

Becoming your own



CHEERLEADER

POCKET GUIDE

3

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST



Becoming your own



CHEERLEADER

Welcome to Becoming Your Own Cheerleader. One of a series of pocket guides created to support the wellbeing of occupational therapists in their first year of practice.

Year One: Thriving not Surviving is a grass roots initiative. Over the course of several months, we engaged with many occupational therapists in their first year of practice and asked a core question, "How has the first year of practice impacted on your wellbeing?" The answers have informed the pocket guide that you are now reading.

As an occupational therapist you will already have a range of excellent tools that you can use to support you. Think of this as an addition to your toolbox. A kind voice that reminds you to, 'Stop for a moment and take some time to focus on yourself because your wellbeing is important'. It is designed to not only make you stop and think but, as importantly, take action. All of the guides are designed so that you can dip in and out and pick the tools which resonate most with you.

The tools are designed to support your wellbeing but are not a replacement for specialist support if you are experiencing significant challenges to your mental health. If this is the case, you are advised strongly to seek support via your GP or through your occupational health department.

By reading the insights of other newly qualified occupational therapists we hope that you get a sense that others are having similar experiences. You are not alone. You are part of a community finding its feet and sense of identity, a process which can feel a bit like being on a roller coaster but ultimately is a great ride.

Introduction

We asked newly qualified occupational therapists to sum up their first year of practice in three words and the responses gave an interesting insight into what people were feeling. The responses shared one thing in common, they captured "what it's like" to be a first-year occupational therapist.

Bewilderment was a common theme, as people struggled to navigate a complex workload and what felt, at times, like a heavy weight of responsibility:

"Sooooo many questions!!"

"Going too fast"

"What's going on?"

Even in this concise form of language, a sense of stress and anxiety comes across in the words people chose:

"Terrifying, inspiring, (I'm) crying"

"Sink or swim"

"This is hard"

"Nobody warned me"

"Abort mission now"

It was a privilege to read such honest outpourings. The sentiments spoke of strength and a fabulous sense of self-awareness. They were emotionally articulate and profound.

You could almost feel the seesawing between moments of celebrating becoming a practitioner and acclimatisation to the world of clinical practice. In phrases like, 'Doubter, Dreamer, Doer'.

We saw the theme of 'professional bloom' again and again:

"Challenging, rewarding, growth"

"Rollercoaster, perseverance, reconfigure"

"Challenging, empowering, rewarding"

"Apprehension, excitement, rewarding"

A witty summary came from this response:

"Growth, freaking-challenging, exhilarating"

We created a word cloud from the words shared which demonstrates the mix of positive and negative emotions people were experiencing.

We were told how some days or weeks could be just plain tough. Times when some people found themselves asking, 'what on earth am I doing here?' or 'I think I've made a big mistake' juxtaposed with

days which exceeded all expectations.

The pocket guide, Finding Balance, is focused on finding a balance in what you do. But how do you bring some semblance of balance into such yo-yoing emotions? This is the focus of this pocket guide.

Before reading any further (and please don't cheat) grab a pen and do the following exercise



Jot down a list of your habits

If you look back over what you've written how many of the habits you've listed would you class as good habits and how many as bad habits?

You were asked just to write about habits, but looking at what you've written have you an equal list of 'good' and 'bad' habits or have you focused mainly on 'bad' habits?

For many of us our brain has a natural propensity to skip to the negative as its first port of call. The things we don't like about ourselves or the things we want to stop doing. But habits can also be things that we are proud of, do well and want to keep doing. They just don't get so much airtime.

This strong, innate propensity for our emotions to be heavily influenced in one direction is called the negativity bias. There are several reasons for this: an inner critic running riot and pointing out our many short comings; inappropriate comparisons with senior colleagues, "I'll never be that good'.

This bias has its foundations in the evolutionary process when being aware of threat was literally a matter of survival. But it still exerts a strong pull on our emotions today. Scientists have observed greater neural processing in the brain in response to negative rather than positive stimuli. At the end of a day which feels challenging it's highly likely that you will remember the one thing that went wrong rather than the many things that went right. You are more likely to focus on your 'faults' than on the things you do well.

This propensity to go to the negative can exert a powerful influence in our lives and, rather than accepting this, we can work to challenge it. This doesn't mean ignoring things that concern us or go wrong. What it does mean is recognising that we need to work harder to counter this bias and amplify the things that go well. Bring a greater degree of balance into our thinking. When we do this we increase our wellbeing and resilience.

