

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Heather Branscombe

[Clinicians Creating Impact](#) with Heather Branscombe

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Episode 90, The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev.

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, friends. I hope things are going well for you. If you're listening to this when it first comes out, we are deep into fall now, and I don't know about you, but I am also deep into my fall projects. It's really fun. It's still, I don't know where you are, but where I am, it's still sunny a lot of the time anyways, but it's just that little bit cooler. I'm able to get out my sweaters and my sweatshirts and not sweat in them when I'm wearing them, and it's just fun to have a little bit of a change, both personally and professionally.

I'm really excited to share this follow-up interview with one of the clinicians that I'm lucky enough to work with, who is Leeza Pertsev. She's an occupational therapist working with us full-time here at Abilities. It was really good to connect with her to see her leanings and learnings about being one year out as a new grad.

And I fully believe whether you are a new grad, you're in the midst of your new grad transition, or you're a more seasoned grad, I think that there are some pearls of wisdom for you to be able to take away. So with that, I give you my interview with Leeza Pertsev.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Heather: All right. Welcome back, Leeza. You are our first, our first like it's ours, but you're the first guest that's come back for the second time, so welcome back.

Leeza: Thank you. I'm honored to be welcomed back.

Heather: There you go. So last time we talked, you were about four to five months post-graduation, and now you're officially more than a year out of school.

Leeza: Yeah. Yes. Where did the year go?

Heather: Yeah. So how does it feel to be a year out of school?

Leeza: Well, I see what they mean now when they say the days are long, but the weeks are short, because, yeah, I just feel like this year flew by. And then it wasn't until I actually reflected on it that I was like, whoa, things have gotten easier and things are getting better.

I'm not nearly the same OT I was when I first started, and I'm continuing to learn more and build on that. So it just makes me more and more excited as time goes on. I'm like, well, what will I be like in six months? And how much will I grow in another year? And how much will, yeah, how much more confident will I be as time continues to go on?

Heather: That's amazing. Yeah, I think this is a really good time to kind of dig into that a little bit more. So what do you think that you've really learned so far in this past year as a clinician?

Leeza: Ooh, I was going to say about myself or about the work I do?

Heather: Any and all of it.

Leeza: I think in this setting, you really get to connect and work with not just the clients, but their families. So you really get to learn and see how unique everybody is and how different every situation is. And then this applies back to

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

the things that I do, there is no one size fits all solution. What may work for one child may not work for another child and their family. So it's really about, I mean, it's the beauty of OT.

But I think it's been so interesting to reflect on that and learn that I have the opportunity to adapt things to make things work for somebody. And seeing that, and you actually, I mean, being a year out I see the difference, which I may have not been able to see when I first started as I was still building my skills and things like that.

Heather: Yeah. What have you learned about yourself?

Leeza: The biggest thing I think I've learned, and this is more so, this is not something that I could have prepared for before I started working. I actually had to start working in order to go through that growth, to take pressure off myself and really adjust my mindset of, I don't need to have all the answers right away. I don't need to have all of these things finished in the next hour. Things will get done, there is time and putting that pressure on myself will only make it worse for me and my mental health. I mean, even my performance and my confidence.

So really learning to sit with that and, yeah, allowed that to kind of guide me if things are okay. Everything's fine. I'm doing what I need to do. Yeah, like I'm not in trouble. There's nothing. My families are happy, clients are happy. So it's yeah, I've just been giving myself that break.

Heather: Yeah. First of all, that's an amazing truth bomb really early in this episode. I think that's great. And no, we love that. We love that. And I would agree, like as someone who's watched you from the outside, I definitely can see that. And I can also see like my new grad self and maybe your new grad self, if you had said that, would be like, how do you do that? How do you take the pressure off yourself?

So what have you learned about that? How do you take the pressure off yourself?

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Leeza: Oh, I think it's hard because it wasn't until, and like I said, this is not something you can do until you're out of that environment. So it wasn't until I was out of school, that high pressure environment, you know, wanting to get good grades, wanting to just continue doing your best and be your best, because that's what I'd been doing for so long. I mean, it works because I'm here and I'm happy and I'm grateful for that.

