Almost Leaving, Now Leading: Reclaiming your OT Identity

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Objectives

1

Identify systemic factors contributing to burnout and attrition.

2

Describe pathways for professional identity development through advocacy, participation in professional associations, and leadership engagement.

3

Understand how social media can be used, including platforms such as TikTok, to translate occupational therapy experience into accessible professional or public communication.

Outline

01 **The Crisis:** The Moment I Almost Left

02 **The Pivot:** Finding My Space

03 **The Transformation:** From Frustration to Leadership

04 **The Lesson:** What One Story Reveals About the Profession

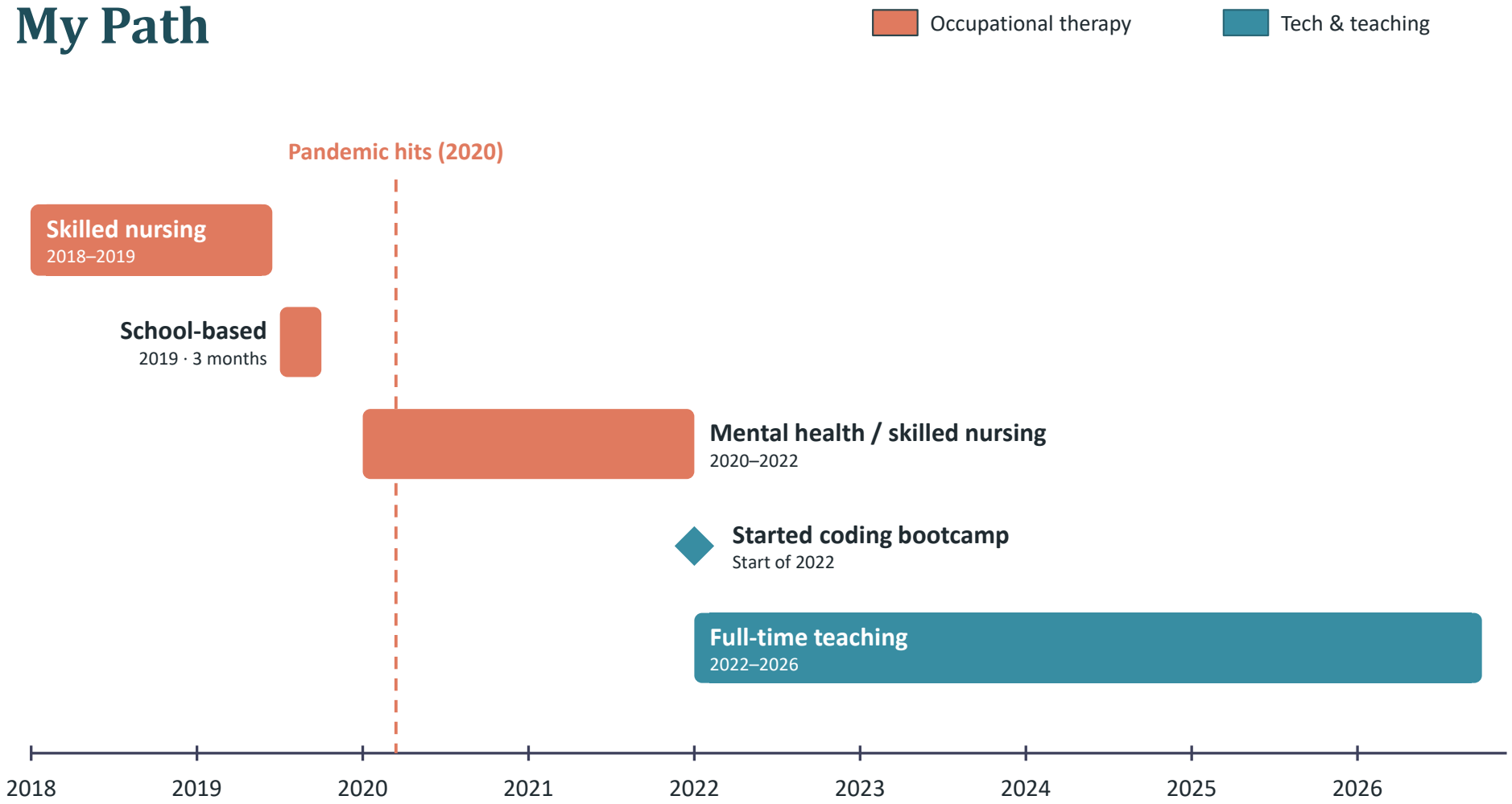
05 **Reclaiming Your OT Identity**

01

The Crisis:

The Moment I Almost Left

My Path


Occupational therapy
Tech & teaching
Pandemic hits (2020)
Skilled nursing
2018–2019
School-based
2019 · 3 months
Mental health / skilled nursing
2020–2022
Started coding bootcamp
Start of 2022
Full-time teaching
2022–2026
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026

When The Realities Did Not Match My Values

What I Expected	What I Experienced
Meaningful work that made a difference	Productivity pressures that sometimes overshadowed meaningful care
A profession aligned with my values	A growing disconnect between my values and workplace expectations
Respect for OT’s unique role	Having to continually explain or advocate for OT’s value
A sustainable career	Compensation, workload, and burnout concerns
Helping people participate in what matters to them	Feeling like the system sometimes made meaningful participation harder
A career I could grow in	Questioning whether I could see myself staying in OT long-term
Resilience would be enough	Realizing individual resilience cannot fix systemic problems

Have You Ever Felt This Way?

