe much of our understanding of the athlete's shoulder and elbow to him. A testament to his knowledge and elegant and precise surgical skill was that the open surgical techniques that he developed were remarkably successful in returning athletes back to competition. Dr Jobe's humility matched his immense skill. He was a kind gentleman. He always wanted to learn from others, and he loved to teach. You never got the impression that he thought he was more important than anyone he encountered. I think it was impossible for anyone who knew him to be jealous of Dr Jobe or root against him because he was so humble. The closest I ever saw him come to bravado was a time in the OR when several important visiting Japanese surgeons were present to watch him do a Tommy John procedure. Dr Jobe looked at me, winked, and said, through the interpreter, that in their honor he would do this case left-handed. It seemed they actually bought it for a moment. Of course, Dr Jobe was famously left-handed. He was so pleased with himself at his joke. Among the many lessons I learned from Dr Jobe, an important one was that you can aspire to great things if you do so with humility, integrity, and the willingness to put in the work. You can't be open to learn from others or have others accept you without humility and honesty. I actually had 3 great examples in this regard. In addition to Dr Jobe, I had Lew Yocum and Jim Tibone. Humble, skilled, and generous with everything. Jim, I owe you so much. You are the most brilliant physician I know, and you are still open to learning and still teaching us all.

Work—Continuously Work on Your Craft

I know of no great surgeon nor great athlete who doesn't continuously work on their craft. They practice, they rehearse, they try to get better every day. Practice, practice, practice. Study, read, and attend courses. Learn indications. Practice surgical techniques—even with your assistants and staff. Follow your results. Remain a student. Be persistent in this regard. There is no substitute for work in your pursuit of excellence.

Collaborate/Teamwork

I am convinced that we can't achieve our potential in our pursuit of excellence without the help and support of others. Teamwork and mutual inspiration are vital. I have been very fortunate to work with the talented and dedicated physicians at the Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic. I have been there my entire career, almost 30 years. Anything that I have accomplished has been with their teaching and support and in large part because I have been at Kerlan-Jobe and a part of that great team. Every task or assignment as a fellow at KJOC was aimed at your education and training. They wanted us to learn from the trainers and physical therapists and position coaches. They would tell us to go there, shut up, and learn something. Kerlan went so far as to tell me he wanted me to tell him every week something I learned in the training room. I have learned so much about taking care of athletes from great trainers and therapists. Among the best I have worked with are Clive Brewster, Stan Conte, Reggie Scott, and Gary Viti. Clive, Stan, and Reggie are here with me today. These were some of my greatest teachers. They taught me about the athletes in their sports, the injuries and treatments unique to their sport. They taught me to speak the language of their sport. They became my colleagues. Like John Conway always said, "I'm only as good as my trainers and therapist." This is a tradition taught at Kerlan-Jobe.

Sports Medicine Colleagues

To my friends and colleagues across the country, collaboration with you all is one of the most rewarding things in my career. I learn from you. I'm grateful for your help and support. Together, we advance greater and faster. I'm blessed to be your colleague.

Colleagues in Technology

I owe a great deal to those who have helped and supported me to enhance new surgical techniques and address surgical challenges to better treat my patients. I've worked with the great biomechanist Thay Lee to learn more about the tissues I am treating and how surgical techniques would perform. I've collaborated with engineers like Peter Dreyfus and surgeons like Tibone, Bradley, Andrews, Park, Burkart, Conway, Ahmad, Dines, Millett, Dugas,

Cain, Altchek, and many others. Reinhold Schmieding has been a great friend and colleague for over 25 years. He has listened to my surgical goals, challenges, and ideas that I have had and helped to solve them. I admire his diligence and dedication to excellence and the self-sacrifice to achieve it. Together, with all these people we have made advancements that have significantly helped many patients. My contributions would not exist without collaboration.

Teamwork

I have worked with Myrna Quirante and Teri Chavarria for my entire practice—almost 30 years. They are the people who help me run my practice. I'm so grateful to you both and our great staff back home. You share my worries and play a great role in any success. You care about our patients, and you care about me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Frances Yamazaki is my chief anesthesiologist, and Karen Mohr is our Fellowship and Research Coordinator—thank you also for your support and being the glue that holds our fellowship and alumni together.

