

OPHTHALMIC WOMAN 
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Ophthalmic Women Leaders
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Take The Challenge to Stretch Your Wings This Spring

Welcome to the spring issue of *Ophthalmic Woman Magazine*!

Thanks to our great Publications Subcommittee, the theme of this issue is “stretching ourselves” to reach aspirations that we might normally believe to be too risky or beyond our capabilities. I hope you find the articles and personal stories informative and inspirational.

As I reflected on this theme, I was reminded of the book, *The Little Engine That Could*. Many of us are familiar with this childhood story that encourages us to think about the power of our own expectations and our self-talk messages. Since I am now reading this story to my grandchildren, it brings to mind how very early we make personal decisions that impact our expectations, motivations, and attitudes about ourselves and our capabilities.

In the story, the little Blue Engine is hesitant at first that it is capable of climbing the big hills ahead and even more worried that it will not be able to pull the huge loads that the other cars are carrying. However, with encouragement, determination, and hard work, the Blue Engine huffs and puffs and chugs along, all the while saying: “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!”

As I think about the future of OWL and the wonderful women and men who make up our membership, I want to challenge each of us to think about how we can “stretch ourselves,” both individually and collectively as an organization. I want to invite each of us to be *bold* and *brave*, embracing the attitude and behavior of the little Blue Engine!

OWL continues to be dedicated to helping women who work in the ophthalmic space develop their potential, advance their careers, and participate in a community of women who encourage and support one another. The OWL board is working diligently on “stretching” to create the kind of organization that is *bold* and *brave*. We want to meet the needs of our membership by providing programs and opportunities that will enable all of us to reach our goals.

And, at the end of the day, instead of saying “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can,” we can all say: “I knew we could, I knew we could, I knew we could!”

I welcome your comments and ideas. It is your voice that makes a difference. OWL is only as strong as our members, and we are strong. Here’s to good stretching and making our dreams reality!

Marsha D. Link, PhD
President, Ophthalmic Women Leaders

3 Ways OWL Members Left Their Comfort Zones

By Jan Beiting

Operating outside the comfort zone is fairly routine in young adulthood because, frankly, the comfort zone has a pretty small circumference at that stage. College, travel, building new relationships, new jobs, and becoming a parent all push us to grow. The challenge, as we put those early “firsts” behind us, is to keep doing it. Here are three ways that OWL members have challenged themselves to continue learning and growing.

1. Move your map pin

In 2011, **Diane Houtman, OD, MBA**, took on a new job at Alcon as Clinical and Regulatory Affairs Liaison – a job that meant moving with her family to Beijing, China, on about 2 weeks’ notice. Dr. Houtman had never been to Asia and didn’t speak Chinese but she was more excited than nervous about the opportunity.

“I had started to stagnate in my former position and wanted more of a challenge,” she says.

The move was also inspired, in part, by a book she’d received at an OWL event a few years before: *Get Ahead by Going Abroad*, which features commentary by Jacquelyn Fouse, then Chief Financial Officer at Alcon and an OWL Board Director.

The book discusses how smart women who are prepared to pursue opportunities overseas can dramatically accelerate their careers.

Dr. Houtman says that learning to bridge cultural and language divides to bring together the company’s disparate research and development efforts have been a boon to her career. But because she had to become operational quickly, there wasn’t time to take Chinese lessons, as her husband and 10-year-old daughter were doing.



During her 18-month overseas assignment in China, Diane Houtman had the opportunity to travel extensively, working with clinical trial sites and Alcon R&D personnel in China.

“It was frustrating to rely on someone else constantly for communication, and I knew there were times when important nuances were lost in translation or simply left out by my translator,” she says.

These days, Dr. Houtman is taking on new challenges as Vice President of Professional Relations for Akorn, but she says there are at least three lasting legacies of her 18-month stint in China.

The first is a greater appreciation for the comforts and way of life at home that she might have taken for granted.

