

# Member Spotlight

## Wade VanDover, PT

### Part 1: Personal Data

**Practice name, location:** Big Stone Therapies, Inc., Eastern South Dakota; Western Minnesota.

**President and CEO:** Wade VanDover, PT

**Size of practice:** We currently have fifteen communities we practice in, representing a mixture of settings: freestanding private practices, contract practices, contract hospital practices, and contract long-term care practices. We have 170 full- and part-time employees. We provide physical therapy, occupational, and speech therapies in our fifteen community locations.

**Year in practice:** Beginning in July 1990, we have been in practice for almost twenty years.

**Most influential book:** Most influential book that I've read is the Bible. The second most influential book I have ever read is *E-Myth* by Michael E. Gerber. The third most influential book I have ever read is *Servant Leadership* by Robert K. Greenleaf.

**Favorite vacation spot:** My favorite warm weather destination is Cozumel. My favorite outdoor destination is the Missouri River in South Dakota.

**Favorite movie:** My favorite movie series is the *Rocky* series.

**How do you like to spend your free time?** I like to spend my free time by spending outdoor time on the lake or fishing with family; outdoor activities such as canoeing in the boundary waters, or hunting for big game or upland small game or waterfall hunting with my family. I enjoy teaching religious education, as well as coaching youth athletics, specifically fourth- to sixth-grade basketball.

**Like most about your job:** I most like the fact that I get to work with people. I enjoy helping and working with people and am humbled that we are able to serve so many people with the rehabilitation services we provide to the communities we work in.

**Like least about your job:** I least like those things that are very detail oriented. I tend to be a more global general thinker.

**Most important lesson you've learned:** First, the essence of leadership is found in service. Therefore, if one is to be an effective leader they must serve those they are leading. Second important lesson: Hire the best and brightest people, even if they are more knowledgeable, educated, or talented than you are.

### Part 2: Business Philosophy

**Describe your essential business philosophy:** Our essential business philosophy is to provide excellent rehab services in the community, using a hands-on caring approach to families and businesses. Our management style is one of hands-on service leadership and the development of staff in a servant leader model.



From left to right: Wade VanDover, PT, CEO; Paul Treinen, PT, COO; and Roman Taffe, CAO.

#### The best way to keep a competitive edge is:

1. Work hard.
2. Stay connected.
3. Pay attention to what is going on around you.
4. Network with knowledgeable, talented people in the profession.
5. Keep your eyes open for growth opportunities at all times.

**How do you measure success?** Success is measured in several ways: (1) Being able to run a rehab business while meeting the objectives of our business plan. (2) Measuring and acting on the results from satisfaction surveys that our employees, patients, and customers fill out. (3) Hearing the comments we receive from patients and others as we are out and about in our communities; and hearing the comments about how great our therapists are, the care they provided, and how they help change peoples' lives for the better.

**Goals yet to be achieved:** The main professional goal is to get my DPT before the year 2012.

**Best decision made:** To start an independent practice with a great partner, Paul Treinen; then adding Roman Taffe as a partner; and later adding Jason Banks and Mike Vig.

**Worst decision:** We have not made very many poor decisions, but probably the worst decision we made was to start a private practice in a very small town. The demographics did not support the practice, competition was present, and that practice was not successful in the end.

**Toughest decision:** The toughest decision one has to make is when an employee relationship is not working and we have to help mentor/coach the employee along a path that leads to the termination of that person's employment. These are always very tough decisions.

**How do you motivate your employees?** Employees are motivated by numerous individual rewards, but we have found that most clinicians are motivated by the opportunity to provide great patient care, having excellent equipment in place, and continued education opportunities. Incentive programs sometimes can motivate people, but sometimes can disincentivize folks if they are not handled correctly. We also motivate with fun; it is important to have fun in our clinics and fun in the organization.

### **Part 3: Your Practice**

**If you could start over, what would you do differently?** If I could start over, one of the things I would do is I would take more business and marketing training classes early on. The way I would do this is I would get more involved in PPS/APTA sooner and begin learning from the folks who are involved and are successful. I would not run a practice for ten years before I got involved in those activities. I would hire business professionals sooner in the development of a company.

**Describe your competitive advantage:** One of the competitive advantages required is a passion about rehab service. We try very hard to hire folks who subscribe to our brand and to our core values. In doing so, I think our staff who have bought into our brand and core values are going to be able to execute plans and strategies for success in patient care at a higher level than folks who will not buy into our brand, our mission, and core values. This is critical for the success of organizations.

**Describe your marketing strategy and highlight your most successful action:** Our marketing strategy has always been about relationship building. We have a system that focuses on internal and external marketing in keeping six areas of marketing activity going at all times. But the emphasis is always about building relationships, whether it is building relationships with physicians, customers, vendors, or, most important, the patients themselves.

**What unique programs do you offer that set you apart from the competition?** One of the things that sets us apart from the competition is that we provide many varied rehab services. We serve rural America and work very hard to provide many different areas of rehab in the communities we serve, since often long-distance travel is required to get specialty services. We strive hard to meet the needs of each community we serve with clinicians who have the expertise to accomplish this.

**What are the benefits of PPS membership to your practice?** PPS membership has allowed us to develop excellent relationships with successful clinicians all around the country. It has also allowed us to meet and find professionals in the business and rehab world who we are able to hire as consultants and/or develop friendships with that have allowed us to evolve

and grow our practice. PPS puts you in contact with very successful and talented people who are willing to help you develop and grow.

### **Part 4: The Future**

**What worries you about the future of private practice?** Worry is a funny word; I do not actually worry about it, but I do have several levels of concern. First, will we be able to manage the changing fee structures (that are unfair now) and be able to hire the high-quality clinicians we need? Second, what governmental changes will be forced upon us or mandated for us to be able to manage the effective entrepreneurial spirits that most private practice owners have and yet maintain a business structure that has a reasonable bottom line?

**What are you optimistic about?** I am optimistic that there are significant numbers of people with rehab needs that are not being met. I think the passion of private practice owners and the clinicians that we are able to work with gets me excited about new opportunities in the therapy world.

**What are your goals for the next year?** Our goals are to run the business, carry out the business plan, and try to meet our budget that would indicate success for the organization. There are areas that also need to be shored up and worked on, to include increased participation by all of our staff at the state and national levels in the APTA organization, development of new clinic or contract practice sites, and review business systems and processes, especially in the information technology world as we continue to develop electronic records management and meet the information technology needs of the organization.

**What do private practitioners need to do to thrive in today's health care environment?** Private practice owners must take time to work on their business and their business model and the systems within their business, or they will be inundated by change that will eventually be like an avalanche that just covers them up and buries them. It is not enough to just treat patients well these days; one must take time to step back, look through the forest, and see what trees need to be chopped down, what trees need to be planted, and what trees need to be pruned so that your organization can continue to grow, flourish, and prosper. I believe that is true whether you are one clinician in a one-person shop, or if you have fifteen clinics and 170 employees in your organization. Planning is critical, and carrying out the plans that are written down for your organization is critical. The only way to do that is to take time, step back away from the day-to-day fray, and develop your systems for your business. ■

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