Scan the code to respond anonymously

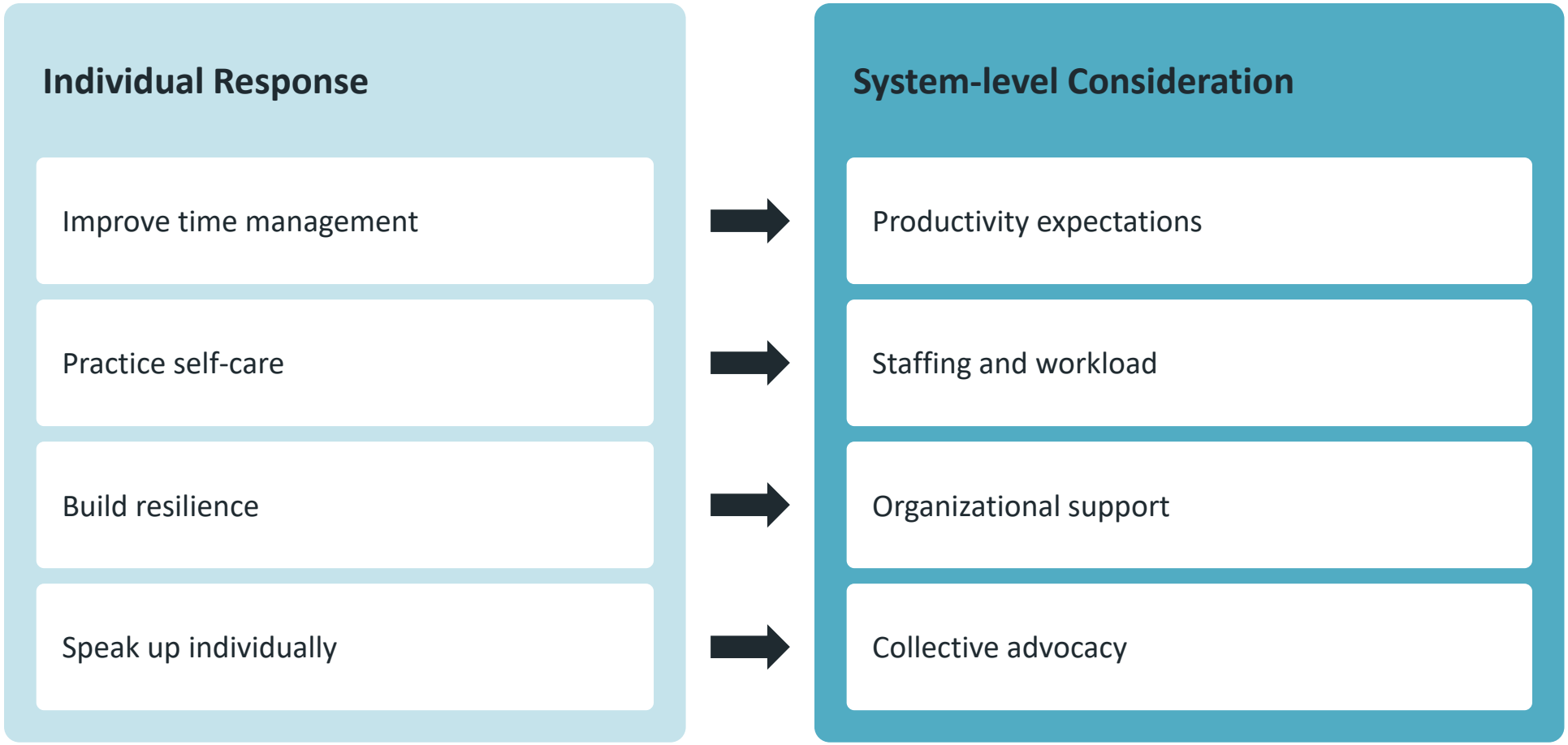


