

Practice Made Practical

Occupational Therapy Inventions Lead to New Business Ventures, Clinical Tools

Andrew Waite

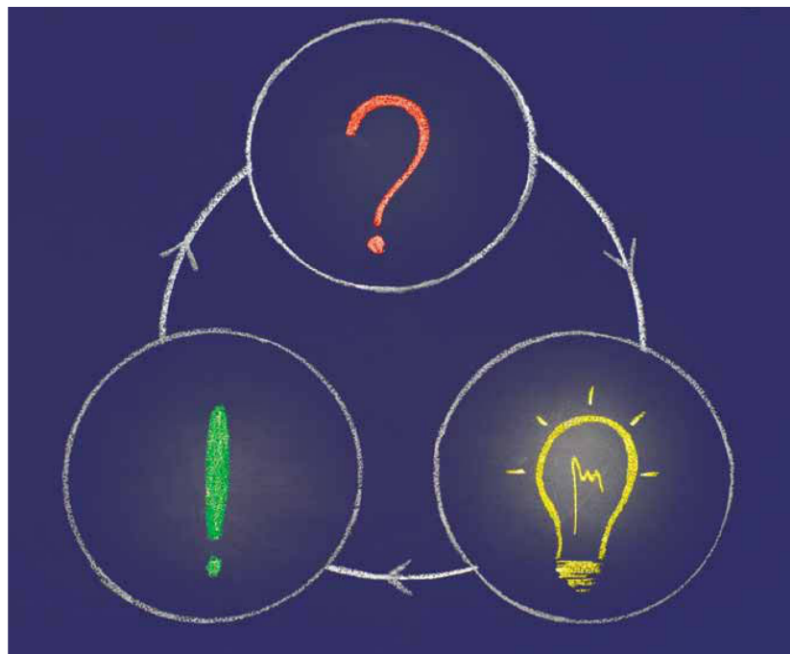
In 2003, a weighted vest weighed down Aviva Weiss, MS, OTR/L. She mail-ordered the product for her daughter, who has a sensory processing disorder, and found what she received to be too unfashionable.

"It came and it was just so ugly. It looked like somebody just cut it up in their basement and then shipped it to me," Weiss, who used to work in pediatrics, recalls. "Kids in general should look great, especially kids who have special needs, because why should they stand out more than they are already standing out? That's what made me realize that there are probably a whole lot of parents out there who would need these kinds of products."

Weiss researched the special needs product market and found that, in her opinion, it lacked a human touch. So she decided to do something about it.

It took a lot of work, but Weiss's business, Fun and Function (<http://funandfunction.com>), which develops and sells toys and other products for children with special needs, keeps the goals and needs of kids, parents, and occupational therapy practitioners in equal focus and has gained tremendous success—in 2010, it was recognized as a fast-growing "Philadelphia 100" business.¹

Although Weiss's story of abandoning her clinical job to start a toy company is unconventional, it is not an isolated example. Not all occupational therapists are going to leave the clinic to pursue their innovative ideas, but they are increasingly turning their creativity into viable ventures, whether as a full-fledged business, side project,



or simply an aide to their ongoing work with clients.

To encourage and build upon the entrepreneurial spirit of occupational therapy practitioners, a number of occupational therapy programs around the country offer courses on developing products and starting businesses. For example, Touro University's School of Occupational Therapy, in Nevada, has put approximately 100 students through an assistive technology course since the program's inception in 2005.

"It helps the students with their clinical reasoning and the creative side of things," says Yvonne Randall, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA, director of the program. "As practitioners, they are going to be faced with not a lot of therapy

support because there are so few therapists out in this area, so they are going to have to create a device or something to help the client."

The assistive technologies and adaptive equipment course asks third-semester students to respond to an issue they might come across in the clinic and develop a product or modify an existing one that will allow the client to achieve his or her desired level of function. Neil Harvison, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, AOTA's director of Accreditation and Academic Affairs, says courses like Touro's are fairly common and can be found at schools like Samuel Merritt University in California and St. Ambrose University in Iowa.

DeLana Honaker, PhD, OTR, might have appreciated taking such a class.


CALENDAR

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March

Baltimore, MD  **Mar. 18-19**
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April


San Francisco, CA  **Apr. 14-15**
Eval & Intervention for Visual Processing Deficits in Adult Acquired Brain Injury, Part I. Faculty: Mary Warren, MS, OTR/L, SCLV, FAOTA. This updated course has the latest evidence based research. Participants learn a practical, functional reimburseable approach to evaluation, intervention, and documen-

tation of visual processing deficits in adult with acquired brain injury from CVA and TBI. Topics include hemianopsia, visual neglect, eye movement disorders, and reduced acuity. **Also in Syracuse, NY, Sept. 29-30, 2012.** Contact www.visabilities.com or 888-752-4364. Fax 205-823-6657.

Atlanta, GA  **Apr. 14-24**
Lymphedema Management. Certification courses in Complete Decongestive Therapy (135 hours), Lymphedema Management Seminars (31 hours). Coursework includes anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the lymphatic system, basic and advanced techniques of MLD, and bandaging for primary/secondary UE and LE lymphedema (incl. pediatric care) and other conditions. Insurance and billing issues, certification for compression-garment fitting included. Certification course meets LANA requirements. **Also in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, April 14-24, 2012.** AOTA Approved Provider. For more information and additional class dates/locations or to order a free brochure, please call 800-863-5935 or log on to www.acols.com.

West Bend, WI  **Apr. 16-21**
Comprehensive Lymphedema and Venous Edema Management (Six Day Certification Course-Module 1). This course combines the best of vari-

ous European lymphedema and soft tissue mobilization techniques and traditional treatment techniques. Instruction includes lymphatic system anatomy and physiology, manual lymphatic treatment and bandaging skills, exercise, skin care, patient evaluation and assessment, pneumatic pumps, compression garments, patient self-management, and clinic set-up topics. Unique to this program are the "hands-on" opportunities to work directly with patients. Also offered in June. For additional courses, information, and registration, visit our Web site at www.chs-continuing.uwm.edu or call 414-227-3123.

Milwaukee, WI  **Apr. 19-20**
Modalities for the UE. The use of physical agents as an adjunct to other therapeutic interventions often expedites and enhances patient outcomes. This seminar is designed for occupational therapists and their assistants to gain an understanding of commonly used modalities and their applications for a variety of clinical conditions. Lecture will address the theoretical basis and efficacy of each modality, physical properties (parameters) of the devices, the body's physiological response to their application, indications and contraindications, and application techniques. For additional courses, information, and registration, visit our Web site at www.chs-continuing.uwm.edu or call 414-227-3123.

Indianapolis, IN **April 26-29**
AOTA 92nd Annual Conference & Expo. The 2012 AOTA Annual Conference & Expo will be a vibrant gathering of occupational therapy practitioners, educators, researchers, and students. Focusing on science, innovation, and evidence, these 3-1/2 remarkable days will provide attendees with continuing education up to 24 contact hours through advanced-level learning in Pre-Conference Institutes and Seminars and more than 700 educational sessions; inspiring special events such as the Presidential Address, Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture, and Plenary Session; and numerous networking oppor-

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