Regarding my team at work. My work family. I can't do anything without any one of them. You know, within this room, there is not much difference regarding aspirations, desire, even potential. That makes us all relatively ordinary, and we are no different than those we work with.

If you want an excellent experience for your patients, unleash the pride of your coworkers who speak with and touch your patients. Let them know you can't do it without them, and when things turn out well, let them share in the success. You will inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things, and your patients will benefit.

Embrace Change

I was raised in a small town, with good people—honest and with a great work ethic. But, in coal patch towns like where I grew up, there existed an attitude by some that my mother referred to as "patch mentality." As long as you toiled away equally in the coal patch, never aspiring or achieving more than others, you had a secure place in the patch, supported by others in the patch. But heaven forbid you aspired to something greater—worse yet that you actually achieved enough to rise out of the patch. There were some who rooted against you, derided you, hoped you'd fail and fall back in. Actually, I've found that this is not unique to patch towns. I've seen it at work in the most sophisticated circles.

It takes self-confidence to embrace change or success and not root against it. Frank Jobe never used the arthroscope, but he saw its potential and encouraged us to become proficient and develop arthroscopic approaches that could improve what he was doing with open surgery. He even insisted that I fix both of his rotator cuffs arthroscopically almost 20 years ago; then he went on to affirm to the old guard of shoulder surgery that the scope was not the work of the devil. It was the way of the future. Dr Jobe not only embraced change; he wanted to be

a part of it. If you were working with Frank Jobe, you always needed to find ways to progress.

Another blessing in my life is Jim Andrews. He has always been there to support young surgeons and team doctors. Time limits me from listing all the ways he has helped me. His work and great skills have saved the careers of people from all walks of life. Jimmy is an eternal student and researcher—always looking for a new way to advance, and he shares his experience with all of us. One of his favorite sayings is “When you’re green, you’re growing, when you’re ripe, you’re next to rotten.” Like Frank Jobe and Jim Tibone, Jimmy embraces change when he spots progress. He knows that not all change is progress, but you can’t progress without it.

Agency

In 2017, the youngest head coach in the NFL took charge of the Los Angeles Rams. Sean McVay was 30 years old. We’ve got an unusual situation in LA. We have the youngest head coach and the oldest coach—defense coordinator Wade Phillips. When asked about their famously close relationship, Wade said, “Yeah, its unique, first team to have a coach on Medicare and another on day care.” Sean is already a superstar who handles leadership well beyond his years. One of Sean’s greatest attributes is his high sense of agency. Agency is defined by Justin Menkes in his book *Better Under Pressure* as the degree to which people attribute their circumstances and outcomes to being within their own control. If you blame things on someone or something else, you can’t grow. In Sean’s first season as head coach, the Rams went from last to first in their division and made the playoffs. They were the first team in history to be awarded Offensive Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, and Head Coach of the Year in the same season. At the award ceremony, Sean said that a coach who had Todd Gurley and Aaron Donald and couldn’t get out of the first round of the playoffs didn’t deserve to be coach of the year and promised to work harder to deserve the award. The following year, the Rams went to the Super Bowl.

We see this inward-first approach to self-improvement in our most effective and advanced leaders, businessmen, and champion athletes. Misfortune can strike at any time, but these high achievers control and optimize what they can about themselves and their conduct; otherwise, success is just a matter of fortune also.

Sources of inspiration and lessons of excellence are all around us. I’m fortunate to have family, friends, colleagues, and mentors that demonstrate them in many ways.

You will meet one of my close friends this afternoon, the great Tom Brady, who is a shining example of every lesson of personal excellence I can think of.

Be Your Best in Your Darkest Hour

Another great friend is Jimmy Dunne. He is a Notre Dame alumnus, runs a successful investment bank in New York city, is one of the best amateur golfers in the country . . .

and is admired by all of us who know him. Jimmy was best when it mattered most.