But after that, it's more so, okay, but there's no pressure to do that anymore, you know? Like I'm not getting graded on these things. I'm helping clients and I'm actually an OT and I'm providing a service.

And I think one of the biggest things that – This is, once again, something that I had to learn is things like I don't need to take my work home out of my work hours. Things will be there the next day, especially for me, like I work full time, but there will be opportunities and time to do it. I mean, maybe it takes a little bit more planning throughout the week, but I don't need to work, quote unquote, like overtime. I don't need to bring my work home with me.

And I think that not just like I don't need to, but I don't have to. Like no one is forcing me to do that. No one is expecting that of me because I am a working professional now. And then this is where like the other half of the balance comes in of all I've known is kind of like school and all the extracurriculars through that for so long. And then now that I'm working full time, it's kind of like, whoa, I have free time.

I have other things that make me who I am as a person. And I've really tried to dive into that throughout this past year, because I can do that. And I have the opportunity to do that. And I not only can, but I want to do that. And that's what makes me who I am. And that's what helps me stay confident. I mean, it's what makes me happy, too.

Heather: Yeah, it sounds like there's, and you can tell me where I'm wrong, but it sounds like you've made that shift of being able to grow through pressure, which we typically have externally in school and that, and to be able to still grow.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Because I've heard there's been a lot of growth that you've felt in the last year, but to be able to grow without pressure.

And so when you don't have that external pressure of an organization or a boss or anything to grow, so you have that gone. But then I also hear there's that layer of taking the pressure off yourself. So how to grow successfully without that pressure or that feeling of pressure.

Leeza: Yeah. And it's so interesting hearing that said back to me, because I'm like, huh. Like, yeah, I would have never thought of it to be, like, I mean, if you asked me a year ago, I'd be like, no, that's not a thing. How does that work? I don't know how to exist without pressure.

Heather: Meaning that you wouldn't think that it's possible to grow without pressure?

Leeza: Yeah, yeah. I think so, yeah.

Heather: Oh, interesting.

Leeza: Well, it makes sense because it's the environment being in school for so long. And even things like, like I said, even the simple things of a routine, like not having a consistent daily routine, most students can kind of relate to that. But like, it goes down to even my hobbies, my outside of work activities, like my sleep schedule. All of these things kind of play a role and a factor in that. And not just how I show up to work but also, like I was saying, like my mental health, my physical health, like my, yeah, just my overall daily function.

And I think that that's made a difference too, even though I would have never expected it to make that big of a difference a year ago. Now that I'm a year out and I'm kind of consistently doing it, I see it and I feel it.

Heather: Yeah. And I'm curious if your goals have either changed or evolved at all over the last year?

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Leeza: I would say yes, because a part of what comes with my goals changing is taking the pressure off and not having such high and unrealistic expectations placed on myself. Because once again, I don't need to and no one's expecting that of me. And I don't have to do these things.

And so I think that because of that, naturally, my goals shifted to more realistic ones based on where I'm at now and what would make sense for me where I'm at now.

Heather: Yeah, yeah, that's amazing. As you reflect back, what supports do you think have been most helpful to you over the past year?

Leeza: Well, honestly, it's been hard. And I think a lot of new grads may be able to relate to this, but it's hard being new and fresh out of school. Because yeah, you have all this knowledge and all these things that you learn throughout school, but you don't necessarily have that direct experience through applying these skills.

So while I can only speak on where I'm at and what position I'm in, but working in private practice, you are more independent. I think I spoke about this in the last podcast I was a part of. But yeah, you're more independent. There's a lot of autonomy and flexibility in terms of like planning and organizing your schedule, and your clients and things like that in your caseload.

So because of that, the support is, it's hard. It's harder to get that because the other, you know, there's other OTs, which is fantastic and I love the fact that I get to work with other OTs and talk to them. But they have their own caseload and their own clients as well.

