

THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

Taking One New Step Has the Potential to Reach Thousands

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Dr. Habermehl gave the following speech during the Installation and Induction Banquet at the COVD 40th Annual Meeting in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico.

Several years ago my wife and I attended my oldest son's parent-teacher conference when he was in the first grade. We met Chad's first grade teacher and she informed us that she didn't think Chad was going to pass the first grade because his reading was so poor. My wife and I were shocked hearing this and I immediately wanted to clarify to the teacher that we were here for Chad Habermehl, "H-A-B-E-R-M-E-H-L." "I know who you are, Dr. Habermehl," was her reply. "We are very concerned about Chad." Well I was immediately defensive, "What do you mean he is not going to pass the first grade?" I managed to get out. "It's October, you have only had the boy for six weeks! What about reading recovery? What about a special tutor?" The teacher's reply was, "We've tried all of those things, Dr. Habermehl, and we still don't think that it would be in Chad's best interest to move him ahead to the second grade."

At that point, I am embarrassed to admit, I did what any good optometrist-father would do, and I gave my son his first eye exam at the age of seven. I was appalled to learn that Chad had double vision from his nose out to about 18 inches. Okay, now I knew what the problem was, but I didn't know how to fix it. I had vision therapy classes and clinicals in optometry school, but at that point in my life, there were only two things that were important to me; my girlfriend Cindy and football. The 1984-85 Chicago Bears were in the Superbowl and I was not interested in 8-year-old kids with snotty noses. But, I did want to graduate; so I did my time, completed my vision therapy rotation and gladly moved on.

Now I was a parent on a mission. Now, that snotty-nose kid was my kid and I needed help fast. I got out the phonebook and called every optometrist in Genesee County, Michigan and learned that no one provided vision therapy in our county. There were a few in Michigan however; Dr. Fortenbacher in St. Joseph, Michigan, and Dr. Hoendorf in Grand Rapids. So, I called them, visited their offices, and

picked their brains. I took every continuing education class that I could find on vision therapy. Dr. Paul Harris took me on as my mentor and he taught me several vision therapy procedures. Dr. Steve Ingersoll also helped by sharing with me several processing and academic procedures as well.

When I would get back home with new procedures, I would run in the house, "Chad, Daddy's home! Come here son, LOOK AT THE LIGHT, LOOK AT THE LIGHT!" "No Daddy, no!" was the reply I would get from Chad. "Leave him alone!" my wife would call from the next room.

By the end of first grade, Chad's convergence insufficiency had been resolved and not only did he pass the first grade, but he had become one of the best readers in his class. Chad continued to do well in second grade, but it was third grade, the first grade where he was given letter grades that gave Cindy and I the lumps in our throats. Chad had received all A's.

And so here I stand, many years later, honored to be serving as the president of COVD for a second year. Chad is now a junior in college and considering a career in optometry. Where would we have been if I had not found any optometrists in the state of Michigan who had *chosen* to provide vision therapy? My story is not unique at all; there are a large number of attendees here tonight who have experienced the impact that optometric vision therapy has had on their own lives as well as the lives of their patients. As you see, it is not only our *talents* that make us who we are, but it is also our *choices*.

The talent that exists in this room is inspiring to say the least, and I would be remiss if I did not point out highlights of a few of our members this year;

Members like Dr. Lynn Hellerstein who not only watched her book on visualization and learning, *See It. Say It. Do It!*, be named one of the Top 10 Books for Educators by the *Principals Blog*, and the Best Call Award from *iParenting Media*, but also she served as part of COVD's Tour de Optometry visiting 20 of the 22 schools of optometry in the U.S. and Canada.

Members like Dr. Leonard Press, who continues to publish regularly in several journals, and served as Chair of the Pediatrics and Binocular Vision

Committee for the American Optometric Association and conducted the now historical webinar with Dr. Susan Barry, while implementing one of the five private practice residencies in vision therapy in the country.

We cannot forget Dr. Dominick Maino, COVD Fellow and Editor of *Optometry & Vision Development*, who is also an international lecturer, and has published several articles including one in the ASCO journal, *Optometric Education*, entitled *Yoda and Mr. Clean on TV and in a Digital Universe* and along with COVD members Dr. Marc Taub and Mary Bartuccio, who will be editing a text to be published by Lippincott entitled *Vision and the Special Needs Patient: Diagnosis and Management*.

Dr. Marc Taub, who in addition to serving as the Chair of the Associate to Fellow committee, helping to manage approximately 100 candidates, is also Assistant Editor for *Optometry and Vision Development* and was lead editor on the articles featured in the issues regarding Brain Injury and Israeli Optometry. Dr. Taub also serves as the Co-National Faculty Liaison and the local faculty liaison for Southern College of Optometry and the student advisor for the student chapter of COVD at Southern College of Optometry.

We have heard a great deal about our public relations in general and social media specifically at this year's meeting. It has truly been an amazing year for COVD. Efforts in social media have helped to bring our message to the forefront both nationally and internationally. Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Warford and our own social media coordinator, Ruth Villeneuve, have led the charge in this area. Nate, one of our social media gurus, founded *Peripheral Vision*, the first online community for optometrists who are interested in promoting eye care via social media, and he established *Foursquare Day*, marking April 16th as social media day.

We have a very special guest here this evening that I would like to acknowledge. One of the MDs who participated in the August is National Children's Vision and Learning Month campaign is here. Dr. Joseph Manley is a physician and medical expert witness for medico-legal cases, and in one of our press releases he states, "The conclusions (particularly the failure to recommend vision therapy for children likely to benefit from it) of the American Academy of Pediatrics report on Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Vision are based on exclusion of the most relevant data and inconsistent application of the Academy's stated criteria for selecting evidence. They fail to acknowledge abundant published and anecdotal

evidence supporting the use of vision therapy. This overlooked evidence includes controlled trials, observational studies, case reports and consensus of experts - the same kinds of data that underpin the daily practice of medical professionals."

Please join me in thanking Dr. Manley for sharing his expertise and insights with us and helping with our campaign. Dr. Manley, can you please stand?

We are defined more by our *choices* than by our talents. Anyone of these exceptional doctors could have *chosen* to devote their talents to a different field of study.

A child in today's educational system, who has been misdiagnosed with ADD, ADHD, or dyslexia, may at some point become a reader that is able to get through a few pages of text, but they have little chance of becoming fully literate. The definition of literacy includes "the ability to read, write, and speak in one's native tongue, and to solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in society (Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Section 203).

We are defined more by our choices than by our talents. Every person in this room here tonight has *chosen* to be a member of an organization and a movement that seeks to change the status quo. A status quo which says that 20/20 is all that is needed for successful vision and if your child struggles in school and has 20/20, then they must be suffering from some sort of mismatched wiring of the brain. A status quo that continues to pump more and more money into an educational system that is failing our country. Our educational system is struggling to generate readers while members of COVD choose to produce literate visual learners.

We are defined *more* by our choices than by our *talents*. I would like to leave you tonight with a quote from the American lecturer, essayist, and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson in which he gives his definition of success:

To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, or a garden patch. . .to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded!

Thank you for *choosing* to be here tonight and for *choosing* to be part of this great organization... The College of Optometrists in Vision Development!