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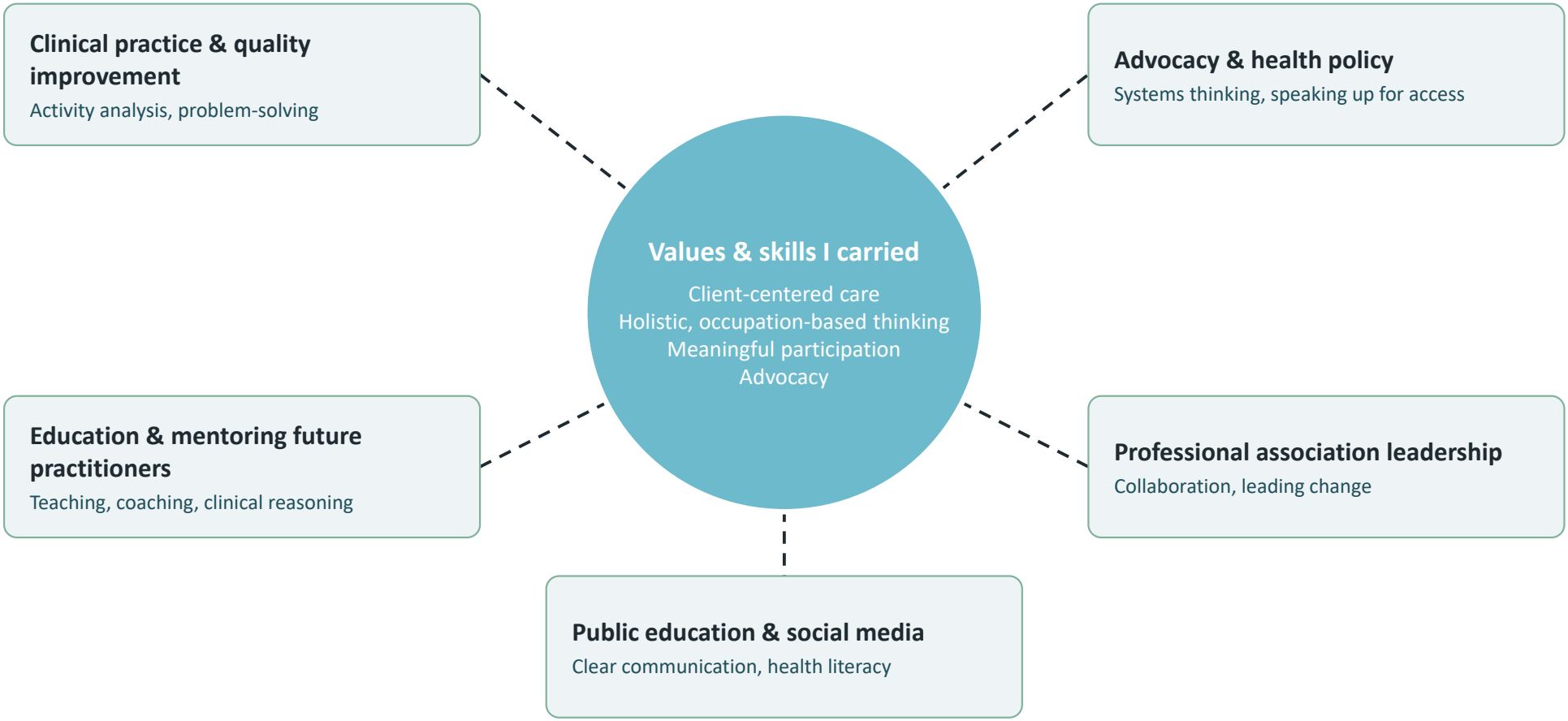
The Pivot:

Finding My Space In Occupational Therapy

Individual Problem or Systemic Issue?



There Is More Than One Way to Be an Occupational Therapist



From Finding My Voice to Sharing It

Finding my voice

- Realized my frustrations were not just personal failures
- Started asking: “What is happening around me that needs to change?”
- Became more comfortable talking about difficult parts of the profession
- Learned to use my OT perspective beyond direct patient care
- Found advocacy as a way to stay connected to OT

Sharing it

- Started having conversations beyond my immediate workplace
- Used social media to make OT issues more accessible
- Shared experiences → connected them to broader professional issues
- Learned that visibility can be advocacy
- Created space for other OTs to say, “I’ve experienced that too.”

03

The Transformation:

From Frustration to Leadership

Advocacy Gave Me Somewhere to Put My Frustration

From identifying problems to engaging the structures that shape OT

Discovering professional advocacy

Learning about legislation and health policy

Getting involved with OTAC

Recognizing the influence of collective professional voices

My way into OTAC

How I got involved

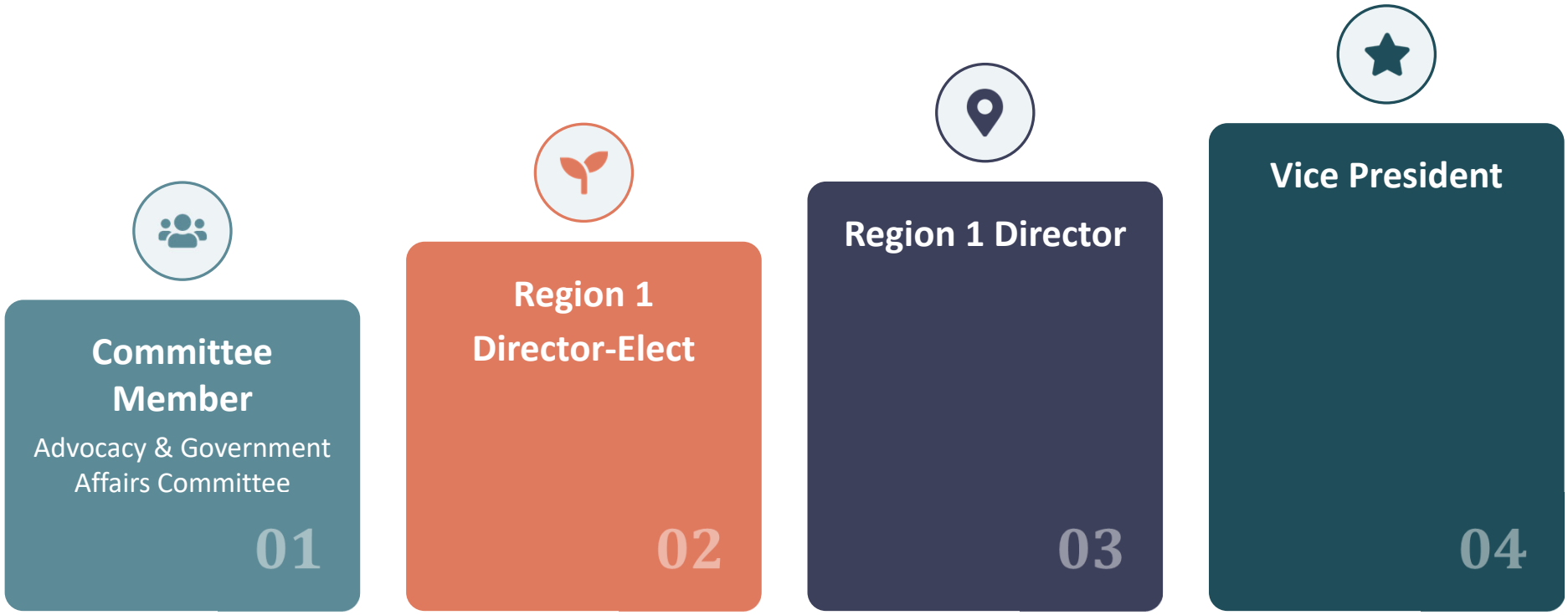
2023: Advocacy and Government Affairs Committee

What motivated me

Interest in politics and policy

My OTAC Journey

Occupational Therapy Association of California



Leadership Changed How I Saw Myself

Skills gained through association involvement



Policy literacy and advocacy



Collaboration and relationship-building



Strategic thinking and communication



Confidence in contributing to professional change

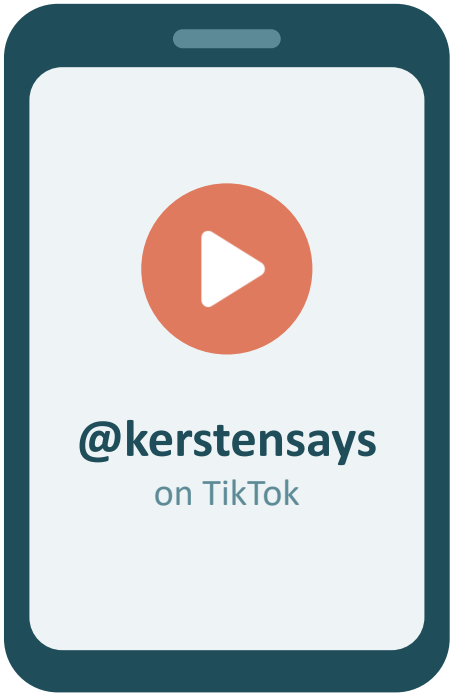


Reflection

“What skills or perspectives could you contribute to OT leadership, even if you don’t see yourself as a leader?”