Additionally, “What I really took away from that experience is the knowledge that I can

function anywhere, that I can face challenges and excel despite them,” she says.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy is that after working with local orphanages during her time in China, Dr. Houtman and her husband are now in the final stages of adopting a 6-year-old girl from there to join their family.

Continued next page.

Taking on a physical challenge can be a wonderful way to recharge your batteries and restore faith in yourself.

Molly Schar,
OWL Executive
Director

3 Ways OWL Members Left Their Comfort Zones *continued*

2. Put things in perspective

In the inexorable, day-to-day busyness of life it can easily feel like there is no room in the schedule for additional challenge. Some deal with this by making radical changes. But **Audrey Talley Rostov, MD**, is proof that it is possible to step off the hamster wheel to do some good in the world, without giving up one's career.

Five years ago, she decided she would take a month out of her busy clinical practice to do volunteer work. It's something she's done every year since, performing corneal transplants and cataract surgery and training local surgeons on trips to India, China, and Ethiopia, working with organizations such as Project Vision, SightLife, and the Himalayan Cataract Project.



Audrey Talley Rostov, MD with visiting surgeon, Wossen Mulugeta Zewdu, MD from Ethiopia.



Audrey Talley Rostov, MD with daughter, Micaela, in Rajasthan on a camel trek.

She has to plan carefully, arranging for emergency and follow-up care for patients in her practice. What she loses in revenue production while away, she makes up with renewed energy upon her return.

...it is possible to step off the hamster wheel to do some good in the world, without giving up one's career.

Audrey Talley Rostov, MD

Performing sight-saving procedures for people who have no other option can be exhilarating.

"I'm able to help patients lead happier, more productive lives; relieve the considerable burden on their family members; and – most importantly – build something sustainable by training other surgeons to continue the work after I leave," Dr. Talley Rostov says.

The remote areas where she volunteers are a far cry from Dr. Talley Rostov's busy (and climate controlled) Seattle practice. In un-air conditioned operating rooms she sometimes has to ask the nurses to put cool towels on her neck so she won't faint from the heat. Adhesive bandages have done double duty as tape to close up holes in the mosquito netting around her camp bed.

But, she says, the challenges also put "first world" problems into perspective. "I appreciate how fortunate we are to have access to quality health care," she says.

3. Test your physical limits

Taking on a physical challenge – running a marathon, climbing a mountain, jumping out of a plane – can be a wonderful way to recharge your batteries and restore your faith in yourself.

In 2013, OWL Executive Director **Molly Schar** signed up for a Tough Mudder, a race that organizers bill as a "hardcore" obstacle course. Participants run about 12 miles, but along the way they encounter obstacles that force them to get wet and muddy, scale heights, and crawl under barbed or electrified wire. The courses can be grueling. What participants like is the challenge of facing their fears, testing the limits of their physical endurance and mental grit, and the camaraderie of doing it all with a team.

Schar had never done any sort of race at all prior to signing up for the Tahoe course on an impulse with a group of friends. In retrospect, she says, "Going straight from couch to Tough Mudder was a little crazy. I was definitely the weakest link in my team of 12," she admits.

Continued next page.

3 Ways OWL Members Left Their Comfort Zones *continued*

The scariest element for Schar was climbing up – and then jumping off – a 12-foot tall structure dubbed, “Walk the plank.” As the event approached, Schar told herself she had to go through with it.

“I decided I would have more respect for myself if failed trying than if I backed out,” she recalls. So, despite an ankle injury and a fear of heights, she kept telling herself to just take one more step. Schar finished the race, drawing from reserves she didn’t even know she had.

While she won’t be signing up for another obstacle course anytime soon, the experience has helped her navigate unfamiliar terrain ever since.

