

# How Do You Know What You Know?

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I have been a manager of rehab services for over 15 years. That is a long time. Many of you have even more experience than I do. I know for myself that there are a significant number of things that I do "because that is the way I do them". They seem to work for me. I have learned them over the years. I have adapted them when I thought I needed to and, most importantly, they are "my" ways.

Recently, I have been asking typical consultant questions. That is what consultants do.

"Why do you do it that way?"

"What other ways could you do this?" and

"Is there a better way to accomplish this?"

Those are pretty easy questions to ask. It is not as easy when I am not asking but rather being asked these questions.

As I have reflected on these questions, it seems there are several ways in which I have acquired the knowledge that I have:

- ?? Academic education
- ?? Independent research
- ?? Informal interpersonal sharing and dialogue
- ?? Experience-based learning experiences
- ?? Independent thought processes
- ?? Mentor-directed learning experiences

All of these have been very valuable over the years – each in a slightly different way.

My academic education consisted of my professional training as a PT and my graduate work in business and marketing. I have a house and office full of textbooks and papers that were once the center of my waking life. Some of those texts and papers are still very relevant; others had a shorter shelf life. Something that surprised me was that many of the general education (liberal arts) texts remain very relevant to today while the professional clinical documents often seem very dated today. I have learned a lot about the scope, history and background of our profession from these teachers.

My office is full of the trappings of my independent research on a wide variety of topics. I would like to tell you that it is all categorized and filed neatly. Much of it seems to be organized in the same manner that I have accessed it – randomly, as the need arose. There are documents from organizations that regulate our profession and documents on our profession itself. Some are better resources than others – but for some reason – I have kept them all. I have learned a lot about the depth and complexity of our profession and life in general from these teachers.

The past 23 years of being a PT are filled with informal (and some formal) dialogues with a wide variety of individuals who have espoused a huge range of positions on an overwhelming number of topics – some relevant to this discussion and others not relevant but important to me nonetheless. My memories (what is left of them) are filled with rich conversations and great friendships forged over heated (or at least warm) discussions in a great many different places and times. I have learned a lot

about the "how to" of management from some of our profession's greatest teachers in these interactions.

I have also been involved in some stimulating (and some not so stimulating) projects over the years. These experience based learning experiences also involved many independent thought processes when there were not any clear cut "right" answers. The lessons of how to determine when I have "no clue how to proceed" are very valuable. They teach you to interpolate, extrapolate and, sometimes, confabulate to reach a successful conclusion. I have learned a lot about what we really don't know from these experience-based teachers.

The mentors in my life have taught me the lessons that typically fall in between the cracks of the rest of my education. They have taught me by example, by prodding, cajoling and confrontation, and by supporting, encouraging and hugging. They have taught me about style and respect, compassion and diversity, learning and being comfortable with not knowing. I have learned life's greatest and most rewarding lessons from these wonderful teachers and friends.

Each of the ways that I have learned is important. Some are more valuable ways to learn than others – I think it depends on the content area which "teacher" is the most effective in the long run for a specific topic. I value all of them.

I would suggest to you that it is important to know how we know things. When we grow, when things change, when we need to adapt, it will be necessary to go back to the roots of our "knowing" and check to see if we can build upon how we know it to adapt it to our current needs. When it comes to decisions of how we run our practices, our departments and our personal lives, the process is often more important than the content. When it comes to areas of regulation and compliance – we need to be able to cite the authority for our actions. That will keep us out of trouble – at least some of the trouble that we can visit.

I'd love to hear about your thoughts and experiences on this issue.

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*Originally published 4/2001*