So I think, like, rather than getting, so this is the difference between when I first started versus now. So rather than getting frustrated at that of I kind of feel more isolated in the setting, or I feel more alone in the setting, I kind of shifted my mindset of, yeah, I may be more isolated, or I don't see as many OTs on the day to day, but on the flip side I'm more independent.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

And what comes with that independence is like finding ways that work best to support myself. So whether that be emailing other OTs at Abilities, or looking things up or relying, you know, going back into my schooling notes, my schooling resources. There's been a lot of things that I've had to, and I do, and I continuously do it, but there's been a lot of resources that I continue to pull from, whether that be like through social media, or through researching on my laptop, or, yeah, even asking friends that are not directly in the same, just old classmates that aren't in the same company, but in the same area.

Heather: So what I hear is what you might have thought was really important to you at the beginning was to be surrounded by a lot of OTs, which I think, again, we discussed a little bit in our first thing. There's been a shift in what I hear has been helpful to you. One is a mindset shift of like reframing some of it, but also thinking about the resources that you do have. And I know, having known you, I do know you developing relationships inside and outside Abilities, so professional relationships. I hear you navigating the things that work for you, social media, your resources.

So it sounds like you are using a variety of resources and kind of figuring out what is working for you and what isn't working for you. How does that land with you?

Leeza: Yeah, yeah, I agree. And I think it's well said. Yeah, and I think that idea and what you're just mentioning is probably something that's going to continue to change and evolve as I continue to work as an OT and build experience and things like that. But it's definitely, like I think that's just like an ongoing thing. Like it's always there. It's always in the background. Yeah, it's always about being able to utilize your resources effectively in the ways that work best for you based on what you need in that moment.

Heather: Right. Yeah. Is there anything that you wish that other clinicians better understood about being a newer grad? So maybe clinicians that aren't new grads themselves, so people that are maybe 10, 15, I know that you work with some clinicians that have been out for a longer time. So either internally or externally, is there anything you wish that they understood better?

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Leeza: Okay, this is a hard one, because I understand where they're coming from, you know, they're many years into the field, they've kind of found what I was kind of describing. But they found it, like it's probably a little bit easier for them to go through those processes because it's become natural to them. But honestly, I would say, understanding or trying to understand where we're coming from as new grads.

You know, we're freshly out of school. Yes, we learned, we spent two years or however many years learning all of these things and building these skills. But like I said before, we don't have that application factor. We haven't had that chance to actually apply these skills. And a lot of the time these skills may not directly work in certain situations as much as we would expect them to.

So I think that's a big thing there of kind of having that grace and patience of, yes, we are freshly out of school and we're full of knowledge, but we don't necessarily have those direct skills yet, because we haven't actually tried these things with any clients or patients yet. So I think that's a big thing to keep in mind.

Heather: Yeah. And what advice would you give your new grad self? What advice would you give the you of a year ago?

Leeza: Breathe.

Heather: That sounds simple, and we giggle, but that's actually super powerful.

Leeza: Well, it's true, because like I go back to that pressure. We put so much pressure on ourselves, which makes sense. Like, we worked so hard to get here. And it would make sense that that kind of mindset would continue outside of school until you get used to it. But we want to do good things. We want to be the best. We want to give the best support and provide the best services to our clients. And that totally makes sense.

But I think that when there's a shift between putting too much pressure on yourself versus like, what you can do, that's when it gets tough. And it's so easy to burn out and to feel like you aren't enough and you're not doing enough and

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

not, you know, I mean, that's a little bit of the imposter syndrome that comes into play, but it's so easy to let that take over, especially being so new.

I mean, and even a year out, I still think I'm so new. It's just, I've learned to shift the mindset of, okay, I'm so new, I have no clue what I'm doing. I don't feel like I belong here, all these things. I've learned to shift that into, okay, yeah, I'm still new. Yeah, I'm still learning. I'm still growing and there's so many things that I don't know. But there's also things that I now do know.

There's so many things that I wasn't exposed to when I first started however many months ago, a year ago, actually, that I now know. And that has allowed me to change and grow with that information and those skills. And like I said, like, there's a reason why they say, you know, it's a lifelong learning journey. And there's so many things that will continue to change as we go out through our, and as I go out through my career.

But that's, I think, the biggest thing of, but there's so much more that I know, that I now know that I didn't know when I first started. And then even things like, yeah, like because now I've been seeing some of my clients for a year now as well, and just seeing that shift of when I first started working with them, it was hard, it was new, there were so many things I didn't know. But now we kind of have such a good flow and system in place and we have things that work for us. And just seeing even that small change, I think made all the difference.