It was a sunny morning in Westchester County, New York, and Jimmy was not at work. He was qualifying for the US Mid-Amateur golf tournament. He had a solid start. He was even par after 5 holes, and as he was about to tee off on the next hole, a tournament official drove up and told him he needed to call his office immediately. Jimmy made the call to the city from the clubhouse . . . no answer. It was Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001. By the time he got back to the city, 66 of the 83 people who had gone to work that morning in the Sandler O’Neill offices on the 104th floor of the South Tower had perished, including the other 2 managing partners. The human loss to the company was immeasurable, and with them went the bulk of the company’s intellectual capital. Jimmy didn’t know if he had what it took to lead what remained of the company. But Jimmy had always been a worker, tough and perseverant. Within a few days, he had made arrangements for a college fund and financial aid to help families in need, and a few days later he had secured office space, computers, and equipment through friends as well as competitors who respected him in town and who poured out to help. Jimmy could have moved to the top of several other firms, but he wanted to save the company for those remaining and willing to work with him. He sent a note stating that he wanted to work with those who felt there was no place in the world they would rather be and nothing they would rather do. He said he was in that category. He said come on in . . . there’s room in this boat. Everyone can help row. But he couldn’t have doubters. He wished the doubters well, but they couldn’t come in the boat because, he said, “if you’re in the boat, you have to have an oar.” He was inspirational and a leader. Jimmy committed to his purpose: he had humanity, humility, collaborated, embraced change, had agency, and he persevered. He was excellent in his darkest hour. Sandler O’Neill is financially much larger today than it was on September 10, 2001. Jimmy hasn’t quite come to terms in his heart with that yet.

Joy, Love, and the Toybox

This, my friends, is a unicorn . . . the great Sam Reeves. Some in this room actually know him . . . and I’m one of the lucky ones who loves him. He is very special to so many. He has touched the lives of presidents and heads of state. He’s considered a mentor by captains of industry and some of the greatest athletes in the world. He has enriched the lives of students in the Harlem Children’s Zone, kids with syringomyelia in St Louis, and children with orthopaedic problems in Asia. Sam has an enormous capacity for love. I once asked him what his mantra was. What was his code? You’ve heard the saying “He who dies with the most toys wins”? Well, Sam has a different take. Sam told me about the toybox. He views life like the box of toys at your grandmother’s house when you played with your friends and relatives. At the end . . . when you’re done . . . all the toys go back in the box. You can’t take them with you. In a little while, people

may even forget what toys they played with. But what lasts is the joy and love you create with those you shared time with.

Sam is a giver. I was raised by givers. Givers resonate with me. They create joy. The great Lanny Johnson once made a comment in one of his typically fantastic lectures, and I never forgot it. He said . . . “Find a way to give something away every day.”

We are lucky to have people like this in our lives, and you’ll meet two more joy merchants . . . two of my heroes . . . tomorrow . . . literally two of the most philanthropic people in America—Stan Druckenmiller and Ken Langone. My parents were in the joy business. My mother started Meals on Wheels in our town and delivered food and medicine to the elderly and infirmed until she herself was too sick to drive. When I questioned life’s fairness before she died, she said, “Neal, life isn’t fair or unfair. In fact the only thing you are promised in this life is loss. So while you’re around, it’s up to you to create joy.”

My fellow members of AOSSM, we live in the service of others. We are in the joy business. Let’s be as good at it as we can be.

The truest source of joy and love in my life is my wife, Tricia, and my girls, Nicole, Natalie, and Eva. Tricia, you were the best surgical RN I ever worked with. I know that our family is your number one priority and purpose in life. And may I say that you are excellent at taking care of it. You are my true north and the love of my life. Girls . . . I’m proud of the good people you have become. You are the answer to my prayers. I hope you know how much I love you and how proud I am to be yours. I hope you know that my greatest purpose is to be a good husband, father, and physician. Our family is the greatest thing I will ever achieve.

I would like to thank you all for the privilege of serving this society—and for allowing me to share my journey and the lessons of my mentors with you. God bless you all.