Becoming intentional about gratitude

Gratitude practices are probably one of the most evidence-based practices to shift you into a more positive mindset when done on a regular basis. There are a number of different ways of engaging in gratitude.

THREE BLESSINGS

Based on the work of Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, the 3 blessings exercise only takes a few minutes a day and is a lovely way to end the day on a positive note.

All you need is somewhere to write them (and that's important, don't just think about them)

Firstly, ask yourself, 'What 3 things that went well today' and write them down.

They don't have to be earth shatteringly big things (but they may be). They could be as simple as I watched a beautiful sunset or laughed at some children playing.

Next to each statement answer the question:
'Why did this make me feel grateful'

That's it!

This isn't a one-off exercise though, for it to have an impact on your wellbeing you need to do it on a regular basis. To establish the habit commit to doing it for a couple of weeks to start off with. Hopefully it will become a practice that, after that time, you continue to do.

A jar of smiles

Find a jam jar or container of some kind and place it somewhere you can see it. Whenever something happens that you are grateful for or something good happens to you jot it down on a small strip of paper and place it in the jar.

As above it can be big or small it doesn't matter, but it must be significant for you: a thank-you note from a grateful patient; positive feedback from your supervisor; a meal shared with a friend.

When you feel you need a boost dip into the jar and pull out a few of the pieces of paper. Sit with them for a while and really reconnect with those experiences.

There are many ways you can develop a gratitude practice and, if the ones above don't appeal, this link to Positive Psychology describes thirteen of them: <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

The Weekly Review

Maybe thinking about a daily gratitude practice isn't where your head is right now. How about a weekly journaling practice that helps you bring into focus things that went well?

Don't even start this exercise if it feels like a chore.

You need some kind of journal to keep your reflections. Create this as a quiet, special time each week just for yourself. In the pocket guide on Balancing Yourself we talked about gift goals. See this time as a gift to yourself. Make a ritual of it. Choose somewhere nice to write where you won't be disturbed, put some music on, make yourself a drink, light a candle. Whatever feels good for you. This is your time.

Sit for a while and reflect on the week. Write down the things that went well and that you'd like to celebrate. They don't have to be all work related. As you write each one reconnect with it, don't just write a quick list. Spend a few moments revisiting it. Who was there? What were you doing? How did you feel?

Over the last week I want to celebrate

Be as creative as you want to be. If you're called to draw or doodle or add a picture do it. Over time this will build into a journal you can dip into at any time to remind you of the things that are going well.

Remember how good you are

This exercise will take 15-20 minutes because what you are doing, in effect, is building an alternative CV.

When you look at your CV it is, probably, a list of work and academic achievements. Maybe there's a short section at the end about other things that you feel are important to tell people about yourself. But many of your achievements will be missing.

As occupational therapists we adopt an holistic approach to our practice. How often do you take an holistic look at your life and think about all the skills and expertise that make you, you? We talk also about transferable skills but how often do you constrain yourself by talking only about your clinical skills or academic skills? In effect a work-related CV takes some important aspects of what makes you out of the picture.

Grab a pen and paper and write down all of the things that you've achieved in your life so far. Stretch yourself to think beyond work and academic achievements. What about the music exam you passed age 11, or the part in a school play? The support you gave to a friend in trouble or the volunteer role you undertake. The birth of a child, getting engaged/married. Everything you are proud of. Put them all down.

This may well be something you come back to over several days. Keep adding to it.

This is an exercise where you really need to dampen down the voice of your inner critic, (See our pocket guide on Quietening Your Inner Critic) which is likely to be saying - well that wasn't important!

MY ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Here are some questions to reflect on

- **When you read back through what you've written how do you feel?**
- **What does it tell you about the range of transferable skills you have?**
- **How can you tap into them more often?**

Use this exercise as a point of reference when your confidence needs a boost or you feel you are losing touch with your strengths.

Tapping into confidence

One of the things mentioned by many newly qualified occupational therapists was a lack of confidence. This is such a natural emotion to experience. You are facing many situations for the first time and it can feel, at times, like you are flying by the seat of your pants.

This exercise, shared by Will Medd (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1f-6DrhLctF8CKi5G6v9fA/> videos) is designed to help you tap into your confidence at moments when it might be wavering.

The point that Will makes is that confidence is not related to how good you are at something: it is a way of being. Two people can have exactly the same proven aptitude for a task. When asked to perform it one person can approach it with confidence, the other person can be totally lacking in confidence, even though they are equal in their ability to do the task.

The difference between feeling confident at something and feeling confident in yourself is an important distinction to understand.