Heather: Yeah, that's amazing. I love that you brought up imposter syndrome, because that's where I was curious about next. Where do you think you're at with the imposter syndrome identity?

Leeza: I think, well now, a year out, I think it's something that'll kind of always be there. It's always in the corner, you know, it'll try to come out and take over. But once again, it's almost like a continuous reminder of, yeah, but no one's expecting me to know everything. I can't know everything. There are definitely things that I don't know. And if it comes up, I think this is a big change, too, but I'm more than happy to actually communicate that.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

So if a family asks me about something that I don't know, I'm more than happy and very confident to say, I'm not sure about this. Let me look into it and get back to you.

Heather: Yes. 1000 times, yes.

Leeza: Yeah. And you know what? As opposed to like, you know, it could be like, oh yeah, let me put more pressure on myself and kind of fake it till I make it, even though at the end of the day, it's not going to help anybody. And it may reflect poorly on me and my knowledge and my skills.

But like there's nothing wrong, this is a big thing too, there's nothing wrong with saying that you don't know, but you will look into it. Because I think that shows that you're still willing to try. And it may not be your area that you've been exposed to for long, you know, mostly working in your setting. But you can always learn and figure it out, and then go from there.

Heather: Yeah, I love that perspective. And again, as someone who, I still identify as a new grad, which clearly I am not. When my graduating year doesn't even start with a two in front of it, clearly, objectively, I'm not a new grad. But I will say that there is that imposter syndrome thing that comes up. And I think that kind of shows that you are at the edge of growth, right?

Because the opposite is that you're complacent and that everything is fine and that. So it's showing that growth. But what I'm hearing that you're becoming increasingly more comfortable with is the discomfort of that, like the comfort of the discomfort, which can be really challenging coming from an academic setting where it is all about right and wrong and black and white. And the reality, as you said, the application is so much more gray than we're often led to believe in our academic settings. Amazing.

Leeza: Yeah, and I think that another thing that kind of plays a factor in all of that, too, is, you know, when you're in school, you're surrounded by classmates. And for me, what ended up happening, which because of all this pressure, high expectations, I want to get good grades, whatever, maybe I want to do well.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

What ended up happening was I often compared myself to others. And I think that was a big thing that really affected me.

And then we talked about imposter syndrome, that played a role in that, too. And all of those kinds of things really only affected my self-confidence and my ability to show up as an OT. And it wasn't until even a year out working in more of an independent, like flexible setting that I realized that me and another new grad or somebody at the same point could have a situation, but we will both handle it and look at it a different way and go about it a different way.

Even though we both have the same amount of schooling, we graduated the same year, at the end of the day, we're different people. And I think that's a big thing that I had to learn, too, especially with imposter syndrome of, yeah, but either way, and even like, it doesn't even have to be an OT. Like, I mean, I say OT because we have the same scope, but like two physios, they likely won't look at a situation the same way. Two SLPs, the same thing.

So I mean, it's highly dependent on who you are as a person and what values and experiences you have. And that comes with your life experiences and things like that. So I think that was another big thing that kind of, like not comparing myself to others and not questioning, am I good enough? Like, at the end of the day, like, yeah, my caseload is so different than another OT's and I can only do what I can for my clients at this time.

Heather: Yeah, and it sounds like, and again you can tell me where I'm wrong, but it sounds like you're switching your definition of what is a good OT from an external point of view, so from comparison. And again, like school, we got that, like, are you measuring up to an external standard, to a switch to your internal standard. How do you want to be as an OT? Like what's important for you as an OT?

And of course, we have college guidelines. And you might work in an organization, there are guidelines in that, and there are your own values that are really important for you and how you want to work that aligns with how you work,

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

like whether that's from a circadian rhythm point of view, or just your needs and preferences. So just figuring out what is being a good OT to Leeza?

Leeza: Yeah.

Heather: Yeah.

Leeza: And that may be very different from somebody else, which is okay.

Heather: Absolutely, yeah.

