NEW ENGLAND
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It’s common for us to want to say, “yes” to everything asked of us, even if it comes at the expense of our own mental health.

A NEW YEAR IS A GOOD TIME FOR RENEWAL

When we start a new year, it’s often a time for reflection, a time to review and renew our commitments to others and ourselves.

To others, we may look around and find we are spreading ourselves too thin. Maybe we offer to help out just a little too often with external activities like the PTA or within our community. Maybe we see that we’re taking on extra work around the house or doing chores that others have slacked off on. It’s common for us to want to say, “yes” to everything asked of us, even if it comes at the expense of our own mental health.

To ourselves, we may take a look inwards and realize we’re not being true to our needs. We may find we’re not being assertive in asking for what we need to feel emotionally secure and safe. Maybe we’re not being entirely honest with ourselves about something we really wanted to try and do in our lives. Maybe it was in terms of forming a new habit or breaking an old one.

Like a client in psychotherapy, we’re capable of immense change too. Of course, it doesn’t just take the initial commitment, but the follow through. And that’s where we so often lose momentum after a few days or weeks of trying. Because as is so often said in therapy, change is hard. Little changes are easier than bigger ones, so it always seems helpful to try and start small and work our way up to the bigger things.

I can’t claim this new year will be any different than the last. We all have our challenges to face, especially as we enter another season where our future in the midst of an ongoing pandemic is uncertain. But you have to believe that change is possible, not just for your clients, but for yourself as well. Enroll the help of a trusted confidante or friend to help hold you to it.

Be kind to yourself in the process, because setbacks are inevitable. But you’ve got this.

Happy New Year!

JOHN M. GROHOL, PSY.D.

Q AND A

Head of the Landmark School reflects on 51-year tenure

Not many people spend their entire careers working for only one organization. Half a century is a long time to stay in one place but when the work itself rises above day-to-day responsibilities to the level of a mission, 51 years may seem not nearly enough.

As he announces his retirement and looks forward to continuing that mission, Robert J. Broudo, M.Ed, head of the Landmark School in Beverly, spoke with New England Psychologist's Catherine Robertson-Souter. He looks back on how the school has grown and how his own path turned out so differently from what he expected.

When first asked, by school founder Charles Drake, Ed.D., in 1971 to join his team, Broudo balked at the idea of staying in his hometown of Beverly. He was already planning to work with children and in education but thought he would go a bit farther from home.

He agreed to help set up the school, left for graduate school and a stint in Israel starting a special education program at the American International School. Then, he returned to Landmark and remained there, moving up to become president and headmaster in 1990.

Landmark specializes in evidence- and research-based teaching for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities.

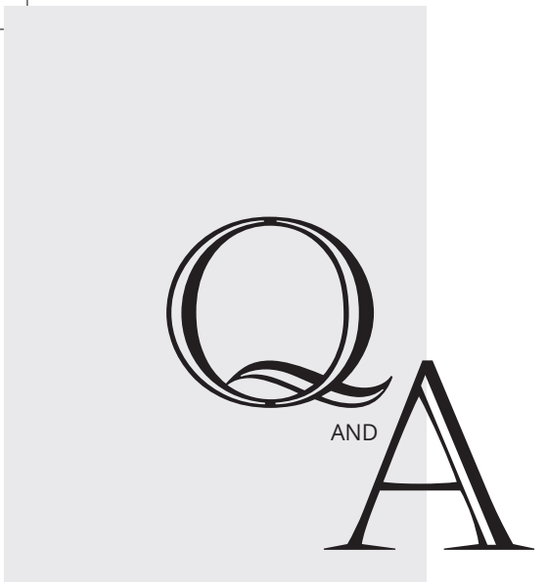
> I won't miss the daily responsibility of running the operation. I will miss seeing the kids every day, though.

You have basically been involved with Landmark since its founding. What have you seen change in 51 years to take the school to where it is today?

I had met Dr. Drake when I was in college studying developmental psychology and I was working in Maine with underprivileged kids. He taught us about this thing called dyslexia and none of us knew what it was. He taught us from day one about neurology and how kids learn.

That summer of '71, we were coming down weekends to this old estate in Beverly, painting walls, collecting furniture, and setting it up to be a school. We opened with 42 students in September of 1971 with a first year's budget of $225,000 and we had bought the campus for about $225,000.

Today, we have $75 million in assets, a $36 million operating budget, 36 buildings and 470 students from 20 states, four countries, and 115 cities and towns in Massachusetts.



It has grown. However, the primary one-to-one tutorial, diagnostic, prescriptive, customized, individualized, remedial model has never changed. We use small classes based on skill level. Academic advisors oversee each student's learning profile and we do not subscribe to any one methodology.

