

Ep #89: What to Expect as a New Grad Clinician with Leeza Pertsev (Part 2)



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With Your Host

Heather Branscombe

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Episode 89, Stepping into Success: Leeza Pertsev's Guide to New Graduates (Part 2)

Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. I am again super excited and so grateful to introduce you to occupational therapist Leeza Pertsev on the podcast today for part 2 of our interview. If you haven't listened to part 1, go back and quickly listen to part one. And if you have, I think you can understand why I wanted to record one of our conversations that we've had. This is really just an example of our conversations and I hope that you can take some value from it no matter where you are in your career journey.

So with that, let's listen to part 2 of my interview with Leeza Pertsev.

Heather: First of all, that is such a beautiful and honest and vulnerable example of why I wanted us to record one of these conversations today. Second, I'll just say, I'll never fight you on how you feel about your feelings, because your feelings are super valid. And of course you feel like that for all of the reasons that you just shared.

So of course, it makes perfect sense that if any time – I'm not going to guarantee that this is going to be the most or the least, I have no idea. I have no idea what your career is going to look like. And it may look similar to mine.

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Leeza: Oh, I have no idea either.

Heather: Right, it might be similar to mine, it might be less similar to mine. But just that you're just noticing the why and it is, it's true, you're not going to get a gold star every time you complete a session or complete a chart note or complete a report. And so there is this shift of identity and there's this shift of feedback. So it makes total and complete sense that this is this messy middle that you're in so far.

But I'm really interested because now we know that there are some circumstances that make perfect sense of why your brain is making it mean we are an imposter. We're having these feelings. We compensate by overthinking, like this is so normal. And again, it's very normal in all parts of it, but of course it's going to make sense in this first year.

But what I'm really interested in, is that you've kind of acknowledged one way to solve for that is to choose kind of a clinical environment that has, you could call it more structure. And some of that could be more structured, but it might actually be more external feedback by saying, yes, you're doing a good job. Like patting your head, getting that feedback in the moment, having an OT by your side at every given moment.

But yet you chose something like, and again, without revealing too much of where you were before, what I've noticed – And this was not a prison, you actively chose yourself. You actually leaned into a place with more autonomy, right, to do that. So can you tell me why you think that is? Why did you make that choice, do you think?

Leeza: Oh, now you're asking the hard questions.

Heather: Here we are in the middle.

Leeza: Yeah, here we are, the messy middle. Yeah, so I did a part-time split.

Yeah, and I won't reveal too much of where I started. But I will say the environments were a lot different, which makes sense. But what it was, it

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actually came from more so when I was in school. I would get, not all the time, but in my placements, and we had five in the UBC program, I would get honestly, frustrated, I guess that's the right word to use, maybe a little bit annoyed that I was being shaped into an OT based on my preceptors, right?

Because these are the people we learned from. These are the people that, you know, they're our support. They're who we ask questions to and things like that. But at the end of the day, we're both different people. And I learned that very quickly in my placements. I mean, some of them I didn't have the best experiences in and there were, yeah, just difficulties with preceptors. But I mean, putting that aside and those emotional hardships aside, that also allowed me to realize that you're a completely different person.

So I compared, like my classmates, for example. We are all graduating at the same time, we all learned the same things, but how we approach a situation will be completely different. And that, I think, is what kind of shifted my perspective and shifted my, like what I wanted. My wants for myself. At the time, when I first finished school I was like, yeah, no, this makes sense. I feel like this would be a really good opportunity, why not try a part-time split? Let's try two different places.

But I soon realized that when there is more so somebody, this is a little bit more, you know, in my other opportunity it was more so I'm learning from somebody, I'm learning how somebody does things. I'm learning their ways of doing, and they've been doing it for so long that it's second nature to them. Whereas for me, this is all brand new. I have to keep at it for it to become second nature.

But I think that was where there was that disconnect of like, yes, it's great that I have someone here all the time, or I have people here all the time. But I felt like, at the time, that you're not seeing where I'm coming from, as someone who's so new, because everybody around me is so experienced and they've done this for so long.

And don't get me wrong, it definitely isn't easier, you know, it's full-time in private practice. But it's that independence of, okay, but once I'm in this setting, I don't

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have anybody watching over my shoulder. I don't have anybody checking to see what mistakes I made and scolding me. Or the other way around, I don't have somebody giving me a gold star and making sure that I am ticking off all the boxes or whatever it is. It's more so myself, I have to be that person now.