“I often think, if I could do a Tough Mudder, I can do this,” Schar says. “It made me realize I had more courage and more substance than I thought.” ■



‘Tough Mudder’ participant, Molly Schar, second from right

Jan Beiting is principal of Wordsmith Consulting and immediate past-president of Ophthalmic Women Leaders.

Jan Beiting



Join Us!

Please visit www.owlsite.org for information and to register for these upcoming OWL events:

In Boston April 26 to 28 | ASCRS

- Annual Awards Reception featuring an intriguing panel discussion and great networking (4/28)
- Member meetings on mentoring and body language (4/26 and 27)
- Executive Roundtable breakfasts for corporate professionals and small businesses owners (4/27 and 28)

In Orlando May 5 and 6 | ARVO

- “Roost” gathering (5/5)
- Women’s advancement luncheon (5/6)

Virtual Coffee Break, May 14

- Get to know other OWL members through this fun online relationship-building activity

Energizing Webinars April 16, May 20

- Topics include improving KOL advocacy and engagement and updates on the ophthalmic space

BREAKING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

By Molly Schar

Operating within your comfort zone is not necessarily a bad thing. Stress and risk are minimized. You feel emotionally secure. In fact, consistent productivity happens within the comfort zone. The low-stress environment offers few diversions to the status quo.

So why bother pushing yourself outside that place of safety and relative productivity? Because real growth occurs outside the comfort zone.

Most of us have had experiences where we left the comfort zone – either because we stretched ourselves or because we were forced out by a boss, client, or other challenger. When that happens, stress and anxiety levels increase, but so does productivity.

More than a century ago, psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson explored the relationship between levels of comfort and performance.¹ As they experimented with a troupe of dancing mice subjected to different levels of stimuli, they realized that it takes a state of relative anxiety (where stress levels are elevated) in order to create a state of optimum performance.

For many of us, it may hardly seem like a good idea to invite more stress and anxiety – in any quantity – into our lives. As it happens, if anxiety levels rise too much, Yerkes and Dodson found, performance suffers.

“Somewhere between checked out and freaked out lies an anxiety sweet spot,” writes Melinda Beck in the June 2012 *Wall Street Journal* article “Anxiety Can Bring Out the Best.”²

Scientists call this space just outside our comfort zone “optimal anxiety.”³ This is where the magic happens. *Continued next page.*

5 Ways to Get Outside Your Comfort Zone Today

1 Set a really lofty goal. Sign up for a 5k. Join a fiction-writing group. Offer to have the whole family over for the next holiday. Choose something that will require you to create a plan of attack.

2 Speak up. Be aware of when you would normally just let something pass, and consider what would happen if you added your perspective. If you can't say it in the moment, write it down. Draft an e-mail and give yourself permission to hit send.

3 Take a class. Required continuing education does not count here. No experience? Shaky execution? Perfect!

4 Make a fool of yourself. Check out Angela Trimbur dancing like no one is watching for some inspiration.⁴

5 Walk a mile in someone else's shoes. The nonprofit Food Research and Action Center offers a “food stamp challenge.”⁵ Spend a week eating on \$4 per day (the average food stamp benefit). If that isn't so appetizing, research other nonprofit initiatives and jump in. ■

Breaking Out of the Comfort Zone *continued*

The benefits of operating outside the comfort zone can be significant.

- **Become passionate and energized.**

The more we step out of our comfort zone, the easier it is to live in the state of “optimal anxiety.” Low-grade anxiety and excited energy can be nearly interchangeable, depending on how we harness the emotion.

- **Do more and learn new things.**

When we decide to move away from our safe habits, we become open to new ways of doing things. Outside the comfort zone, we’re more productive, and willing to consider different approaches. We can be creative and think outside the box.

- **Get okay with uncertainty.**

When we explore the anxiety of existing outside our comfort zone, we do so in a relatively low-risk environment. The more we practice living with uncertainty, the better we’re prepared when we are thrown there without warning.

By stretching the boundaries of your comfort zone, you can actually expand it. Make it a habit to stretch by trying new, smaller things all the time.