We have learned new science over the years from new research, so we are able to take the neuroscience plus our years of experience about what works and doesn't work and apply that to our curriculum. The curriculum can grow based on what we are learning but the basic model of meeting every student where they are as an individual and as a learner has not changed.

In the early 90s, the school was in a pretty significant financial challenge and, in order to right the ship, a group of us came together and we problem-solved how to maintain this model and the faculty and staff and keep them whole.

Since 1994 or so, even with downturns in the economy, we have been on very solid financial grounding. Our budgets are positive every year, we have grown every year. Fundraising is taking off. I am proud that we have never let go of our mission even in difficult times.

You speak a lot about the mission of the school. What does that mean to you?

I now refer to Landmark as a mission with a school rather than the other way around. We do outreach and training programs with around 10,000 teachers a year. We are in 60 school buildings doing consulting and we have a summer institute and online programs with Southern New Hampshire University.

Our goal is to help classroom teachers everywhere understand how to integrate language and learning skills into the classroom to meet the needs of students.

I say we are a mission with a school because it is those kids who can't get to Landmark whom we really want to reach. My biggest goal is to put Landmark out of business. Why should a student have come from England, from India, from Houston or even from New Hampshire, to graduate and go and be successful? Why should that have to happen? We should be able to educate these kids wherever they are.

Since the 70s, there have been leaps and bounds forward in our understanding of learning differences. What have you seen change in the wider world during the past 51 years?

In the general population, there is much more awareness that not everyone learns the same way. I don't believe we are doing enough to help potential classroom teachers understand the broad neurodiversity in the classroom, though.

In many states, teachers are still teaching curriculum content and curriculum frameworks leading to a high stakes test and they are not necessarily doing problem solving of what are the strengths and challenges of the learners.

Parents are more aware of how to advocate for their children, I think.

Yes, that is true. One of the things about Landmark is that since the 1970s, we have been approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education so 52 percent of our kids are funded by the district they came from. And that is a parent effort. The parent will go and fight the district. It means a lot of kids can come to Landmark who otherwise would not be able to come here.

What are you most proud of in the 51 years?

That's a hard one because I get emotional. What I am most proud of is that we have never lost sight of our mission. It is all about the kids and if anything brought that out it was COVID. What this faculty and staff has done to take care of these kids, knowing that remote learning is not the best thing for a kid with learning disabilities--they have gone above and beyond.

It is when I see the young kids jumping out of their cars in the morning, with backpacks that are bigger than they are, and they are happy to be in school. And the older kids walking up and down the hill,

laughing and talking to each other and happy to be in school, that is what it is all about.

What is next?

I've been saying to people, I'm stepping out of the role of running Landmark School but I am not stepping out of the mission. There are so many ways to stay involved with what Landmark does and the mission of helping kids who are not learning because of their language-based disabilities.

I am involved in some national groups and will stay involved with Landmark. There are other organizations I am on the board of so I will have some time with them as well. I know I won't be bored.

I won't miss the daily responsibility of running the operation. I will miss seeing the kids every day, though.

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IN PERSON

Raking leaves again

> When you're well into your seventies, you don't need metaphors to remind you that loss comes around, sadness lurks, and time moves too fast.

***By* ALAN BODNAR, PH.D.**

The yard is clean and smooth again waiting for nature's hand to paint the first coat of winter white. The air is crisp and still. As I take in the scene from the window, I find it hard to believe that it has been 25 years since I wrote my last column about my personal version of the New England ritual of raking leaves, but here we are. Now, across the threshold of winter, there is time to take the long view of a process that has alternately challenged, vexed, and satisfied me for most of my adult life.

When I was a young man busy practicing psychology and raising a family, my wife and I had only the weekends to clear the yard of what amounted to 100 bags of leaves every fall. Our goal was to get the job done by Thanksgiving, and if the weather cooperated, we usually succeeded.

That meant at least four long days of raking and hauling our leaves off to the town dump or piling them on a compost heap in a corner of the yard. The work was tiring but, at the same time, invigorating in the autumn air, conducive to reflection and challenging. The challenge was to find the most efficient way to do the job, the ideal balance between taming nature and simply living as part of it.

At first, we tipped the balance in the direction of taming and swept the yard clean of every fallen leaf. When that became too hard, we started the compost pile and reveled in witnessing how this mess of unraveling nature spawned deep, rich soil tilled by worms and thousand-leggers. In went the pitchfork and out came a wriggling creature. Once a toy blue plastic man emerged from the ooze, soiled but intact, a symbol, I was certain, of human resilience in the face of all the hardship that life could heap upon us. That happened in the year my father died.

