



# AFTERwords

A Newsletter from SIERRA TUCSON®

Winter 2007 - 2008

## Changing for Good: Creating a Daily Practice

By Mark Farris Pirtle, D.P.T., CSCS, COMT  
Associate Director of Pain Management Program at Sierra Tucson



Are you looking for something to be thankful for this year? Consider being grateful that we possess a reasonably functioning self-improvement gene! We have a natural, innate drive for healing and survival, and this yearning to *recover* serves our health, happiness, relationships, and even our career.

If you extrapolate to the extreme, it is an enticing ideal: the prospect of unending growth and self-improvement. Move over, Buddha. Right? At least in my experience, the ideal does not quite fit with reality. A lot of the time, I find myself falling short of the particular vision I have for myself. Let's face it, changing for the good is hard. The sucking pull of old patterns is a strong and relentless force. It draws me back down into the quicksand of reflexive habits, and any progress I make is a slow, messy struggle. Alas, if only I could break away and free myself!

How to *self-direct* positive change is more than an interesting topic; for many of us, it is the *raison d'etre* (reason for being) of life itself. In one way or another, I have been focusing my professional energies on the subject of personal change for nearly 20 years. If I have learned anything in this time, it is that for positive change to really take hold in a person's life, a systematic program is required—one that initiates and reinforces new thinking and behaviors. More than that, this routine should be top priority when organizing one's day. The aim of this article is to teach the science behind the change process and give you tools to enact that change: meditation and a daily practice.

Change is the incontrovertible given of life; fighting it is futile. Change is also stressful. The best anyone can do is to flow down the river of change with a skillful hand on the tiller. Navigating this river is uncertain, but knowing its nature and how to steer is the best way to go about it. What is it about change that makes the voyage often feel unpleasant and chaotic? A primary reason is that it is just plain hard to be human. Each of us is a complex living system, living among complex living systems. There is a science of systems, called system dynamics (or theory), which, once understood, will help you navigate. It can provide some insight into the nature of our struggle (the river), and suggest the best (least painful) way to direct change (steer).

Basically, systems theory says that complicated systems are *stable and resistant to change*. That's the bad news; changing for complex systems, like humans, is most often difficult. Bad news aside, systems theory also describes the "butterfly effect," the good news corollary of how complex systems can and do change. This concept suggests that, given enough time, *very small inputs* can dramatically change the system. Hear this: VERY SMALL INPUTS are the opposite of drastic, painful, or difficult. VERY SMALL INPUTS can be interesting, comfortable, and even fun!

If very small inputs are what are required for a person to comfortably change for the good, why are we not all enlightened yet? Again, systems theory provides the answer. When systems function, they produce repeating patterns of behavior. These patterns are called "attractor states." Attractor states are the stable and resistant aspects of systems that I alluded to earlier. Here are some examples of human attractor states: personalities, addictions, beliefs, family dynamics, cultural norms, and even chronic pain. So, practically speaking, evolving to a higher plane is not as easy as wanting it, and then ascending. Systems theory suggests that we are walking, talking attractor states, conditioned to act out in habitual ways. And what does it mean to be conditioned? In essence, it means that there is an element of unconsciousness or ignorance that keeps us stuck.

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# Alumni World Tour



**SOUTHEASTERN FL**



**SAN JOSE, CA**



**INDIANAPOLIS, IN**



**WASHINGTON, DC**



**CHARLOTTE, NC**



**LAS VEGAS, NV**

## 2008 Upcoming Alumni World Tour Dates

can be found at [www.SierraTucson.com](http://www.SierraTucson.com) and in the biweekly Alumni eNews, "Beyond the Miracle."  
Sierra Tucson's alumni and family members are invited to join our Alumni Coordinators at the following events!