Fight “auto drive.” Go left where you normally go right. The more you are able to push yourself and get to that “anxiety sweet spot,” and the more you’re able to enjoy it, the less scary it becomes, and the greater dividends it pays.

This article started by saying the comfort zone isn’t a bad place, and it’s not. Make your comfort zone a “home base” where you can return and rest. It will be in your comfort zone where you can safely process all your new and exciting experiences, and rest up for your next adventure. ■

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Molly Schar is the executive director of Ophthalmic Women Leaders, Washington, DC.

Networking Outside Your Comfort Zone

What’s the difference between a social event and a networking event? For many of us, it’s nothing more than the number of people who smile at you when you walk through the door. Even the most accomplished networkers can find walking into a room full of strangers to be intimidating.

Rather than trying to be interesting, be interested. Happily, networking is no longer about charming everyone in the room. You may have to push yourself to walk up to someone, but once you’re there, you’ll be appreciated for listening carefully, asking thoughtful questions and being warm and genuine.

Here’s the trick – and there’s no way around this – you have to step up, throw your hand out, and say “hello.” ■

Molly Schar



Making the jump into Entrepreneurialism

By Michelle Dalton, ELS

Trading corporate jobs for entrepreneurial ones can be daunting. Three members of OWL who did just that give us their pearls and share their fears.

Sitting at your desk, do you ever daydream of working for yourself, but are apprehensive about giving up the security of corporate America? Or maybe you've been hearing rumors your division is going to be sold and you may be without any job in the near future? Or you've got an idea about some facet of ophthalmology that can be done more efficiently and effectively than the confines of a larger group would allow?

In all these scenarios, the writing is on the wall – people in those types of situations are just waiting for the most opportune moment to strike out on their own. Three such entrepreneurs share the steps they took before embarking on their own, what fears they needed to overcome, and why they are confident they made the right choice.



For **Doral Fredericks, PharmD, MBA**, founder of Pharmacos Biopharmaceutical Services, LLC, her decision to leave a high-paying corporate job was

a bit reactionary and proactive as well – a much larger conglomerate had recently bought her company.

“I’d always kicked the idea around with a couple of people, but when

the acquisition was announced, it was the kick in the rear I really needed to make it a reality,” she says.

The company, whose mission “is to provide a complete suite of outsourcing and consulting services that delivers optimal organizational and financial flexibility to small and mid-size specialty biopharmaceutical drug and device companies,” has six partner/investors and took a while to get fully set up, she says.

Brad Fundingsland, president of the Fundingsland Group, took several years between identifying the opportunity and believing it had developed to the point where he could focus his career on it.

“I left my corporate job because I saw a unique developing opportunity, but my experience in corporate positions showed me the beginning stages of what this opportunity was,” he says.

“It’s ill-advised to start your own company because you’re frustrated with your current job or company. The only sustainable ideas are those that are built on taking advantage of well-timed evolving opportunities.”

The Fundingsland Group supports large society surveys on clinical

opinions and practice patterns of their membership and mines the data from those surveys for gaps between the current and the ideal state of practice, as determined by thought leaders within the organization. The company then develops multi-tactic education campaigns to resolve these data-driven gaps, and provides market research reporting to the industry on cross-analytic trends. “Our goal is to achieve measurable year-over-year-change in these surveys to positively affect behavior and impact patient outcomes,” he says.

Amy Jacobs, vice president and co-founder of Sandbox Strategic, a strategic marketing think tank, says her decision was a combination of need and desire.

“I’d always talked about my idea, but it was difficult to make the jump – I always thought I’d wait until I had more experience, or different types of experience,” she says. “Within a week of having my first child, however, I knew I was going to change lifestyles.”

Confined to the typical corporate schedule was no longer a viable option. “Starting my own company was a fantastic choice for me,” Amy says, noting the flexibility

Continued next page.