Years passed, the children grew and we lived through the joys and sorrows that life brings to us all. We put an addition on our house, changed the shape of the yard and cut down some trees, but there seemed to be just as many leaves to rake every fall. And so, I raked, raking the actual leaves and the metaphorical leaves, symbols of unwanted sadness that we could either hide away in the town dump or put in a protected space to do the alchemist's work of turning sorrow to wisdom.

I thought of my patients as I worked, one in particular who hid his leaves of sorrow under a cover of alcohol, drugs, and gambling. I took satisfaction in being a psychologist and felt grateful for the opportunity

to help people face the pain in their lives and allow it to do its transformative work.

Then one day we reversed course, abandoned the compost heap and resumed our practice of bringing 100 bags of leaves to the town dump. I still believed in the healing power of nature's alchemy and the importance of accepting life's painful emotions, but home composting had run its course and lost to the attractiveness of a clean yard and the practicality of getting better quality soil for free at the dump.

Now with both of us retired, my wife and I are no longer limited to weekends to dispatch the leaves, and eight-hour days of raking, hauling and disposing of our spent New England foliage have become a remnant of our shared history. The passing years leave their mark, and as much as we try to remain active and young at heart, our bodies do not hesitate to set their limits. And so we listen, compromise when we can, and establish a routine that works, at least for the time being.

When the first thin carpet of leaves covers the lawn and starts to gather around the trunks of the trees at the base of the hill, we make our first pass. The years have taught us that wide-bottomed rakes with steel tines are best for the job. The work is easier still with plastic chutes that hold open the big paper bags hungry for the armloads of leaves that we drop into their waiting maws. The chutes weren't around when we first started tending our lot over 40 years ago, and like most things these days, they mark the passing time.

New inventions show our progress and old markers map the way we have come. At the bottom of the slope in one corner of the yard, an aluminum canoe lies on its side propped against a tree. We've had it for longer than we've owned the house but haven't used it in decades. When we sell it, someone will get an indestructible boat and we'll get to keep the memories it carries. My rake glides over the pet cemetery, no stone markers, just a smooth patch of earth covering a hamster, a cockatiel, assorted woodland creatures, and an old man's cat that died in our window well.

These days, we try to keep up with the leaves as they fall, making several passes over the yard, filling the nine bags that fit comfortably in the car and bringing them to the dump over a period of weeks until the job is done. Though the autumn leaves are always a good metaphor for sadness, these days I see them more as what they are – just leaves.

When you're well into your seventies, you don't need metaphors to remind you that loss comes around, sadness lurks, and time moves too fast. It is enough to enjoy being outside in the crisp days of autumn, to find satisfaction in the work and to get it done with time to spare for the delights that the season holds. NEP

Alan Bodnar, Ph.D. is a psychologist formerly at the Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital.

THE PRACTICAL PRACTICE

Managing tech/life balance can be challenging for children

> You may not be paying money, but you and I and our children are paying with the one thing we can't get more of, our time. We are paying with most valuable thing on the planet.

***By* CATHERINE ROBERTSON SOUTER**

Technology, the internet specifically, has drastically changed the way we live our lives. From instant access to data, to 24/7 contact, to real-time traffic flow, many of us live simultaneously in both the real and virtual worlds.

For younger people, who have never known a world without social media, YouTube or TikTok, the virtual and IRL (in real life) worlds often blend so seamlessly, they may not appreciate how much time they spend in front of a screen, looking at images or puppies or chatting with friends rather than actually looking at puppies or being with friends.

"If you look at grammar school age and especially into the teens, the average screen use is pushing over seven hours per day," said David Greenfield, Ph.D, founder of The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction and assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. "And that is non-productivity-related screen use."

Many of the most popular sites are designed specifically to keep the viewer engaged and online. The product they are selling is the humans they can attract.

"The goal of all screen-based media," said Greenfield, "including the news, is to keep eyes on screens. You may not be paying money but you and I and our children are paying with the one thing we can't get more of, our time. We are paying with most valuable thing on the planet."

Since the players behind the scenes have billions of dollars of research behind them to show how best to keep people engaged, it is not surprising to find more and more of us falling down a rabbit hole of technology usage and wondering where our time is going.

"Screens are incredibly distracting and addictive," Greenfield added. "A smart phone is a portable dopamine pump, an easily accessible internet portal. One thing we know in addiction treatment is that the more accessible it is, the more likely you will overuse it and now you have a smartphone less than six inches from your fingers."