*This is not a complete list of events, but it shows alumni events attended by Tim McLeod and/or Patty Reyna.  
Be sure to check our website and eNews for additions and changes.*

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| February 4  | Chicago, IL - A Night of Comedy with Mark Lundholm   |
| February 5  | Vernon Hills, IL - A Night of Comedy with Mark Lundholm  |
| February 6  | St. Charles, IL - A Night of Comedy with Mark Lundholm   |
| February 7  | Detroit, MI - Alumni Support Group   |
| February 19 | New York, NY - Alumni Dinner   |
| February 20 | Newport Beach, CA - Alumni Support Group   |
| February 23 | Denver, CO - Alumni Vision Board Workshop, "Reach Your Summit & Beyond"                                      |
| March 3     | Columbus, OH - A Night of Comedy with Mark Lundholm  |
| March 11    | Scottsdale, AZ - Alumni Support Group  |
| March 12    | Los Angeles, CA - Alumni Support Group   |
| March 19    | Southeastern FL - Alumni Support Group   |
| March 29    | Southern CA - Alumni Workshop, "The Heartbeat of Recovery: Connection, Consistency, Compassion, Celebration" |
| April 7     | Houston, TX - Alumni Dinner  |
| April 8     | Austin, TX - Alumni Dinner   |
| April 9     | Ft. Worth, TX - Alumni Dinner  |
| April 10    | Dallas, TX - Alumni Dinner   |

# ST Staff Moves

Two wonderful Sierra Tucson staff members, who have contributed so much to so many patients over the years, have decided to develop their careers in new areas. The alumni would like to share a note of thanks to Dr. Michael E. Scott and Carol Ross:

*Thank you, Dr. Scott and Carol Ross, for showing up each day to bring the love and support we so needed. Your wisdom and guidance will always be a part of our journey down the path of recovery.*  
~The Sierra Tucson Alumni

Dr. Michael E. Scott has served Sierra Tucson as Medical Director for 13 years. He has announced his retirement to establish a private practice, but he continues working with Sierra Tucson to maintain a connection with our staff and patients. So, he may not be the Medical Director, but his knowledge, presence, and love for those seeking a new way of life remains a part of Sierra Tucson!



**Michael E. Scott, M.D.**



**Carol Ross, M.A., LPC,  
CADAC, ICRC, CSAT**

A Thank You from Therapist Carol Ross:

*I have finally completed my treatment at Sierra Tucson as of November 1, 2007! That is 18 years, to the day, that I began coming to Sierra Tucson as an intern, just looking for some job experience in inpatient treatment. After the internship, I was offered the position of Sexual Recovery Therapist, and I could not resist the opportunity to enjoy even more wonderful experiences here. Then, the interesting process of creating a new program led to my next position as Unit Therapist in the Program for Sexual and Trauma Recovery (PSTR). And finally, the parting gift has been joining the EMDR Department and focusing solely on the sacred experience of sharing EMDR with patients each day. It is the richness of being a part of thousands of patients' journeys, as well as being part of Sierra Tucson's journey over the years, that has lured me to stay this long.*

*I have grown up at ST. With the help of Sierra Tucson patients and staff, from whom I have learned so much, I have come to this transition in my own life. As I continue my own journey in private practice, please know that I have deep respect and admiration for each of you and the memories you have given me. Tim McLeod has asked me to let you know how you can contact me, so I have included this information below.*

*It does work if you work it!*

*With sincerity and gratitude,*

*Carol Ross*  
(E-mail: [CarolRossTherapy@aol.com](mailto:CarolRossTherapy@aol.com))

## "Beyond the Miracle"

Have you signed up to receive Sierra Tucson's Alumni eNews, "Beyond the Miracle"? Don't miss the great encouragement and biweekly event updates from our Alumni Coordinators.

To subscribe, visit [www.SierraTucson.com](http://www.SierraTucson.com) and click on the "Alumni eNews" button!



## Alumni Chat Room



Every Monday at 7:00 p.m. CST, Patty Reyna or Tim McLeod will be hosting an online chat on various recovery topics. Please join us! Request the Alumni Chat password through e-mail ([AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com](mailto:AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com)) and log on Mondays at 7 p.m. CST!  
[www.SierraTucson.com](http://www.SierraTucson.com) (click on "Alumni Resources," then "Chat")

# Giving Back - Twelve-Step Path

Sierra Tucson is creating a "Twelve-Step Path" for our community to use as a place for contemplation and meditation. The path will be lined with personalized pave stones and 12 benches honoring and remembering the special people who have already begun the recovery journey. Alumni and family members have an opportunity to reserve a pave stone with your own personal engraved message, e.g., your name, year of graduation, words of encouragement, things you left behind, etc. Each of the 12 benches will feature one of the Twelve Steps, along with the name of the donor at the bottom.