Most of us have experienced moments when we feel confident in ourselves and the following exercise is designed to reconnect with those moments.

Before going any further choose a gesture that you can use in public. Make sure it's something inconspicuous and a gesture that you wouldn't normally do. For example, squeezing an ear lobe, pinching your thumb and second finger together or making a fist. Something quick, discreet and simple.

When you've done that let go of the gesture.

Now, either sitting or standing, remember a time when you felt confident. Really connect with it.

- **What were you doing?**
- **Where were you?**
- **What were the images and sounds around you?**

Feel your body in this moment. You're probably standing or sitting taller, shoulders back. How does it feel?

Now hold the gesture you've chosen for a moment whilst you are reliving that moment of confidence.

Count to three and let go of the gesture. That's it!

For this exercise to have an impact you need to really embed the connection between the gesture and the feeling. So, keep practicing it.

You then have something that you can call upon to remind you of your ability to feel confidence. Because the gesture you've chosen is discrete you can use it any time you go into a situation where you quickly want to connect with a sense of confidence. It may be going to see a patient for the first time, walking into a meeting or giving a presentation.

Take a moment, pause and make your chosen gesture. It's a short cut to connecting with your confidence.

Reconnecting with your purpose

In the introduction we mentioned that some people told us about times in their first year of practice when they asked themselves a very fundamental question: *why am I doing this?*
Why am I putting myself through this?

These questions go right to the core of our values and our purpose. They are big questions and even if you're not in that place of questioning it's helpful to have a clear sense of your purpose.

It is one of the things that we know helps to build your resilience: when things get tough you know exactly why you push through; you know what motivates you to do what you are doing; you tap into the bigger picture which gives you an inner strength.

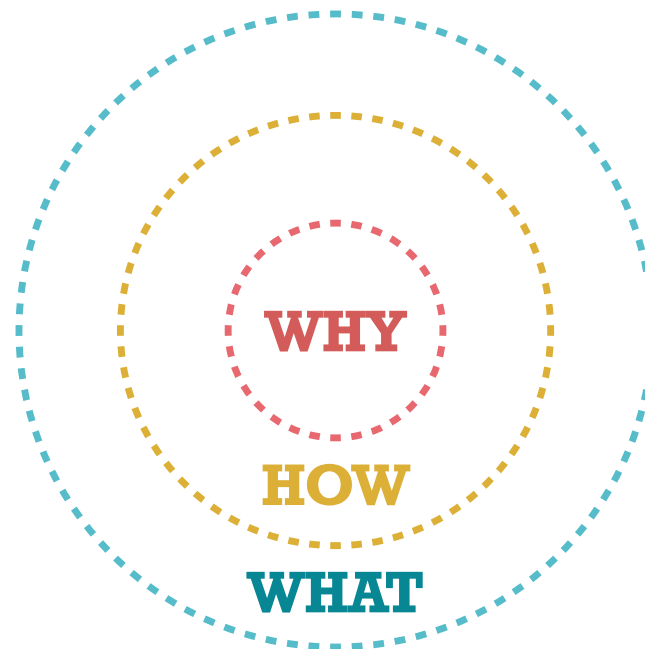
In one of the most watched TED talks of all time Simon Sinek described what he called The Golden Circle (https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en) it was presented initially in the context of leadership but has since developed into a concept we can all use.

THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

The basis of the golden circle is straight forward but it takes time and thought to work through. The underlying premise is that all of us know what we do? If someone asks, "what do you do?" you know the answer right? "I'm an occupational therapist"

If someone asks you, "what does that involve?" you also know how to answer that question, especially when related to your own working context. BUT what would you say if someone asks you, "why do you do it?" Maybe not so easy.

What is your why as an occupational therapist? The reason you took up this career the values you are honouring every day you go to work?



My why is

It usually takes time to come up with your why and it may change over time. So, this is an exercise you can revisit and keep a question to keep exploring.

Another component of the Golden Circle is the development of a why statement. A single sentence that expresses two things.

Your contribution, which is the main thing that you are doing e.g.: to support the wellbeing of people with mental health conditions, or, in the case of this project: to support the emotional well-being of newly qualified occupational therapists

The second part of the sentence is the impact of your work, the effect you will have e.g.

“so that they can...”

These two components provide a touchstone to go to when you are may be having a mini meltdown and asking yourself the why question. It takes you back to the values that led you into this profession.

MY WHY STATEMENT

your contribution



To _____

So that _____



your impact

Your smile file

Over the course of your career you will receive all kinds of appreciative comments, cards, emails and feedback from your supervisor, clients and colleagues. The problem is they often get lost.