Social Media as an Extension of Professional Identity

Bringing my OT voice to a wider audience

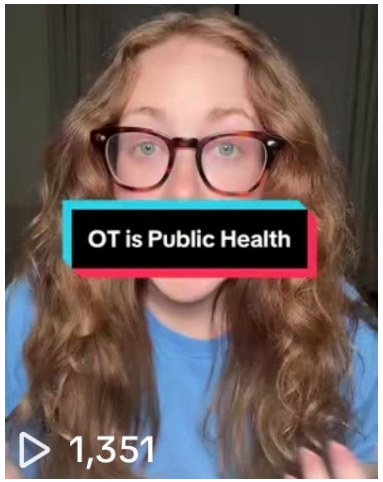


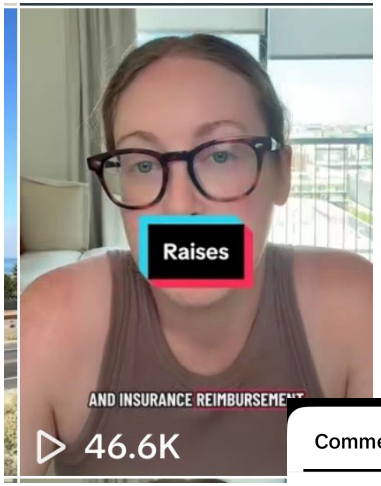
Making OT accessible
Turning profession-wide issues into content anyone can follow

Connecting the personal to the professional
Sharing my experiences and linking them to broader OT issues

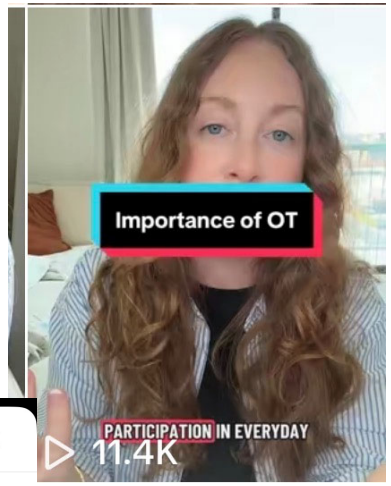
Visibility as advocacy
Creating space for other OTs to say, “I’ve experienced that too.”

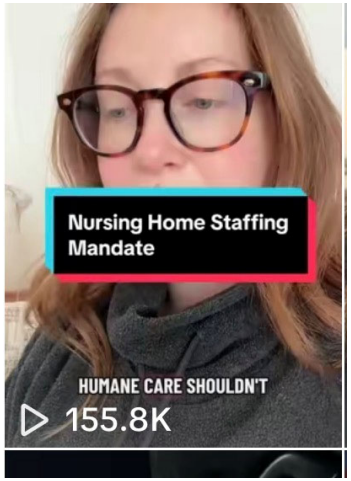
What I talk about
Healthcare and OT Policy, practice issues, benefits of the profession