Your gift will help support the cost of the path and future alumni events, and, most of all, help individuals experience the powerful treatment at Sierra Tucson. The cost of each pave stone is \$150, and one Twelve-Step bench may be purchased for \$2,500.

For pave stones to be installed by S.T.A.R. 21, the cutoff date for ordering is April 1, 2008. Subsequent orders will also be accepted, until the path is complete.

For more information and instructions for ordering, please visit [www.SierraTucsonBricks.com](http://www.SierraTucsonBricks.com) or call 800-537-5579.

Your personalized pave stones and benches will bless all who walk the path with courage, strength, and hope!



**S.T.A.R. 21**  
**Sierra Tucson Alumni Reunion 2008**  
**August 8-10, 2008!**  
**"Reclaiming the Moment"**  
 at the  
**Westward Look Resort**  
**Tucson, Arizona**  
**Saturday Evening Entertainment:**  
**Comedian Mark Lundholm**  
**Registration begins May 1, 2008**  
 Continue to check [www.SierraTucson.com](http://www.SierraTucson.com)  
 for more information!

**Save the date!**  
**Saturday, March 29, 2008**  
**Newport Beach, California**  
**"The Heartbeat of Recovery:**  
**Connection, Consistency,**  
**Compassion, Celebration"**  
 A day filled with workshops, fellowship,  
 and self-growth. Sierra Tucson's own  
**Phil Mitchell will facilitate a workshop**  
**titled "Forgiveness and Beyond."**  
 For info/registration, visit [www.SierraTucson.com](http://www.SierraTucson.com)  
 or call Mary Davis at 949-675-6107.

## Alumni Nights at Sierra Tucson

New in 2008, one Saturday evening each month will be "Alumni Night" at Sierra Tucson! This evening will include dinner and a time for alumni to give back to the current patients by sharing your experience, strength, and hope in a panel format. (Alumni must be discharged at least 30 days before returning for Alumni Night.) You will need to contact Tim McLeod at **866-638-1650** or [AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com](mailto:AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com) to be placed on the list of those planning to attend. Here are the dates for 2008 Alumni Nights:

January 19	April 19	July 19	October 11
February 16	May 17	August 16	November 15
March 15	June 21	September 13	December 13

# Changing for Good: Creating a Daily Practice

(Continued from page 1)

I heard a statistic recently that in any one second, there are about 400 billion bits of information flowing into and circulating around our nervous systems. I have no way of validating this sum, but, accurate or not, it makes an important point: there is a heck of a lot going on inside of us! Like software, this information flows in patterns and, thus, compels and reinforces certain habits of thinking and behaving. What if we could learn to direct these animating commands consciously, rather than be controlled by them? Thankfully, there is a way.

The first step in any self-directed change process is to begin to clearly see what is happening. The best way to do that is to learn to meditate. It is not often looked at this way, but meditation was the first recovery model. Recent data on meditation shows that it helps individuals cope and heal from chronic stress-related physical and psychological problems.<sup>1</sup> I think this is so because it helps reveal our conditioning. There are times when every one of us becomes “unconscious,” and we lose track of what is really happening in the present moment. At such times, our habits start running us; that is the attractor state! When we learn to recognize the attractor state for what it is, we stand a better chance of changing it. In other words, when you are watching the “state,” you are not being the “state.” Get it?

And learning to meditate is easier than you think. There are only five basic instructions, which, incidentally, are shared by all major meditative traditions, be it Christian Mysticism, Jewish Kabbalah, Islamic Sufism, Buddhism, Hinduism... you name it.

The first is to establish yourself as an objective “observer.” Sit and *intend* to watch. Second, pick an object. Meaning, pick something for the *watcher* to watch. In many traditions, the breath is used as a primary object. The observer then watches how the object changes over time and any secondary feelings, thoughts, or sensations that co-arise and pass away in connection with it. Any object can be used. In fact, the choice of which object is not the central point. Picking an object just establishes a context whereby the changing nature of one’s experience can be witnessed. Watching an object eventually leads to a realization: that everything is connected. Sensations, thoughts, behaviors, and emotions are all entangled and influence each other. For example, say one is calmly watching one’s breath and while doing so, a *triggering* thought arises, like “my mother-in-law is coming over for dinner,” followed a nanosecond later by the sensation of tightening in the chest. And if the objective observer is there, it would witness the state of “hen-pecked son-in-law” materialize. It would also see where the subsequent urge to medicate with a drink comes from. This is how careful objective watching illuminates the links between all aspects of one’s experience. (FYI, if such an urge had arisen, it then could be used as the next meditation object.)