By starting a smile journal or a smile file on your computer you are creating somewhere you can access them at a moments notice.

On days when you're feeling a bit down on yourself or experiencing imposter syndrome it will give you an automatic boost if you dip into your smile file.

They are powerful reminders of the positive impact you have on people, even more so because they are unsolicited. They will bring a different perspective to your thinking to balance some of the more negative thoughts you may be having.

So, develop a system for keeping them in one place. Set up a new mailbox in your emails or buy a scrapbook or journal. It's never too early to start.

Dance like no-one is watching

A simple and fun thing to do when you need a quick pick-me-up. If you've had a tough day it could be the first thing you do when you get home. Maybe even find a quiet spot during the day where you know you won't be disturbed. Actually, you can even do it with someone else if you wanted to.

All you need to do is choose a song that is upbeat and resonates with you in a positive way. Simply play it as loud as you want to and sing and dance along with all of your energy. Don't just sway from side to side, really get into the groove and move!

It will be an instant energy boost and brighten your mood.



Affirmations

Affirmations are carefully selected positive sentences that have meaning and resonance for you and connect you with positive intentions you have or qualities about yourself. They are short sentences you say to yourself which are designed counterbalance the self-negative talk and the negativity bias we discussed earlier.

If you are feeling a bit sceptical about this and want to learn more about the theory and evidence behind their use check out the blog post [Positive Daily Affirmations: is there science behind it](https://positivepsychology.com/daily-affirmations/) is a good place to start (<https://positivepsychology.com/daily-affirmations/>)

Maybe it feels pretty awkward to say positive things about yourself, most of us are not used to doing this but this is exactly why they can be impactful.

One thing to flag up is the importance of them having relevance to something you believe about yourself. Social media is full of inspirational quotes. We read them once and think, 'oh yes that's great' but the impact can be minimal as they are written for a generic audience.

If you would like to make a start writing your own affirmations you might want to go back to the earlier exercise on achievements. What positive things came up for you in that exercise that you would like to amplify in your thinking?

Some pointers for writing affirmations are

- If possible, begin with words like 'I am', 'I choose to' or 'I can'
- Write them in the present tense
- Write them as statements of fact and truth
- Keep them short and specific

They can actually be in any format you find helpful. Some people say them to themselves in front of a mirror. Some people record them and listen to them. You may want to have some to use in specific situations like before going into a team meeting or on the way to see a client for the first time.

For them to have an impact however, you do need to use them on a daily basis, several times a day.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES

I am

- I am courageous
- I am joyful
- I am enthusiastic

I can

- I can do this
- I can be strong
- I can laugh and have fun

Here are some longer ones which have been written by Dawn Breslin as part of her Harmonizing Programme.

- Today I choose to embrace my uniqueness and stop comparing myself to others.
- I am an incredible human being. I can deal with so much more than I think I can. I am braver stronger and more resilient than I can ever imagine but more than anything I'm safe.
- Today I choose to start exactly where I am right now, to be kind and patient with myself. I allow myself to try new things and not to be great. I allow myself to be the amateur until in time I become the expert. By striving for perfection and comparing myself to others I deny myself of the joy of the moment, of presence, and of journey.
- Today I choose to remind myself about what I am good at. I step up to express who I really am and what I'm truly capable of and in each and every situation in my life I do the best and this is all I can ever do.
- Today I choose to be gently kind and patient with myself. I choose to quieten the harsh inner voice that terrorises my mind and I lovingly accept that my inner voice has simply developed a protective mechanism to serve me in my past fearful way of life.
- Today, I accept that each and every situation in my life is presented as a teacher and each of these experiences offers me an opportunity to learn and grow.

There are a wide range of examples available on the internet and also apps designed specifically to support the use of affirmations. If you look through these remember the important thing is that any affirmation you choose must have truth and resonance in them for you.

Reflection

This page had been included so that you can use it in your CPD File to evidence your learning

Date:	Impact on my practice
Description of what you have done	
	Follow-up actions or further development.
Summary of my main learning points	
Relevance to my practice	

References

Dawn Breslin <https://dawnbreslin.com>

Will Medd (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1f-6DrhLctF8CKi5G6v9fA/videos>)

13 most popular gratitude exercises and activities. Positive Psychology <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

Positive Daily Affirmations: is there science behind it. <https://positivepsychology.com/daily-affirmations/>

Simon Sinek. The Golden Circle https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en

Resources to Explore

There is a wealth of resources available on the internet to support well-being. Here are just a few that you might wish to explore further. They have been chosen because they are varied in their approach to well-being.

