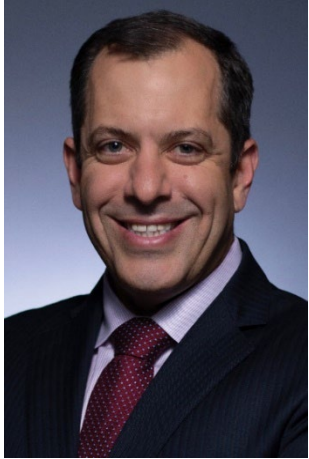


“Life After Wartime”



This was a trying year at every level—personally, professionally, and also for our Society, POSNA. In fact, in an email about one month before our annual meeting, Min Kocher shared his thoughts that this was very much a “wartime year” for our presidential line. Unfortunately, challenges of all different

flavors will come to all of us from time to time. As in the song “Life During Wartime,” the Talking Heads recount, “The sound of gun fire, off in the distance, I’m getting used to it now.”

While no one seeks out hard times, the realities of experience, chance, and time will often interact in ways where the road ahead seems steep and challenging. In those times where all seems lost and a peaceful future seems very far away, focusing on early, small wins can make a tremendous difference. It is in these times that we must focus more on *trajectory* rather than position. Over time, small wins accumulate and allow massive differences in outcome. The fundamental lesson of the Stockdale paradox is that we must face current realities but have a long view on outcomes.

It has been a true pleasure to serve as your president during these times, and I have learned so much along the way. Participation in POSNA, at whatever level, allows us to spend time with so many passionate, like-minded, capable people—and this makes us better. I have certainly learned quite a bit about planning for wartime from my friends on the POSNA board and presidential line. I have learned the importance of the “pre-mortem” which calls for us to ask the question, “How will we fail?” well before we start. I have learned the importance of having a “red team” allowing us to think like the

enemy. Of course, it’s important to appreciate the “devil’s advocate” in the room to test the strength of prevailing opinion and take advantage of the diversity of opinion on your team.

The importance of diversity was not lost on this presidential line. I am so grateful for Bob Cho, Min Kocher, and Colleen Sabatini for working tirelessly through the creation of a very active Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. This will be important for POSNA, our members, and our patients moving forward. While I think we should all be proud for what POSNA has accomplished with regards to diversity and gender equality, there is clearly a lot more work to do.

Two years ago, Steve Frick shared an impactful book with the board called *Farsighted* where Steven Johnson speaks about how to make decisions that matter the most by 1) leveling hierarchy, 2) not getting stuck in binary thinking, and 3) diversifying voices. This year, I shared the book *Upstream* with our board of directors. Author Dan Heath tells the story of two fishermen who see a baby floating down a river. They pull the baby out, only to find another baby and then another baby floating by in the water. As one fisherman runs upstream, he is asked where he is going by the other fisherman busy pulling babies out. “To stop people from throwing babies into the water,” he replied. The lesson here is that we must put systems in place to avoid the plane from having to make that emergency landing; we must see the problem before it happens, and we must own the problem even if no one asks you to. My favorite concept is: “Upstream victories are stories written in data starring invisible heroes who save invisible victims.” Really this is our task at work, at home, and in great organizations like POSNA.

I feel the future in POSNA is bright with so much talent in the wings of our presidential line and board of directors. But while planning is essential, there comes a

time when we must react. As Mike Tyson said, “Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”



Nassim Taleb speaks about the impact of highly improbable events in his New York Times best seller *The Black Swan*. He describes the inevitable but rare and unpredictable events which can have disproportionately severe consequences. He cites

many lessons from a wide range of organizations and concludes that we must build more *robustness* and *agility* into our lives and organizations to best survive these black swan moments. When I think about POSNA’s amazing management team, our organizational infrastructure, and our people, I see *robustness* and *agility*. When confronted with challenge, it helps to have a bit of stoic in you. I love Ryan Holiday’s book *The Obstacle is the Way* which speaks about turning adversity into advantage. He quotes Marcus Aurelius in saying that “the impediment to action advances action” and “what stands in the way becomes the way.” Sometimes obstacles present opportunities.

This was an eventful year for POSNA. Just as we were retooling our infrastructure for independent management, separating from the AAOS, and planning for our annual meeting, we were confronted with COVID. In March, we made the decision to pivot quickly to a virtual meeting. Six weeks later, Teri Stech and her *agile* management team pulled off an amazingly successful annual meeting! With almost 700 registrants, great virtual content, and financial success, the meeting was a clear win. What stood in the way, became the Way.