The third instruction is to be mindful. Mindfulness has gotten a lot of publicity lately but few people know exactly what it means. Mindfulness means being precisely aware of what is happening moment to moment. Meditating mindfully is a way to enter the mind/body’s internal conversation and consciously intercede in the dialogue. It is postulated that “those who learn to do their own

self-monitoring get well faster because they have more intelligence at work in their systems—more information to make changes that bring about improvement.”<sup>2</sup> In a related study on pain patients, it was shown that the more they knew about their condition, the better their management and outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Because healing relates to change, we can all apply this finding.

The fourth instruction is merely to concentrate. The mind will naturally wander, so when it does, simply bring it back to the primary object. Popular author and meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg believes that the moment one notices that one’s mind has wandered is the pivotal time. She says to not judge yourself. Instead, be gentle, and in the spirit of loving-kindness and compassion, “shepherd” your mind back to its object and simply “begin again.”

The last instruction is to accept whatever arises with equanimity. The word equanimity derives from the Latin roots “aequus,” meaning balanced, and “animus,” referring to our internal state. My meditation teacher Shinzen Young says, “Intentionally creating equanimity with bodily sensations amounts to establishing and maintaining a continuous relaxed state as any and all sensations wash through.” Creating equanimity in the mind works the same way but is applied to your thoughts. The astute reader will see that this last instruction is similar to the first. The difference between them is that establishing an objective observer is like using the rational left side of your mind to watch, while being equanimous lets the right, emotional side of your brain set the tone of loving acceptance. It’s a great balance.

Now that you know how to meditate, you need a daily practice that allows the benefits of meditation to unfold over time. Remember, “very small inputs” are the way to go, and creating a daily practice is simple and fun. Here’s what I do. Every day I wake up and read something spiritual. I choose authors who are way smarter and more highly realized than I am. Once I get their ideas in my mind, then I have a sit. I meditate in front of an altar that is situated in a serene spot in my house. It is decorated with items that are sacred and meaningful to me: 2.2 billion-year-old rocks, feathers, pictures, WWII relics, and more. In essence, the altar sanctifies me and the space. Next, when I’m done meditating, I say some prayers and then off I go. That simple practice sets the tone for the rest of my day, positively influencing my mind and my heart. If “one day at a time” is your mantra, this is a way for you to really live it.

Very small actions, like a daily meditation practice, done over time will completely and dramatically change your life. If you’re struggling and feel stuck, this method can help you break free. Accomplished meditation teachers can be found all over the web, but I find these resources especially helpful: [www.dharma.org](http://www.dharma.org) and [www.shinzen.org](http://www.shinzen.org). Here’s wishing you the blessings of health, happiness, and positive change.

~By Mark Farris Pirtle, D.P.T., CSCS, COMT

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Grossman et al (July 2003), Mindfulness meta-analysis.

<sup>2</sup> C. Pert (1997), *Molecules of emotion*, Scribner.

<sup>3</sup> Moseley (2003), G. L., P. W. Hodges, and M. K. Nicholas, A randomized controlled trial of intensive neurophysiology education in chronic low back pain, *Clin J Pain*.



# Alumni Support Groups

## Los Angeles, CA

*This meeting is open to anyone who has gone through treatment!*

When: 2nd & 4th Wednesday each month  
Time: 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Place: 1901 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 500  
Century City, CA 90067 (310-201-0005)

Contact: Bryan F. 310-201-0005  
Stefani U. 310-458-3768

## Scottsdale, AZ

When: 2nd & 4th Tuesday each month  
Time: 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Place: Valley Presbyterian Church  
6947 E. McDonald Drive  
Paradise Valley, AZ 85253  
(480-991-4267)

Contact: Robby C. 602-799-8732  
(robert@orchidsound.com)

