

I get around. I give a lot of talks, and I've had the pleasure to meet a lot of people in our field. Among those people have been some real giants.

You know their names. I won't list them for fear of forgetting some, but many of them are synonymous with innovation, caring and the pioneer spirit that defines O&P.

There are many ways to be a giant in O&P. Some giants made a major contribution to mechanics. All orthotic and prosthetic components were invented by someone, and many of these inventions were simple adaptations of inventions from other industries. Some were brand-new concepts developed specifically for O&P.

Some giants develop a technique or treatment protocol that helps the quality and accuracy of care. For example, when the medical field began standardizing diagnostic methods, O&P came along too. The work of those early pioneers who helped standardize protocol means that clinicians no longer have to reinvent the wheel each time they treat a patient.

Other giants have elevated our industry through volunteerism and missionary work. Whether by traveling to foreign countries or going around the corner, some of our ranks have donated much of their time and money.

But many more of these giants—in fact, the most important ones—are people you've never heard of. You may have met some and never known of their contribution to the profession. These are the giants who work quietly in the background, taking the time to share the knowledge and the skills they've learned with the rest of us. It is to those silent teachers that this article is dedicated.

The silent giants

Most technicians learned their art not from formal education, but from some other technician. There are some fantastic formal technician programs available these days, but the vast majority of technicians are

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

By Steve Hill, CO

indebted to some unknown O&P craftsman.

Still, I hear constant complaints from fellow technicians about an insidious type of rivalry. It occurs when an experienced technician is threatened by a newer one and deliberately refuses to pass along any information. Since most technicians are trained by one another, technician education returns to the Dark Ages.

I suppose some experienced technicians do this as a way to protect their turf. But I think knowledgeable technicians realize that passing on knowledge gives them an opportunity to progress as well. You can't go on to the next level of your career without someone to fill your shoes.

Be a giant

Sharing your knowledge with your peers is imperative to anyone who takes this job seriously. There are many different ways to accomplish a given task, and some are better than others. While standardization of the technical aspects of O&P may seem far off, you can be a part of the future of your profession by teaching other technicians what you've learned. Here are three practical ways to do that.

Help your co-workers. When a co-worker asks how a technique is accomplished, show him. When you see someone struggling, lend her a hand. I know it's entertaining to watch a newbie trying to get the resin down a long stretch of a KAFO, but if your co-workers are not successful, you all look bad.

Set aside your ego. Each patient deserves the best possible device we


can create, and substandard work will be seen by every doctor and therapist who comes in contact with that patient. Don't let personal turf wars ruin an entire practice.

Keep learning. A smart technician learns from any source, whether it's from more experienced colleagues or the brand new guy with a fresh perspective. Look for new tools at the hardware store and catalogs. Go to state and national meetings and sit in on a few talks. Better yet, if you want a real learning experience, get up on the podium and give a talk yourself.

Face it: we're all "standing upon the shoulders of giants," to paraphrase Sir Isaac Newton. Some of us have been fortunate enough to develop or adapt new techniques, but our knowledge of treatment today is based on information we learned from someone else.

Be the technician on whom others rely for knowledge and expertise. If you save them the learning curve, someone may come up with an innovation that elevates all of us in the process.

And maybe one day you'll hear a former co-worker say "I learned this trick way back in the day from _____. Best darned technician you ever saw!"

Then you'll know you've become one of the giants of O&P. 



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