



“Ask Dr. J”



The “Ask Dr. J” columns are authored monthly by Jennifer Christian, MD, MPH, President of Weability Corporation. See previous columns at www.weability.md.

Dr. J's columns also appear in the monthly Bulletin of the Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC). To purchase a book of Dr. J's collected columns, go to www.dmec.org.

The columns often summarize issues discussed by the Work Fitness and Disability Roundtable, a free, multi-disciplinary e-mail discussion group moderated by Dr. Christian. Apply to join the Roundtable at www.weability.md.

April 2005 – Make Music with What Remains

Dear Dr. J:

I'm a plant nurse who doesn't like doing disability management. The company seems to want me to push everyone back to work (we're now using disability duration guidelines). I feel like I'm being mean. Life is tough enough for these employees who have been injured or have developed chronic health conditions, particularly the ones who have chronic or major problems. I know it would be very hard for me to cope with something like that, so I don't like pushing them to come back to work before they feel ready.

Sympathetic Syd in Secaucus

Dear Syd:

Did you know that you might be a great resource for those injured and ill employees? You're correct that they may be struggling to cope with their circumstances. The people who seem too slow getting back to work are probably having a tougher time figuring out how to respond to the blow that life has dealt them.

There aren't many people around who know how to guide them onto a path that transforms their current view of the situation into a challenge and an opportunity for personal growth. Maybe you can.

The poem below, written by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, articulates a vision for the redemptive response to suffering that I want to share with you. More than just with you, I'd like to share it with everyone who has an opportunity to help people figure out how to respond to their illness or injury or loss of function. What made the poem so powerful for me is that the subject of the poem, world-renowned violinist Yitzhak Perlman, has done the same thing with his whole life that he does with his violin in the poem.

Playing with Three Strings

By Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

*We have seen Yitzhak Perlman
Who walks the stage with braces on both legs,
On two crutches.*

*He takes his seat, unhinges the clasps of his legs,
Tucking one leg back, extending the other,
Laying down his crutches, placing the violin under his chin.*

*On one occasion one of his violin strings broke.
The audience grew silent but the violinist did not leave the stage.
He signaled the maestro, and the orchestra began its part.
The violinist played with power and intensity on only three strings.*

*With three strings, he modulated, changed and
Recomposed the piece in his head
He retuned the strings to get different sounds,
Turned them upward and downward.*

*The audience screamed delight,
Applauded their appreciation.
Asked later how he had accomplished this feat,
The violinist answered
It is my task to make music with what remains.*

*A legacy mightier than a concert.
Make music with what remains.
Complete the song left for us to sing,
Transcend the loss,
Play it out with heart, soul, and might
With all remaining strength within us.*

Life is hard for all of us, although in different ways and to different extents for each of us. Suffering seems to be part of the human condition – of being alive. The question is what we do with the suffering.

People who have been knocked off balance by illness or injury may have lost their confidence that they can cope. The employees you are trying to protect may need your outstretched hand helping them “get back on the horse” and face forward to life as much or more than they need more time off.

Smiling,
Dr. J

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