And at the time, I'm not going to lie though, at the time when I first did the shift, that's when it was the hardest. That was probably one of the hardest things to get used to. I mean, it makes sense based on my experiences. But I would question it, right? So I would do something and I'm like, oh, I don't know if this is right, what am I doing? Is this right? Should I do this?

Because as a student, and in a placement, if I were to have those questions, I could ask my preceptor. My preceptor would be like, oh yeah, or they would be like, no, what are you doing?

Heather: You got that star right away. Yeah, you got that instant feedback that you were on the right track. Yeah.

Leeza: Cool, I have the answer, now I can go. Thank you for, basically, redirecting my second guessing. Whereas now, especially in such a place with independence, if I second guess, I have to be the one to provide that reassurance, right? Well, actually, I've been doing it, I've been a lot better now. But at the start it was really tough, because I'm like, oh, I don't know.

And that's okay. It's okay not to know. But I would, not in the session, but afterwards, reflecting, I would sit there and be like, I really don't know. I am so, like I have no one that I can directly run to and ask. But at the time, I was angry about it.

But thinking about it now as I've gotten used to it, I think that is actually a great thing because it is almost shifting my focus to be less reliant on other people's positive reinforcement, and more so reinforcing that connection with myself as a professional and allowing myself to give myself that reassurance of, okay, this is where, you know, you're where you need to be.

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And these are questions that I always ask myself. Are you doing harm? Are you doing what you think is best, given the circumstances? And yeah, that's the biggest thing too, right?

Heather: Those are some powerful questions that you're asking yourself, huge.

Leeza: But these are the things I had to learn. Otherwise, I didn't. And I feel, like I said, if you have someone you're shadowing with so closely, you don't really get a chance to reflect on that personally as much. And I think it's so different when it comes from yourself, as opposed to others.

Heather: Yeah. So what I hear you saying, and again, I don't want to – Like make sure that I am hearing this correctly. Like there was a discomfort of being in this kind of environment, which is learning how to ask and answer those questions on your own and to start to learn your own feedback. And then there was also the discomfort of in a different environment, which was you got the feedback, but there was the discomfort of it wasn't always filling out where you felt the growth of like, oh, you're giving me this feedback, but it's not in the way that I wanted, or maybe it's slightly different.

So it was just choosing the discomfort that is most aligned for you and for your growth and knowing your background and how successful you've been. You've referenced a couple times of how young you are. You don't, I mean, young is all a perspective. You're old enough to have a master's degree and be an occupational therapist. So I think that's great.

But I think one of the reasons, it makes sense that you have been this successful at this age, because you have chosen the discomfort, the long-term discomfort to make for growth for you over the short-term discomfort of whatever else that is. Am I on the right track? Like, would you agree?

Leeza: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that just makes me think, so thank you to my past self for sticking it through. Because at the time, yeah, like I said, when you're in it, it's a lot harder because everything is, you know, at the surface it's really

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overwhelming, everything kind of hits you at once. And then it's more so you need to ride that wave.

And when we go back to the sink or swim, you know, you start to swim. And then things get easier as you start to swim. And that's the beauty of it. And it will start to get even easier as you get into your own groove of things, you learn your own ways of doing and you build your confidence that way.

Heather: Right. And at the risk of, I do not want to gaslight you, and I understand that I have a role as your clinical director and I care about clinical support. But I do want to say, because it kind of sounds a little bit like you have no support, you have support, but it's just, it's not in an instant way. And we've given you more autonomy as to when you want and how much support that is.

Leeza: Yes, I will. Yeah, for the record, I do have support.

Heather: Let it be known, you have clinical support.

Leeza: No, wait, yes, I didn't mean it to come across that way. I do have support. It's just, yeah, comparing it to other settings, which you know the setting I think I'm referring to, you have that immediate support. Like if you need a question immediately answered, you can just go into their office. Whereas in this case, yeah, you still can get that support, but it's not as immediate. Which makes sense, though, because we all have different schedules, different clients.

Heather: Yeah, and the clinical setting that we're in, right? So if you're in a more acute clinical setting, it would make sense that you would need more acute clinical support, right?

Leeza: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And that's the thing, too. That was another thing I learned, is that – And you're the one that actually kept telling me this. But no things need to be answered right away. It's not as immediate as you need to figure this out by this week or by the end of the session. No, because the majority of the time we are seeing our clients for a longer term basis, whether that be months or years. We don't need to have all the answers at once.

