

# Making an Impact

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## MAKING AN IMPACT

Making an impact means living a life that has significance in the lives of others. When one consistently lives a life that matters, a legacy is left behind. How long you are remembered – and by whom and for what – depends on that legacy and the impact it makes. Living an impactful life is not easy, but it is not difficult either. One of my favourite poems, ‘What Will Matter’ by Michael Josephson, ends with the lines:

*Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.*

*It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.*

*Choose to live a life that matters.*

It is all in our hands. Living an impactful life does not mean doing something spectacular on a global level or introducing a novel technique. It starts with small things and begins locally. Every hand surgeon must ask whether their hand surgery department is the most respected department in their institution. If they practice alone, they must ask if they are one of the most respected doctors in their community. One cannot make an impact on a national or global level if they cannot first make an impact in the community they live and work in. That is the first step.

Making an impact in the workplace demands patient-centred decisions and actions. Conventionally, we assess ourselves by the number of patients seen, the volume of surgeries performed, the revenue generated and similar metrics. Valuing ourselves based on these ‘output metrics’ will not lead to making an impact. We need to assess ourselves on things that matter to the patient, for whom we exist. These may include waiting time to see the surgeon, the time the surgeon spends with the patient, the duration of the diagnostic pathway and treatment schedule and the discharge experience. If we improve these metrics to meet patient demands, that will be the first step towards making an impact. This effort calls for empathy. Improving these ‘input metrics’, as they are termed in corporate language, is entirely in the hands of the hand surgeon. When input metrics are corrected, output metrics will improve, and impact is certain to follow. The department is bound to become the most respected. People who act to make change – and do not give explanations or excuses – make an impact.

The next step is to help someone around you become better. Bill Gates is credited with saying, ‘*The most powerful people in the next generation will be those who help others to grow*’. The core idea is that true power in the future will lie with individuals who actively contribute to the growth and potential of others – not just through personal achievements. This aligns with the concept of mentorship, where experienced individuals guide and support others to reach their full potential. By empowering others, leaders create a broader positive impact on the community and future generations.

Another way to make an impact is to reach out to people who deserve quality hand surgery but unfortunately fall outside the radar of regular health care systems. Initially, the thought or project may seem challenging. Financial limitations might be perceived as a barrier. In my personal experience, I have found that if the purpose is noble and the team is committed, nature conspires to help accomplish the goal. What is most important is the will to achieve it, no matter what it takes.

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Once an impact is made at the local level, the stage is set for the hand surgeon to make an impact on a larger stage. This can be achieved by participating in professional and community organisations, collaborating with a larger body of people to make a difference. There is a limit to what one person can do alone. However, there is often reluctance amongst many good hand surgeons to actively participate in the activities of their professional organisations. We must remember that no man is an island. In the complex society we live in, policies made at a political level can drastically affect how a hand surgeon delivers care. Political decisions are based on available input and the lobbying for various causes. The greatest tragedy occurs when good people shy away from participating in the affairs of national and regional professional organisations. If we do not take a seat at the table, we risk becoming part of the menu. I am convinced that with the right purpose and no personal

agenda, we can significantly advance our specialty by assuming leadership roles in communities and professional organisations.

By living an impactful life, a surgeon becomes a role model for the next generation. Inspiring young minds to understand the significance of values is the greatest service a hand surgeon can provide. This reach is much wider and transcends time. All leaders who made an impact had to take crucial decisions while continuously steering their unit towards a goal. They based their decisions not on popular will but on popular good, setting high standards at work. Abdelnour once said, *'Never apologize for having high standards. People who really want to be in your life will rise to meet them'*. Leaders often find that people rise to meet high standards. While such individuals may be few, it is the ones who choose to live impactful lives and those who are willing to follow them who keep the world moving forward.