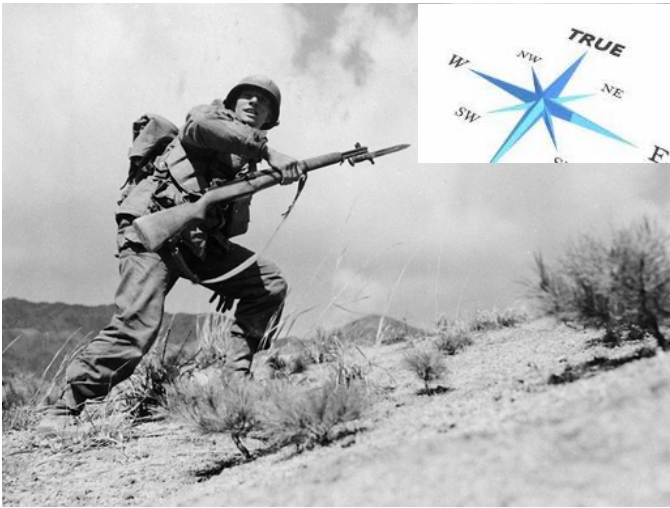
Another relevant book from Nassim Taleb is *Antifragile*. He describes that “antifragility” is beyond resilience. While resiliency allows us to resist pressure, antifragility

allows us to get stronger. Like bone responding to Wolfes Law, sometime pressure can make us better. The view from the podium during our 2021 annual meeting in Dallas tells a story about antifragility. Through this year, POSNA took the opportunity to learn about the technological infrastructure necessary to pull off a meeting like this. I am so proud of our staff and our teams. We were the first professional orthopaedic society out of the blocks to have a live meeting while pulling off a full-featured, flawless, hybrid and virtual event for those who were unable to join us. POSNA was antifragile, not only coping but getting stronger in our medical educational capabilities throughout the year of COVID.

So with more and more people vaccinated, we start to get a glimpse of the horizon. What will “life after wartime” look like for POSNA? As described in Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone*, society is increasingly turning inward. Participation in organized activities, leagues, and civic and community groups is less and less common. The forced isolation of this past year may speed that trend. Yet not true for POSNA it seems. We have grown from 30 committees and 1280 members in 2014 to 44 committees and over 1500 members this year.

A large part of our success relates to our passion towards our shared mission, “to improve the care of children with musculoskeletal disorders through education, research, and advocacy.” This is our “true north.” Our members are intrinsically driven to contribute and to make a difference in the lives of our patients. You feel this in our culture. Still, we all have limited time, and the reality is that “it is later than we think” for all of us. I often think of the lesson of Randy Pausch who wrote *The Last Lecture* when diagnosed with pancreatic cancer: “The key question to keep asking is are you spending your time on the right things? Because time is all you have.”





Staying true to this mission fosters robustness. “We fight the fight we can, on the hill we find ourselves, with the troops we have on our side.”

Our relationships sustain us in this fight. I feel intensely fortunate for my friends in and out of work, my mentors along the way, my partners, and especially to my amazing wife and family. How lucky are we for the privilege to make a difference in the lives of children while working with people we love?

As Billie Jean King says in *Pressure is a Privilege*, “Very few people get to experience the pressure of great movements.” We are truly privileged to experience the pressure of making children better in our lives. What a special thing to be able to fix a twisted or broken child and get to watch them turn into beautiful young adults.

Forest Witcraft said, “One hundred years from now, it will not matter what kind of car I drove, what my bank

account was, the sort of house I lived in . . . but the world may be a better place because I made a difference in the life of a child.

Don Berwick of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement said it a bit differently, “And, though they are unknown, we will know that mothers and fathers are at graduations and weddings they would have missed, and that grandchildren will know grandparents they might never have known, and holidays will be taken, and work completed, and books read, and symphonies heard, and gardens tended that, without your work, would never have been.”

We will inevitably confront a black swan from time to time. Our agility and robustness will allow us to find the best trajectory forward. These events will be reminders that we must use our time wisely and cherish our troops on the battlefield. In following our true north, we have the privilege of caring for children and making a difference. It’s been a privilege to serve this amazing organization during these days.

Thank you,

Michael Vitale, MD, MPH
2020-2021 President, POSNA