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Heather: Mm-hmm, yeah. And it looks like, just as you've kind of talked like what has come to me having known you for a while, like we had quite a few conversations even before you were ever hired at Abilities. And now being hired at Abilities and managing your first start with us and that transition to a full-time role, just seeing what you said, like even some of those questions that you're starting to ask yourself is so beautiful that no matter what setting and of course, I mean, I'm not going to lie, I would love for you to stay with us forever and for us to die together.

However, it's such a beautiful thing that you are learning these skills. Just like the skills that you are aiming to help your clients and the families with, like those enabling skills that you wanted to go into as an OT, you're also developing those skills for yourself. And isn't that cool?

Leeza: Which is so surreal.

Heather: Yeah, isn't it?

Leeza: Yeah, because as a professional, you're teaching and you're trying to support your clients through these same things. But at the same time, you're also doing it as a professional. Especially as a professional that's so new to the field. So it's a very interesting feeling and experience to go through.

Heather: Well, and I would say as someone who has been in this field a couple of years longer, that to me, is always a thing of, as I told you before, it just tells me you're doing it right. You're exactly where you're supposed to be.

Obviously, my questions that I have and in my role are going to be very different than you, but I also am not getting the shiny stars from anybody. I'm also not getting, I'm getting feedback, but not in that immediate way. And do I have that imposter syndrome? Absolutely, I do. But I also have more tools in my tool belt to help to manage that as I navigate through.

Leeza: Yeah, and I have no doubt that that won't come with more years in the field and building that confidence in, not only the work we do, but also in ourselves. And it's just the beauty of being so new in this big world and trying to

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learn everything, learn as much as you can. Like I said, not just about the field and about the work that you do, but also about yourself.

Heather: Right. Isn't it huge? Yeah. So what have you found specifically –

Leeza: It's a lot.

Heather: Yeah. What is working for you now? As you're in the middle of it, like what have you found has worked for you? And maybe what hasn't, but what is working for you?

Leeza: I already went on about my past self and my bitter past self. But I think now the idea of acceptance, right? Like the acceptance of, okay, you're a professional now, you're not in school anymore. And like you were saying too, in this specific clinical setting, things are different. But that is okay. It's going to be different. Just like even if I was going to the same type of clinical setting, but a different company, things still will be different. And that is a thing that I worked really hard to do, but I accepted.

And as soon as I accepted it, things got easier. And not just that, the things that I was telling myself seem to be a lot more positive as well. So stepping away from that, you know, I'm not good enough. I can't be here. I shouldn't be here. What am I doing? I don't belong here. You know, those natural imposter syndrome things that we tell ourselves. Or even those, you know, being so hard on ourselves. And like I said, being an overachiever, it's so natural to us.

But I found that as time went on, even though it hasn't been that long yet, but still as the weeks went on and I dove further into work and I got more used to how I want to do things, what I feel like works best for me, things just got, it just felt easier mentally. And don't get me wrong, there are still things I don't know, but it's okay and I'll learn.

But stepping back from that pressure, that pressure that I put on myself of I need to know this, or I should know this. Why don't I know this? Like taking away that blame and more so redirecting it to, I don't know this, that's okay. Let me learn it. And I need to know it right away. That's the beauty of it.

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Heather: Acceptance is so beautiful.

Leeza: Yeah.

Heather: I'm wondering, I'm curious whether you've noticed that that acceptance, one, I mean, just hearing how that's helped you and your mindset, I'm curious if you've noticed that's helped you of how you show up in your sessions and what's happening from those sessions at all.

Leeza: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I can even, like I said, it's only been a few months, but if I'm comparing now to where I first started, it's completely different, right? And it's probably still, you know, if we look six months down the line and if I'm comparing six months to three months, it'll probably be completely different because that confidence in myself and the OT that I want to be and my exposure to different situations, that will continue building.

And so even if I think about the day I've had today, for example, and the clients I saw today. I found that, yeah, that acceptance and taking that pressure off myself of the idea of I need to answer everything right now. I need to have everything figured out immediately, that just is like, once I figured out that that wasn't the case, which took a while, it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders.

And I found that I am more confident in my sessions. I'm more confident in myself. And I always refer back to my clinical reasoning and what I am using for my clinical reasoning, what resources am I using? And I think that's really made a difference in how I show up for my clients.