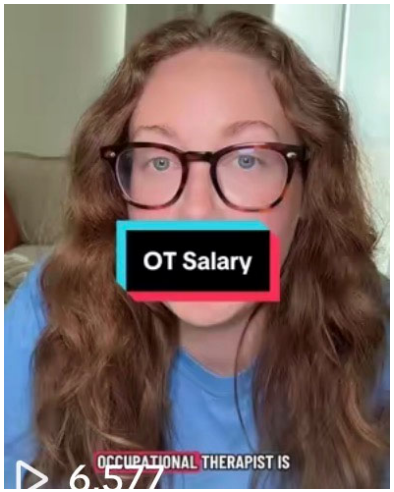


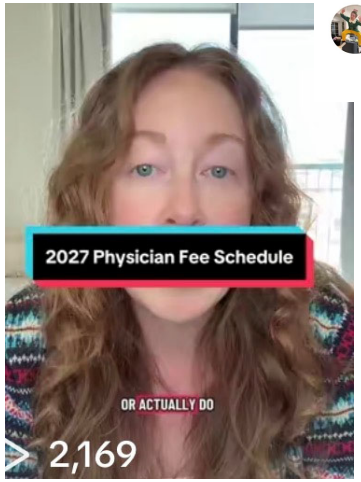


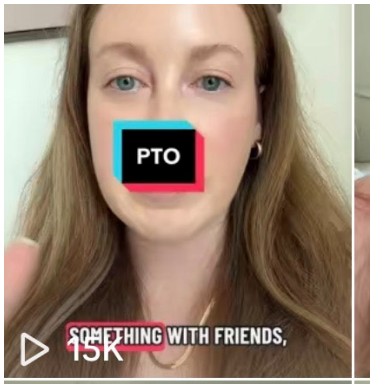
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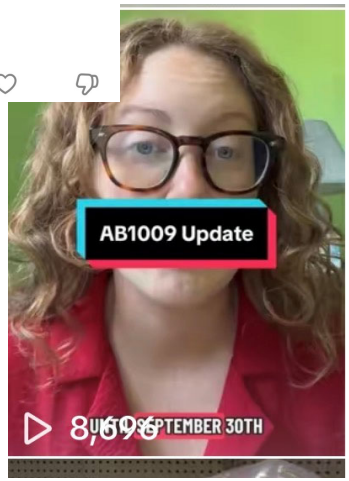
Kersten | OT, Politics, & Me · Creator
Jake Shane and OT #FYP #ot #jakeshane #occupationaltherapy #hand 3h

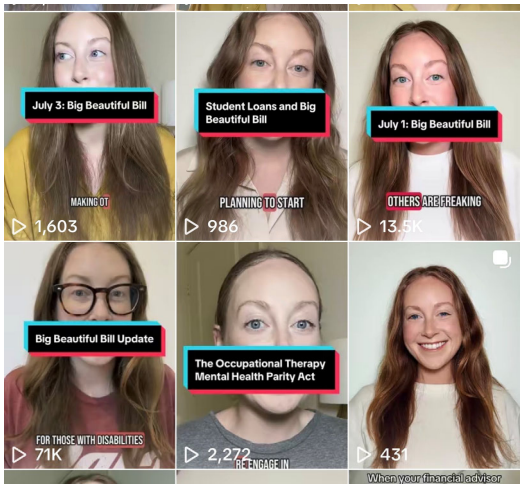
Jake Shane
Wait what's occupational therapy
5m Reply











04

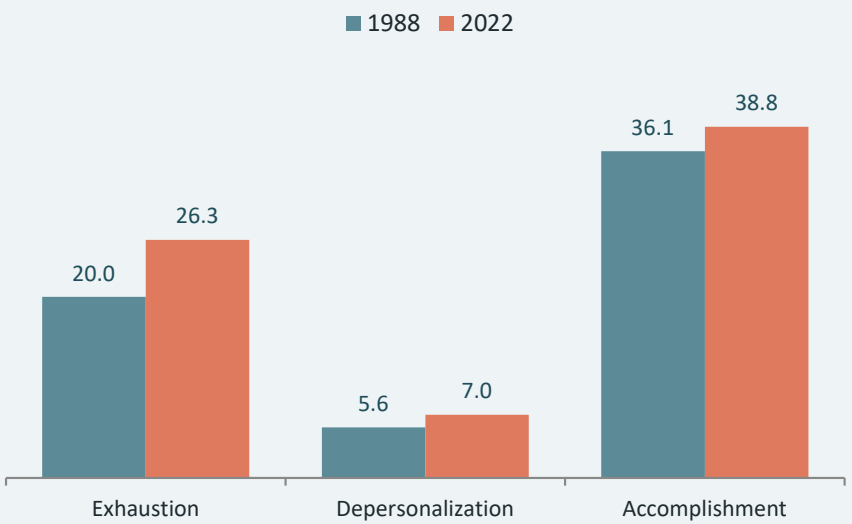
The Lesson:

What One Story Reveals About the Profession

My Story is Personal, The Issues are Bigger

Two U.S. studies using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, 34 years apart

Average MBI subscale scores



Higher exhaustion and depersonalization = more burnout. Samples and MBI editions differ, so compare with care.