As times have changed, addressing technology use and abuse has also become a major part of residential school programs. In April, Greenfield worked with the staff at Shortridge Academy in Milton, NH, for a two-day training and curriculum consultation on dealing with technology in a school setting.

While the school's main goal is to offer an authoritative approach for

students struggling with anxiety, depression, family dysfunction, and learning challenges, they found that incorporating lessons on healthy relationships with technology needed to be brought on board early.

"Our population often used screens as a maladaptive coping skill, spending hours a day on non-productive screen time, isolating with screens, playing video games, or seeking social approval via technology," said Christina Smalley, LCMHC, clinical director at Shortridge.

Rather than attempting complete abstinence, experts recommend aiming for two hours or less per day of "non-productive" use, which would include all video games, television, and the Internet. At Shortridge, it is a matter of placing screen usage in context.

"Our Healthy Lifestyle Goal at Shortridge has a focus on technology balance," Smalley explained. "We tend to work backwards to see what should fit in a typical day and then figure out how much time might be left for non-productive tech time."

One concern is how difficult it can be to find something else to do. With the dopamine hit from screen time, the real world can feel less interesting and exciting.

"Sadly, many students have dropped out of activities for a variety of reasons and have turned to technology to fill their time," Smalley said. "As adults, we've sometimes exacerbated that by lowering our expectations of what kids should be doing. When we do everything for them and pay for everything for them, there's no reason for them to need to get off of a screen to do more for themselves. We use this concept in our family programming often."

While in the program, technology usage can be physically restricted, but it won't work long-term unless the staff helps students find other options.

"It's incredibly challenging for students to figure out how to fill their lives," said Smalley. "Often we fall back on their values: Who do you want to be and what do you want to contribute? What actions or activities help you get closer to that?"

The goal, of course, is to give students tools they can take with them throughout their lives, and maybe share with their own friends and families.

"The majority of students and families realize their tech life balance will always be a bit of a challenge and come away with strategies and benchmarks to help monitor that."

NEP

SURVIVING COVID-19

Residential schools find ways to weather the pandemic

> Basically, we were like a health care facility. We created quarantine units and on campus we learned how to separate students who couldn't mask.
>
> Elizabeth D.R. Becker, Esq., executive director, Massachusetts Association of Approved Special Education Schools (MAAPS)

By **PHYLLIS HANLON**

When life came to a virtual halt in March 2020, thanks to COVID-19, residential schools faced daunting challenges that required quick action, creative thinking, and fortitude.

According to Elizabeth D.R. Becker, Esq., executive director, Massachusetts Association of Approved Special Education Schools (MAAPS), the virus was the "hardest thing we have faced." She pointed out that the population residential schools serve necessitates close proximity and, very often, one-on-one contact; keeping staff and students safe brought about several changes.

Early in the pandemic, residential schools provided staff with personal protective equipment (PPE) and training in how to don and remove the masks, gowns, and other gear. At the same time, these schools continued deep cleaning protocols. "It's shocking how much they had to do to operate the schools," Becker said. "Basically, we were like a health care facility. We created quarantine units and on campus we learned how to separate students who couldn't mask."

Furthermore, residential schools campaigned for the vaccine and, as part of the congregate care contingent, did a fair amount of testing, Becker said. "We put a lot of public health protocols in place."

Rita M. Gardner, MPH, LABA, BCBA, president/CEO, Melmark, applauded MAAPS, typically known for its advocacy, for offering significant technical support during the pandemic.

Gardner pointed out that guidance from federal and state authorities was delayed so Melmark had to quickly develop a strategy to mitigate adverse effects. "We started cohorting to reduce contract tracing. We also did a lot of infectious disease things," she said. All surfaces became contactless and Melmark installed air purifiers. By April 4, 2020, Melmark schools had provided full PPE for 1,300 employees.

Melmark employees had an advantage over some other schools since all staff had undergone intense safety skills training pre-pandemic and became one of the first immunization providers.

Before the vaccine was approved, Melmark launched a vaccine education program to address employees' concerns. "We conducted fifteen public health town halls regarding how mRNA was developed. We gave details on how the vaccine works and its ingredients in layman language," said Gardner.

Gardner reported that Melmark's quick and effective response to the pandemic drew the attention of the Boston University School of Public Health, which awarded the organization more than $25 million.

> We conducted fifteen public health town halls regarding how mRNA was developed. We gave details on how the vaccine works and its ingredients in layman language.
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> Rita M. Gardner, MPH, LABA, BCBA, president/CEO, Melmark

Ivy Chong, PhD, BCBA-D, MBA, senior vice president of Children's Services at the May Institute, reported that her school quickly shifted to remote therapy, although residential schools continued face-to-face learning. Day and residential programs shifted to a partial cohort model where students from each population did not cross paths. Currently, all students, with few exceptions, are back in the building, she noted.