Heather: Yeah, it sounds like as you manage your mind and you relieve that pressure, it opens it up for you to access all the clinical reasoning and the tools that you already have. And that confidence that brings that leadership energy to the session, which again, we're not fully responsible for the results that the client has, the client also has a role in that. But you are definitely setting up the scene and the environment to help them. Very similar to that door in the thing, you're making it a lot easier for your client to be able to make progress, whatever progress looks like for them.

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Leeza: Yeah, I mean, who knew things get easier when you don't put as much pressure on yourself and you're not mean to yourself.

Heather: Yeah, it's something we're all learning as clinicians every single day. Isn't it so funny? And we are often so kind and gracious and compassionate to our clients and we're often hardest on ourselves. Yeah.

Leeza: Yep.

Heather: For sure. So are there any other resources that you have or you love on this topic that you wanted to share?

Leeza: I follow a lot of these Instagram pages of these OTs. And a lot of them are more so in the PEDS field, but they do a lot of posting around this too. Around it's okay to not know, there are still times where people have been working for 15, 20 years and they still don't know. And that's okay. And that's the beauty of this field, it is truly like lifelong learning and you're not alone in this journey.

I will say as well, like my classmates who are now my colleagues, they are also resources too. They are also people that are going through the same thing that I'm going through. Granted it may be in a different setting, but still they are going through the same transition that I am. They are going through the same transition, the same new things coming up, the same not knowing enough, the same feeling of, am I good enough?

So yeah, I think that's really important too. But definitely, yeah, having something to refer back to, to almost provide that reassurance is really helpful.

Heather: Yeah. It sounds like that's you developing your professional network, whether that's inside the organization you're working for, outside like, yeah, your classmates. And I could see how that could help with acceptance, right? Just normalizing your own experience. Of course, it makes sense that you're feeling all the things that you're feeling with the intensity that you're feeling as well, for sure.

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Leeza: Yeah.

Heather: So what's one thing that you want to share, if there's a takeaway from today or something we might not have addressed today that you'd want to share with your fellow clinician. Whether it is a fellow, you know, a new grad who's about to graduate in a few months, someone who might be like your fellow classmates or someone who's just considering a transition from private practice to public practice, public practice to private, a new area of expertise in that transition. What would you like to share with them?

Leeza: So I'll start with one word, and that word is breathe. And this is something that I shared with – I spoke to the incoming class of the UBC MOT program for their induction ceremony. And I said the same thing, take a breath, breathe. Because it goes back to what we were talking about earlier, but you don't need to know everything, number one. And also you won't know everything. But that is okay because that's the beauty of the space that we're in, the profession. This truly is a lifelong learning journey.

And there's such an importance in accepting that and allowing that to guide us, because I feel like once you have that understanding and once you truly grasp that, then things just get easier from there, as opposed to the opposite, of having these high expectations on yourself, being so hard on yourself. Like it only makes things harder for yourself, especially as you're trying to adjust to such a new transition in a new environment. Basically, it's okay. It's okay to not know and it's okay to not feel confident.

And it's okay to, like, yeah, basically just normalizing that. We've all been there. We've all either gone through it or we are going through it. So yeah, I definitely encourage that, take a breath and go easy on yourself because, well, at the end of the day, we're the ones that show up for our clients or the people that we work with. And if we're not ready to show up for them, then not only is that not fair to our clients, but also to ourselves. Because then we're not able to be the best person that we can be or the best professional that we can be for the people that we work with, and our colleagues as well.

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Heather: So you kept referring to how young you are, but you have a lot of wisdom, Leeza, even in the messy middle. So, again, I'm so grateful that you were able to come. I'm so glad that we recorded this. As we were mentioning before, won't this be so fun for you to just look back on, your colleagues to look back on five years, 10 years from now?

Thank you so much for sharing all of your wisdom in the messy middle. If there are people that want to connect with you, whether they want to refer people to you or just know more about you, they want you in their own network, how can they get in touch with you?

Leeza: Probably the best way is LinkedIn, it's more of a professional platform. Or by email, because this is through Abilities, and yeah, I'm always available through email and I'd be happy to chat.

Heather: All right, and we'll put those links in the show notes of the podcast so they can refer to that.

All right, thank you again so much, Leeza, I really appreciate it.

Leeza: Yeah, thank you so much for having me. This was great.

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