Becoming Who You Are

Hannah Braime is a creative coach who blogs about self-care and personal growth and has developed a range of resources which can be downloaded or purchased through her website. <https://www.becomingwhoyouare.net>

Brené Brown

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston. She has spent two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy and is an internationally renowned author and speaker. Her website contains a wide range of resources including podcasts, blogs, downloads and guides. <https://brenebrown.com>

Jen Gash

Jen Gash is an occupational therapist and personal coach and her website contains information about coaching, a series of blog posts related to personal development and links to other occupational therapists working as personal coaches <https://otcoach.com/about-us/>

Lynne Goodacre

Lynne Goodacre is an occupational therapist and personal coach who blogs on a regular basis on topics related to personal development and well-being. She has created a mini-series of free eBooks which can be downloaded from her site. <https://www.lgpersonaldevelopment.co.uk>

Greater Good Science Centre at University of California, Berkley

An extensive online resource comprising blogs, podcasts, videos, tools and educational programmes informed by research. The tools are focused on creating a happier life and more compassionate society. Well worth checking out. <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

Gretchen Rubin

Author of The Happiness Project, and internationally renowned author this website contains a wide selection of blogs and podcasts about creating a happier, more productive and creative life. <https://gretchenrubin.com>

Kristin Neff

Is one of the world's leading experts on self-compassion. Her website contains a range of exercises and tools focused on developing self-compassion and a comprehensive list of recommended reading <https://self-compassion.org>

Life Coach on The Go

Life Coach on The Go is an online resource providing a wide range of self-coaching tips, tools, articles and resources. <https://lifecoachonthego.com/about/>. It is merging with the Fierce Kindness Blog <https://fiercekindness.com/page/2/>.

Mind Tools

Provides access to several thousand resources including articles, videos and podcasts to support you in learning management, leadership and personal effectiveness skills. <https://www.mindtools.com>

On Being

The On Being Project is a non-profit media and public life initiative making radio shows, podcasts and tools for 'the art of living'. It explores the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, community, poetry, and the arts. <https://onbeing.org>

Positive Psychology

A community of practitioners who have built an online science-based resource of courses, techniques, tools and tips to help you put positive psychology into practice every day. <https://positivepsychology.com>

Tara Mohr

An expert on women's leadership and wellbeing, author of Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak up, Create and Lead. Tara Mohr also developed the global Playing Big Leadership Programme and is a Certified Coach. Her website includes a range of resources and blogs. <https://www.taramohr.com>

TED

Several of the people mentioned in the pocket guides have given TED talks. A place where you can explore short powerful talks of 18 minutes or less from some of the worlds most inspiring thinkers on a wide range of topics from science to business to global issues. <https://www.ted.com>

Tiny Buddha

The sites feature blogs, articles and insights on a wide range of personal development topics. Whilst it has it's root in Buddhism it is not a site about religion. <https://tinybuddha.com>

End Note

The Year One: Thriving Not Surviving pocket guides have been funded by the Elizabeth Casson Trust. We would like to extend our thanks to the Trust and to everyone who has contributed to the project. Without the insights that have been shared by the occupational therapy community, with honesty and compassion, this resource would not have been possible.

The Project was led by Dr Lynne Goodacre (an occupational therapist and personal coach) and Rob Young (a writer and artist who helps NHS leaders to communicate).

The project team comprised: Andrew Bates, Stephanie Exley, Joanna Hunt, Bethany Morgan-Davis, Deborah May, Ryan McClure, Rebecca Power, Siobhan Scanlon, Paul Wilkinson, Katy Williams. All of whom were in their first year of practice as occupational therapists.

We would like to also thank Jessica Salmon for her support in editing the resources and Paul Baker for his design work.

The Elizabeth Casson Trust is excited to have commissioned this work by Dr Lynne Goodacre and Rob Young and is proud of, and grateful to, the first-year occupational therapists who committed their time and energy for the success of the project. The Trust aims to further the profession of occupational therapy and offers a range of support and development opportunities.

Please visit our website (elizabethcasson.org.uk) and follow us on Twitter (@elizabethcasso1) for more information.

This is one of a series of pocket guides which includes:

- **Becoming Your Own Cheerleader**
- **Building Your Network of Support**
- **The Book of Blogs**
- **Finding Perspective in Tough Situations**
- **Finding Balance**
- **Questioning Your Inner Critic**
- **Treating Yourself with Compassion**

All are available freely from the Elizabeth Casson website.

