

Growing Pains Can Be Positive

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As I researched in preparation for my presentation, "Corporate America Here We Come," given at the Pacific Symposium last fall, I was amazed to discover how many directions acupuncturists are taking today in pursuit of their career dreams. Smart people with bright-spirit eyes and unlimited potential are finding new ways to expand this industry. We are creating jobs for ourselves in multiple sectors; educational products for corporations to prevent injuries; and new business models and marketing opportunities for this magnificent medicine. Our growth is an organic process, built upon the efforts of those who have come before and inspired by a new generation of practitioners. We have grown increasingly rich in texture with profession members coming from the business world, traditional medicine, engineering, marketing and even farming backgrounds.

When I began working in this field in 1970 I was aware of six non-Asian apprentices/practitioners in the United States. Now, less than 40 years later, we and our students are circling around the number 20,000. With this tremendous expansion, it is normal to expect growing pains and we seem to be having them. Children can become uneasy during dramatic growth spurts. They become agitated and irritable, uncertain as to the boundaries of self-capability. Can an industry follow similar patterns? Have you noticed colleagues resistant to new, entrepreneurial ideas, criticizing other colleagues, criticizing themselves, feeling overwhelmed, doubting their professional abilities or unable to have joyous breakthroughs generating income or patient results? When growth is so dramatic, might we unconsciously dig in our attitudinal heels to slow the progress and avoid overwhelming our organs?

About halfway through my presentation for PCOM this past November, I noticed that words didn't want to come out of my mouth. The air was thick and an inner voice told me to be silent and listen. I stood quietly until I felt compelled to ask the several hundred practitioners in my audience to raise their hands if they felt resistance in the room to what I was teaching about the workings of corporate America and how to move into it successfully. Almost the entire room raised their hands. Merely acknowledging the resistance publicly allowed the atmosphere to lighten and the room began to breathe again. How healthy and "traditional" it is to feel, acknowledge and grow through resistance. How appropriate and historically relevant for Oriental medicine practitioners to expand into entirely new contexts and grapple with the differences they find. It is our path. It is why this medicine is able to continue, no matter the culture, continent or century. We express wisdom when we recognize resistance, employing *yin* traits of tolerance and acceptance to resolve it. These traits are taught to us through our professional ancestors and the great teachers of Taoism and Confucianism.

In looking at the history of this medicine and the cultures in which it developed, we must take into account the great merging of these two traditions. Over centuries, two seemingly opposing ideological systems, Confucianism (directed primarily to the structure of society) and Taoism (a series of revelations about the inherent chaos of life) were threaded together by great minds. It was this merging that brings us one of the primary characteristics of our art - that of inductive reasoning. The way we diagnose patients is not based upon the deductive process used by medical doctors. They take the body and break it down to find the single cell, germ or process that is

responsible for a disease. MDs deduce the problem by eliminating options. In contrast, we merge as many pieces of information together as we can to ascertain the imbalance causing a patient's health problem. We are inductive in our thinking, inclusive of all data - the more the better.

Growth through tolerance to and inclusion of seemingly conflicting views is the history of our medicine. It is upon this foundation of merging opposites - balancing *yin* and *yang*, allowing fire and water to exist side by side - that proponents of seemingly differing opinions have been debating and thus developing our craft. Practitioners have tested their theories and treatment practices against great minds of opposing perspectives generation after generation.

As we approach our associates in Western medicine, we have to merge seemingly contrasting views yet again to create an integrated medicine. Several of us have been successful in this and are working side by side with physicians, exchanging knowledge and bringing about notable results for patients. There are many challenging aspects of this work, one of which is the cultivation of a language that MDs can understand. As the saying goes, medical doctors will not "get" the message of our work until they "get" the messenger who delivers it. This is, of course, true of any group. The challenge of delivering our message to patients, members of the Western medical system, corporate human resource department heads and society at large is substantial. We must present our work in a language our varied audiences understand and relate to. I have found this to be among the trickiest parts of my work and worthy of growing pains. If you have ever taken one of my classes you may recall that I fashioned a language to help you see how this medicine was being reflected in your own life; how you are a living example of its theories.

Acknowledging greatness in this area, I want to share news of the passing of an admirable colleague to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. Evan Ross recently passed, after a long battle with cancer. His efforts opened the doors of Cedar Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles to us. Now several acupuncturists have privileges at the hospital and the prospects for our professional future at this reputable hospital are strong. It takes a leader, a man with courage, a man driven to educate and effort on behalf of us all to accomplish such a task. His example will continue to hold the doors of this respected institution open to members of our industry. Thank you, Evan.

We begin another blessed year my dear colleagues. Again, we are granted the opportunity to witness the Tao expressing itself through the blossoming of our profession. How fortunate we are and how understandable that growing pains are part of the process.

Editor's Note: If you are interested in receiving the handout for the "Corporate America, Here We Come" class, please e-mail me at ompractitionersupport@gmail.com. This is a 25-page handout with concrete data to help you move in this direction. Also, I asked 10 acupuncturists who currently are working in hospitals to explain how they acquired their positions. I have compiled their comments into a single document and can send you that if you are considering hospital work.

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