Making the jump into Entrepreneurialism *continued*

allows her to concentrate on her strengths and either delegate or flat-out turn down projects she does not enjoy.

Fears and trepidations

For Fredericks and Jacobs, the uncertainty of leaving the comfort of a steady paycheck for the unknown is something potential entrepreneurs should think about. “Launching a business is not just something you turn around and do,” Fredericks says. “The amount of time it took to get all the paperwork filed before we could even start talking to potential clients almost overwhelmed me.”

“The logistics are somewhat intimidating,” Jacobs says. “Corporate holds your hand on a lot of the business side of things that all of sudden I had to know about – from invoicing to filing the right paperwork, to getting licenses and insurance.”

To that end, Fredericks adds she was a bit lost on how to set pricing – hourly or per-project?

“Without the typical distractions of a larger company, we needed to ensure we built in enough time to get the projects done without being sidetracked,” she says. “But we also needed to learn how to appropriately scope out those projects.”

Fundingsland offers this advice to anyone contemplating starting their own business – Find a trusted

and spend twice as much as you imagined to have them manage all financial aspects of your company, including taxes, expenses, billing, etc.

He continues to believe this is one of the most successful decisions he made in the early stages of establishing his company. “I’d rather overpay an accountant and then scale back their responsibilities as I get more comfortable with this business, instead of trying to unwind problems created by trying to do a lot of this myself, when I’m so new to many of these activities,” he says.

“I was initially worried about how to find clients and where the next paycheck is coming from and what that paycheck is going to be,” Jacobs says.

“This industry is so well connected, it’s much easier to connect than I thought it was going to be – and I need look no further than OWL to support that.”

Fundingsland says his biggest – but pleasant – surprise was a concern he’d be isolated working from his home office, instead of in a busy corporate environment.

However, “the interactions online, via phone, and at conferences is even more significant than what it used to be with a large company,” he says. “If anything, I have more connectivity than I did before, at

meetings and OWL events.” Fredericks says she expected there would be more challenges around getting all the partners to agree on the core focus of the company with so many divergent opinions.

“We still have discussions about various topics, but we’ve learned to prioritize to our strengths and to really trust our partners,” she says. “Our key to success has been keeping all the partners on task; we’re all motivated to get the jobs done and done well.”

We have to live up to our promises. When it’s your name on the door, you don’t have any excuses.”

Still wavering?

No one thinks launching a new company or business is ideal for everyone, but if you’ve thought about it, if you see missed opportunities or inefficiencies that others do not, “just do it,” Jacobs says. “It sounds corny, but what are you waiting for?”

She does advise taking some time on your own to set up the company, design the website and logo, and determine a business and marketing plan to strategically identify potential clients.

“If you’re thinking and daydreaming about it, you’re ready to strike out on your own,” she says. ■

Michelle Dalton, ELS, is founder of Dalton & Associates, Reading, PA.





Member Profile: Ashley Tuan, OD, PhD

By Adrienne Resek

Driven. This single descriptor is the epitome of Ashley Tuan, OD, PhD.

“I started out as an optometrist, which was very fulfilling because I was able to help individuals,” Ashley relates. “However, I have always been very interested in innovation and that steered me back to graduate school where I specialized more in the optics and vision science.”

Ashley received her Doctor of Optometry degree from The Ohio State University along with a Master of Science in Physiological Optics. For most of the next decade she worked as a clinical optometrist, while also teasing her investigative inclinations as a vision research scientist at the University of California.

But even that wasn’t enough analytics for Ashley, so she headed back to UC Berkeley’s Vision Science Program to get her PhD.

Ashley finished her PhD, thinking she would become a research scientist, before Genentech snagged her first. There, she used her myriad skills to help start their clinical trials division before she did end up working as a research scientist for VISX and CooperVision for a number of years.