Masks are still part of the daily dress code, especially for congregant care. "Where students can tolerate it, they wear masks," Chong said.

Most of the protocol modifications took place in terms of teaching, according to Chong. "We are using more software and apps to be creative. We have purchased additional technical equipment." Remote sessions and telehealth were fairly new platforms for staff at the May Institute. "We had dabbled a little, but full remote and Zoom meetings take getting used to," Chong said.

Teacher comfort level was tracked through a dashboard that asked various questions, Chong reported. Ratings went up or down as cases in the state fluctuated.

Operational changes at the May Institute revolved around sanitizing measures. "We hired a cleaning crew and teachers also helped clean the school. We had to create a new isolation room. We did temperature checks and collected data before the vaccine was available. Additional policy and procedures address different levels of exposure and symptoms," Chong said. "We are trying to be cautious but not overly restrictive. This has been very different for families to go from consistent support to limited support."

The May Institute spent well over $1 million to implement all these changes, according to Chong.

What has been most disruptive for students is switching back and forth as the virus recedes and then returns. "The unpredictability of the situation is a challenge," said Chong. "Students are used to routine. They can't control their fear of becoming ill. The global pandemic is causing exhaustion. We'd love to have a crystal ball to predict when there will be a completely new normal. We innovate constantly and want to improve quality of life."

Safe schooling continues to be a challenge, Chong said. "We're cautiously optimistic of what the new year will bring."

> We are trying to be cautious but not overly restrictive. This has been very different for families to go from consistent support to limited support.
>
> Ivy Chong, PhD, BCBA-D, MBA, senior vice president of Children's Services, The May Institute

Phillip Ekberg, MEd, principal at Wayside Academy, noted that students were not exposed to each other but kept in separate cohorts in the early days of the pandemic. The school executed thoughtful classroom practices to minimize risk to staff and students and provided academic and emotional support, he added.

When the school year resumed in September, the students returned to a different environment. "All items had been removed from the classroom. Bookshelves and cabinets were gone," said Ekberg. "With COVID funding, we bought podiums with storage and a white board on the front. They are mobile and smaller than a teacher's desk, but compact. This makes it easier to maintain six-feet distance."

Additionally, Wayside eliminated communal spaces, installed air purifiers in the classrooms and meeting spaces and used outdoors rather than the gym for exercise class, according to Ekberg.

During the height of the pandemic, communication became the foremost goal. Wayside teachers became "tech experts," facilitating virtual classes with students and weekly meetings with parents, according to Ekberg.

Wayside also adopted transportation protocols for day students to maintain safety. "[Students] waited for us to wave them in and we made sure they were masked and sanitized," Ekberg said. "As much as possible, the treatment setting is dedicated to kids living here or at home. We are maintaining integrity, doing anything in the interest of not damaging the important work of supporting kids. Students are looking for reassurance and emotional support."

Becker believes there will be an increase in special education students post-pandemic. She hopes that "things will level out" and is looking to create a five-year plan. "It

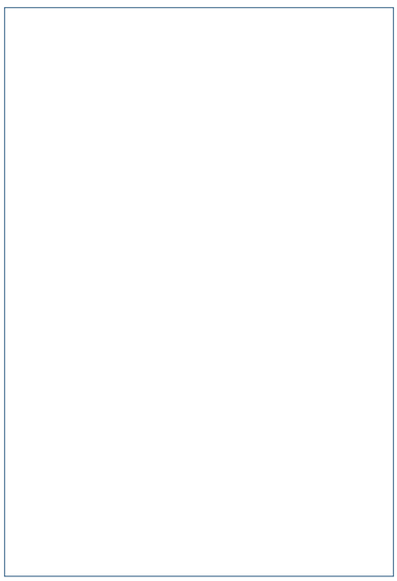
> We are maintaining integrity, doing anything in the interest of not damaging the important work of supporting kids. Students are looking for reassurance and emotional support."
>
> Phillip Ekberg, MEd, principal at Wayside Academy

will take time to address all the needs of students. We've seen the benefits to in-person education."
NEP

Phyllis Hanlon has been a regular contributor to New England Psychologist since 1999. As an independent journalist, she has also written for a variety of traditional and alternative health magazines and business consumer and trade publications. She also serves as writer/editor for custom publications.

COVID-19 HAS GROWING IMPACT

Residential schools find ways to weather the pandemic



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