Leeza: As long as we're obviously abiding to guidelines and our practice guides and things like that. Like, I think, yeah, it's okay to be different. It's okay to do things in a different way because at the end of the day, as long as you are supporting these clients and families, and as long as you are working on their goals and they're happy, then that makes all the difference.

Heather: Yeah. Is there any other advice that you would give any new grads? As you said, this isn't just applicable to your discipline of OT, but what advice would you give to the new grads of this year coming out?

Leeza: Honestly, the biggest thing, well, I'll go back to breathe. But I think –

Heather: It regulates your nervous system, right, from an OT perspective, right? If you're in fight or flight, you are not going to make the best decisions. Of course.

Leeza: So true.

Heather: Yes.

Leeza: I think the biggest thing is to give yourself time. Because it may seem, and as someone who literally experienced this, I can remember three months in how overwhelmed I felt and how much I was questioning things like, is this what I'm going to be doing? Like, can I even do this? This is my career now? Did I make the wrong choice? And you know, and so on and so on, all of the imposter syndrome questions.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

And just like with any new change and new adjustment, like things take time, and you really need to give yourself some time to settle in, figure out what works for you, whatever that may look like, figure out your schedule, your routine both inside of work and outside of work, and finding the things that you enjoy and the things that work best for you, whatever that may be.

And I think that's also why a lot of people, not a lot, but why it's common for people to start working, and I've had classmates that do this, but people start working and then they switch. I feel like a few months in, it's too early to realize whether or not this is for you. You need to give yourself a little bit more time to kind of settle in and adjust. And once you've adjusted, then you can start, you know, opening up or exploring like whether or not this is actually a fit for you.

Does this work for you? Is this something you want to do? Can you see, like are you happy doing this? So I think more of those questions start to get answered as time goes by. But all of that is, it's really hard to have to think about that and exhausting, actually, to have to think about that when you have just started, because so much, as I've had to learn, so much can change even in the span of four months. It's actually shocking and amazing at the same time.

Heather: Right. Hopeful and crazy at the same time.

Leeza: Yeah, exactly.

Heather: Well, I think that's really important. And I really like that piece, because there is a new grad thing that new grads, and I did that as well, that we jump around a lot as a new grad. And I don't think that that's necessarily wrong. I know you talked about in our last episode of how you were starting to work with us part time and you were somewhere else part time and then you kind of decided.

So it's not wrong to move at all, but just really noticing and sitting with the reasons that you are moving and whether you like that reason. And I notice that sometimes, too. I can tell when someone is leaving. And I know Abilities is not the right fit for everyone. And that's okay, and it's amazing that there are so

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

many different organizations as clinicians for us to work with. Just like as clients, I would want them to have choices in their clinicians as well, like finding that match. But just knowing the tolerance that you have to sit in the discomfort of what's going on and really figure out where that's coming from.

If you just move to avoid discomfort, then you're just pushing that discomfort down the road for a little bit, because there is a honeymoon period in most places that you start, and then the reality of it comes in and then it's up to you to decide what is working for you, as you said, and what isn't. And then within that organization, how much are you able to change, like to influence the thing for you and how much are you not? And then deciding is that enough for you to be happy or do you need to move somewhere else? So I think that's a really important thing.

And I will say I think it's really important because I love that you talked about the comparison, because you are, I mean, having known you, seen your resume and that, you are objectively successful by a lot of outside metrics. And it can be really easy not to be vulnerable and share those inner workings that are frankly happening in all of our brains all of the time. But we as clinicians don't always talk about that.

And I think the more that we do talk about that as clinicians, I ultimately think that will help ourselves to create a bigger impact as clinicians and then to then ultimately, as we're able to use all of our brains and all of our resources and all our knowledge, we will be able to create a bigger impact for the clients that we serve as well.

So thank you. Thank you so much for coming today and for sharing your story. This may be an ongoing thing. We could do this at your 30 years. I'm ahead. I don't know if I'll still be working or not. Maybe you'll take over the podcast. Who knows?

Leeza: No, I loved it. Thank you so much for having me. This is great.

Heather: All right.

Ep #90: The New Grad Guide to Your First Year as a Clinician with Leeza Pertsev

Leeza: Thank you.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner to download your free getting it all done at work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.