

## The Past - The Future - The Present

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*Editor's Note:* Dr. Phillips delivered the following address to the 2008 graduating class of Palmer Chiropractic College West on May 30, 2008.

### The Past

When I was in high school, I often would find myself staring out the window wondering what I would become in life. I knew, after working four years on a chicken ranch, that I wanted to be my own boss and not "punch the clock" for someone else. Every day after school and every Saturday, I would be hatching chickens (in incubators), vaccinating chickens, moving chickens, feeding chickens, cleaning chicken pens and gathering eggs. Chickens are not very smart, but they can sure peck hard when you're trying to steal their eggs.

Never did I dream my life would take the many paths I have followed. Yes, many paths, but always one dream - a dream of independence. I have been a practitioner, a teacher, a researcher and an administrator, and now I am a consultant. In each case, I had the independence of determining what I wanted to do and when. However, one is never truly independent. In every capacity I worked, there always was someone to serve and someone who evaluated my performance.

Look at your president, Dr. William Meeker. He is the boss around here, right? Yes, but as the boss, he is serving and being held accountable all the time. I always defined the president's role as "striving to meet the needs of multiple contingencies - board, students, faculty, alumni, staff, community, profession, family and society - with woefully inadequate resources." It is a most challenging act of juggling. Kudos to Dr. Meeker for a job well done, but a piece of advice from Bill Cosby: "I don't know the way to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."

Were my dreams fulfilled? I would answer emphatically, yes! While serving and constantly being appraised for my service, I always had the option, the opportunity, to alter my situation, make choices and pursue different opportunities. I never felt stuck.

So, what is to be learned from the past? Each of us have encountered crossroads requiring decisions that would determine our future direction. The chiropractic profession also has faced decisions over the years. It faces decisions today, and those decisions have and will determine its future direction.

We all must become students of history - our own personal history and the history of the profession you now are a part of. We must understand how decisions have been made and how we make our own decisions. We must refine this process so that when faced with future decisions, we will be prepared to assess and act on well-founded principles and not be moved by fickle-fated feigners of futuristic falsehoods. It's amazing how much history is driven by ill-formed decision-making.

My advice to you graduating students is to take control of your dreams and your future. Don't sit back and allow someone else to determine who you are and what you will be. Place yourself in roles and positions that will allow you to influence, and even make, decisions that will affect you and your profession. Graduate and get involved.

I entered undergraduate university training knowing I wanted to be my own boss. I migrated through a few different majors, landing finally on health care and a desire to become a dentist. Fortunately, I met Dr. Joseph Janse, president of National College of Chiropractic for 38 years. He was a determining factor in my decision to decline admission to dental school and pursue chiropractic.

While I received much opposition from family and friends in making this change, I knew what I wanted and I went after it. After I achieved what I wanted, I dedicated my life to making it better and to preventing others from taking it away from all of us. I got involved. Go do likewise.

## The Future

The sky is falling! The sky is falling! Weren't these the words of Chicken Little? How often have we heard the cry of "doom and gloom" about the future of chiropractic? It seems many of these predictions of doom and gloom originate from those who have a solution to sell you right after graduation. You know of whom I speak - those who tell you that you didn't get a good enough education and if you will just obligate your next 10 years of income and your first-born child, they will teach you what you really need to know to be "successful."

Be cautious, be careful and be critical. You have received a great education. Some of you have internalized it better than others, but you wouldn't be sitting here today if you were not prepared to be good practicing doctors of chiropractic. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. The myth that 50 percent of you will not be practicing five years from now has never proven to be true.

Will the PTs take over chiropractic? Will we be relegated to technicians under socialized medicine, on the same level as a massage therapist? Will the osteopaths reclaim their roots and make manipulation a mainstream treatment reserved only for those who have an MD degree? Will managed care starve us all out of existence?

I like the saying, "The world is run by those who show up to meetings." The key is to get involved and feel the power of the one. There is a best-seller about a man who, with the assistance of 12 others, altered the thinking pattern of one-third of the world.

When I was a student at National back in the early 1970s, chiropractic still was under attack by the AMA Committee on Quackery. There were articles from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare boldly stating there was no scientific evidence supporting chiropractic theories, and people should avoid seeing chiropractors because they were quacks and their practice methods had no scientific basis.

How times have changed. Now, every practitioner who touches a patient claims the right to perform manipulation/adjustments - PT, ND, DO, MD, LMT, etc. Our therapy, thanks to the past 30 years of research, has arrived. Everyone wants a cut of the "hands-on" pie. Yet chiropractic still is portrayed by some as a cult with no scientific basis. It was my generation that changed the prevailing attitudes regarding "hands-on" care. Let it be your generation that changes the prevailing attitudes regarding the doctor of chiropractic. Make it part of your dream!

## The Present

Sometimes we let our thoughts of tomorrow take up too much of today. Daydreaming of the past and longing for the future may provide comfort but will not take the place of living in the present.

Professor Harold Hill, in "The Music Man," cautioned, "You pile up enough tomorrows, and you'll find you've collected a lot of empty yesterdays."

During my 10 years of private practice in Salt Lake City, with the support of my wife, I continued to be a student, seeking and obtaining both a master's and a PhD degree. Why did I do this? I made the commitment to be a doctor of chiropractic, and I loved what I experienced every day in the office. I was challenged by the lack of acceptance of chiropractic by society in general, and by medicine specifically. I was driven to make a change, and I had to prepare myself to make a difference. I also enjoyed the challenge of learning.

Every day was filled with multiple commitments. There was no time to lounge in the past or to wait and wish for the future. I had to get things done. Day planners were popular then, and I had one at my side constantly. With great care, I found time for my family, my religion, my health and our profession.

Buried in endless "to do" lists, perseverance and patience became daily goals. At times, maintaining my dream was not easy. At times, failure seemed more likely than success. Time teaches us all there is a silver lining inside every storm cloud.

As you now leave the hallowed halls of this institution, I leave you these final words of advice:

Learn from the past.

Prepare for the future.

Live in the present.

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