

2023 Candidate Statement – Candidate for Director



Skye Donovan, PT, PhD Board-Certified Orthopaedic Clinical Specialist

Question: What meaningful qualities do you bring to the Board of Directors that would help to achieve the APTA strategic plan?

Response:

What do ride on toy cars, Nicaragua, and blogging for US News and World Report have in common? These are all ways I spend my free time. Creating ways to find and listen to unique voices and bring the profession of physical therapy into uncommon places sparks joy inside of me. The role of the Board of Directors is to listen, innovate and collaborate, and act with the highest integrity. These qualities helped the board form the APTA strategic plan--a bold vision for the future of the profession. I can help the APTA follow through on this endeavor using my strengths, willingness to speak up, and leadership by example.

Specific to the board, the qualities that I can bring are a commitment to adopting best practices derived from out of the box thinking, an inclusive, galvanizing attitude, and an overall optimistic view of change. This unique perspective has served me well in my roles as a scientist, educator, clinician, and board member. One tangible result of this combination was acting as the race starter for the largest 5k in Arlington, Virginia. While on the APTA centennial celebration committee, I spearheaded our first race sponsorship to help celebrate our past and show APTA as an association dedicated to health, wellness, and community.

Many of my leadership roles have highlighted my strengths in relationship building and having a positive influence on others. I may not be an expert in any one thing, but I can connect to those that are and bring their ideas to life. As an extrovert, I try to form a community wherever I go, seeking out people I do not know, introducing myself, forging new relationships, and building trust. My work as the Chair of the newly formed DEI committee was a great example of this. Through listening and learning from each of the members, I was able to bring a group of 13 people with completely different perspectives and lived experiences together to create an inaugural action plan which now brings the APTA DEI commitment to life.

I also lean heavily upon optimism and maintaining a positive attitude, especially in the face of adversity. In difficult times, I do not let the situation unsettle me; instead of abandoning hope, I try to clear roadblocks to find alternative solutions. During the pandemic, I had to serve as the interim Associate Dean of the College of Health and Education. Amidst new and difficult financial and logistical challenges, I remained positive about the future and practiced gratitude, helping to energize and motivate my colleagues and students to embrace a seemingly never-ending set of changes.

My commitment to looking beyond the profession and reading a broad set of works about both parallel and tangent industries allows me to bring innovation and creativity to my board service. That exposure to a wider set of ideas helped me realize that the work I do outside of the board meetings is critically important to fulfilling my role. For example, a chance lunchtime conversation with a university colleague led to me teaching physiology in a bioengineering program at a partner university. Working with a different set of students and faculty in a program focused on innovation allowed me to see physical therapy in a new way. That alternative perspective then allowed me to develop a motion for the house of delegates on digital practice.

Lastly, my leadership qualities can be seen in my volunteer work, which is devoted to increasing access to physical therapy services and exposure to the profession. For example, I am actively involved in Go Baby Go, a program rooted in bringing STEM curriculum to middle schools with diverse populations and teaching rehabilitation and engineering skills through a social justice lens. Also, my work with Remote Area Medical, Arlington Free Clinic, and our university-led mission trips to Latin America demonstrate my passion for showing the critical role PT can play in improving the health of low-income, underinsured, and historically marginalized communities.

I am inspired by the knowledge and perspective I have gained in my first term as Director and wish to serve an additional term with a heightened sense of urgency. Several important initiatives are ongoing, and I wish to see them through. Most importantly, I am excited about the premise of creating the new APTA – an association that is prepared and remains relevant for whatever the future brings.