Rogers & Dodson, 1988

- 99 OTs in the Southeastern U.S.
- Less burnout than other helping professions
- Linked to age, education, years in practice, patient contact

Shin et al., 2022

- 178 practitioners, national U.S. sample
- Linked to supervisor support, income satisfaction, education
- Calls burnout a workplace health and safety issue

Productivity Pressure and Burnout

366 therapy practitioners in U.S. skilled nursing and assisted living facilities

20.5%

were burned out on all three burnout dimensions

Linked to burnout
Productivity requirements were tied to exhaustion, depersonalization, and lower accomplishment

Linked to ethics
Productivity standards were tied to 5 of 6 ethically questionable behaviors

Role, not setting
Therapists and assistants faced different requirements; SNF vs. ALF made no difference

Takeaway: rethink how productivity is defined and strengthen organizational support.

Coleman, McLaughlin & Floren (2024), AJOT 78(1), 81–89 · Cross-sectional online survey; shows associations, not cause and effect

AOTA 2023 Workforce & Salary Survey

What U.S. OT practitioners reported · 11,567 responses

3.2 / 5

Average self-rated burnout

70%

Have a productivity, efficiency, or caseload expectation

$74,731

Average OT salary (OTA: $46,238)

Considering other career paths (strongly or somewhat)



86.8%

got a job in their desired practice area after graduation

Source: AOTA 2023 Workforce & Salary Survey, Premium dashboard (filtered export)

How OT Organizations Influence Policy

Interviews with representatives of 10 Canadian OT organizations (7 provincial, 3 national)

Reaching out

- Building relationships with policymakers
- Educating OTs to advocate (e.g., election playbooks)
- Position statements and coalitions with other health professions

Reaching in

- Consulting members on advocacy and client needs
- Generating data: surveying OTs and compiling research evidence

Challenges

- Scarce funding and time; 5 had no dedicated policy staff
- OTs often don't respond to policy requests
- Policymakers unaware of OT and slow to respond

Mostly reactive
Responding to government agendas more than shaping them

> *"We're not visible, we're kind of beige … blending into the environment."*
> — Participant, on OT being left out of government rehab documents

Osman et al. (2020), Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 87(5), 354–363 · Interpretive description; semi-structured interviews

We Cannot Solve Every Systems Problem Individually

Systems problems need collective structures

Professional associations

A collective voice to government and payers

Advocacy networks

Coalitions that pool voices across professions and clients

Workplace initiatives

Local change: supervisor support, staffing, productivity standards

Policy engagement

Shaping the laws, payment, and scope that define practice

Social media complements these structures

It doesn't replace direct advocacy or organizational change.

Educate
Explain OT's value

Connect
Find community

Amplify
Spread the message

Every Occupational Therapist Has a Voice

Three ways to participate in digital advocacy



Educate

Explain OT's value to the public.



Amplify

Share credible resources and professional advocacy efforts.



Create

Communicate an issue that matters to you.

Advocate responsibly



Accuracy



Privacy



Professional boundaries



Responsible communication

05

Reclaiming Your Occupational Therapy Identity

Ways to Reengage Without Leaving



Connect

Find community through OTAC, colleagues, mentorship, or professional events.



Contribute

Participate in committees, advocacy, education, or local initiatives.



Communicate

Share knowledge and advocate through conversations, writing, or social media.



Reengagement can take many forms, including changing roles or workplaces.

Your Next 30 Days

Take a few minutes to complete each prompt:



One issue I care about is...



One way I could contribute is...



One action I will take in the next 30 days is...

Almost Leaving, Now Leading

Reclaiming your OT identity **does not require following one particular career path.**

It means finding ways to align your values, voice, and contributions with the profession you want to help shape.



Values



Voice



Contributions

References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2023). *AOTA 2023 workforce and compensation survey* [Premium report]. https://www.aota.org/career/state-of-the-profession/what-do-practitioners-earn

Coleman, A., McLaughlin, E., & Floren, M. (2024). Practitioner burnout and productivity levels in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, part 1: A descriptive quantitative account. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 78*(1), 81–89. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2024.050341

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