While Ashley was perfecting her clinical operations as well as research and development knowledge, she got a very good piece of advice from a wise mentor, Jane Rady – not to be afraid to branch out and expand her horizons. Ashley also jumped at opportunities to take on project management roles, providing her with broad exposure to operational processes and how different departments must work together.

All of her studies and work history have come together in her most recent position as senior director of product development and clinical affairs at a medical device start-up. Here she has successfully led her team through the maze of manufacturing, clinical, regulatory, and even legal hurdles to finalize a deal and have their device purchased.

When asked what has helped Ashley be successful, she said it is necessary to find the attributes inherent in your personality.

“I am naturally introverted and feminine – these are not stereotypical traits for success,” she says. “However, being introverted makes me a better observer and analyzer, and my feminine attributes are also an asset when it comes to people management and crisis management.”

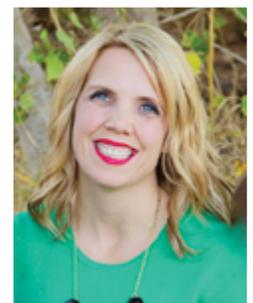
Women are more nurturing and can better understand other’s strengths, weaknesses and motivators, she adds.

“I can mentor my staff to develop the skills I need, rather than micromanage them,” Ashley says. “This motivates them to perform above and beyond the minimal necessary, and as a team we can accomplish more.”

Ashley’s skills at mentoring those around her coincide with her interest in OWL.

“OWL is a community that shares experience to help other become more successful,” she says. “The relatively small roundtable discussions and symposia give us all the chance to learn from others how to overcome the hurdles we face.”

Ashley has effectively accomplished herself out of a job with the acquisition of the intellectual property from her current start-up by a large company. But have no doubt; she will quickly find a new adventure that is in need of her very strong analytical, strategic, and soft skills. ■



Career Path: What's Holding You Back?

By Brad McCorkle

The most astonishing revelation of my entrepreneurial journey has been that prior to starting my own business, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't even understand what I was well equipped to do.

Don't misunderstand, I thought I understood my strengths, but clearly I had not discovered my professional passion. I couldn't honestly answer the question, what do you want to do when you grow up? After a 15-year successful career in sales, my continued lack of contentment and clarity was a red flag.

I've reflected about what was holding me back, and I believe fear was the primary culprit. Not a fear of success or failure, but fear of the unknown. Studies actually show¹ that we fear unknown outcomes more than ones that we know are bad.

I generally love routine and predictability, so setting out for uncharted territory isn't something I do easily. Unknown things often feel "unsafe" to me. And because I sometimes struggle to find the courage to try new things, I miss experiences that would help me challenge inaccurate beliefs I have about things, including misconception about myself!

Before my entrepreneurial journey, I would have told you my personality was best suited for sales or finance, and that the creative aspect of building a business was best left to others.

Well, that just wasn't true, but I couldn't have known because I never really explored the creative aspects of my personality. I was an athlete in college, and somewhere along the way I got the notion that former athletes do finance and sales, so this is "who I must be." Now that I'm running my own business, I find myself hiring people to handle much of our finance and sales, so that I can focus on the things I enjoy and am actually good at.

I ended up starting my own business in large part because I had the good fortune of walking closely along side a good friend as he embarked on his own entrepreneurial journey. A proverbial light bulb went off when he asked me to help him with a couple of creative projects related to the launch of his business (still not sure why he asked me for help!).

The idea of starting my own business wasn't something I ever really gave serious consideration, but my fortunate exposure to my friend's journey helped me see that I really didn't understand what starting a business was all about, nor did I understand how well-suited for it I actually was.

The point isn't to challenge you to start your own business, but to encourage you to step out into the professional unknown. Try new things that may feel unsafe from time to time. Perhaps volunteer for a project that's outside your comfort zone. You never know what you'll discover. ■

Related references

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Brad McCorkle is founder of Local Eye Site.

Brad McCorkle



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