## Denver, CO

When: Once each month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Nancy S. 303-527-1830  
(n\_specian@hotmail.com)

Tom N. 303-785-2829  
(ptcip@earthlink.net)

## Marin County/San Francisco, CA

When: 2nd Thursday each month  
Time: 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Place: The Mayflower Center  
523 4th Street, Suite 100  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
(415-257-4210)

Contact: Brian C. 415-850-1840  
(sugfoot@aol.com)

## Newport Beach, CA

When: 3rd Wednesday each month  
Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: 3404 Via Lido Drive  
Newport Beach, CA 92663

Contact: Jana T. 949-680-5882  
Evan S. 949-275-3443

## Atlanta, GA

When: 3rd Tuesday each month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Richard R. 404-518-1220  
(richard@rossboy.com)

## Washington, DC

When: 1st Sunday every other month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Susan B. 202-686-9221  
(slbaes@aol.com)

## Southeastern FL

When: 3rd Sunday each month  
Time: 6:00 p.m.

(Please inquire about location.)  
Contact: Glen K. 561-543-0364  
(kukorone02@yahoo.com)

Tim A. 561-329-1445  
(talston1956@aol.com)

## Kansas City, MO

When: Once each month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Lana E. 816-561-4346  
(qponnie@sbcglobal.net)

## Chicago, IL

When: Once a month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Ross S. 847-989-0747  
(ross.samotny@gmail.com)  
Jeff B.  
(jeffbelmonti@yahoo.com)

## Detroit, MI

When: 1st Thursday each month  
Time: 6:00 p.m.

Place: Farmington Hills Library  
32737 West 12 Mile Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48334  
Contact: Gail P. 248-891-3304

## Columbus, OH

When: 3rd Wednesday each month  
(Please inquire about location and time.)

Contact: JoCarol R. 614-353-5604  
(reinerjo@aol.com)

## Charlotte, NC

When: 2nd Monday each month  
Time: 6:30 p.m.

Place: St. John's Episcopal Church  
1623 Carmel Road  
Charlotte, NC 28226

Dinner to follow meeting.  
Contact: Scott G. 704-560-2130  
(scottgnc@yahoo.com)

## Syracuse, NY

When: 1st Monday each month  
Time: 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Place: Manlius Pebble Hill School  
5300 Jamesville Road  
Dewitt, NY 13214

Contact: David C. 315-278-5293  
(david.cortese@hotmail.com)  
Adrienne M. 315-247-5004  
(aeichmyl@mymail.syr.edu)

## Philadelphia, PA

When: 2nd Thursday each month  
(Please inquire about dates,  
location, and time.)

Contact: Debbie R. 610-945-4837  
(debra.beth@yahoo.com)  
Bob R. 610-513-6090  
(brbball@aol.com)

# From the Editor

By Tim McLeod, Senior Alumni Coordinator



Tim McLeod, Senior Alumni Coordinator  
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Patty Reyna, Alumni Coordinator  
Toll-free Telephone: 888-535-8214  
E-mail: [PREyna@SierraTucson.com](mailto:PREyna@SierraTucson.com)



Hello, my Friend,

As always, I hope you are doing well and your path of well-being is filled with all the love and support you deserve.

Sierra Tucson's new lodge, "Dancing Sun," is now open! It is nestled next to our other two lodges, Morning Star and Crescent Moon. As you can see in the photos, the building is beautiful. It houses patient rooms, staff offices, and group rooms. Plan to attend S.T.A.R. 21, and you can take a peek at "Dancing Sun!"

We want to thank those of you who have joined Patty and me in the Alumni Chat Room on Monday nights. We have had some interesting discussions, and it has been a surprise each week to see who decides to drop in and say hello. So, mark your calendars for Monday nights—and if you need the password, please e-mail Patty or me.

It has been wonderful having Alumni Coordinator Patty Reyna helping me out. As you know, she joined Alumni Services six months ago, and she has been such a gift to our vision of supporting you. Patty has a plan to create a database of alumni contacts, both patient and family members. The plan is that no matter where you are in the world—small town, big city, Seattle to Singapore—if we have alumni willing to be contacted, we will help you make the connections that count! So, to be a part of the Sierra Tucson Alumni Networking database, you will need to e-mail Patty the following information:

- Full Name (we will only use your first name and last initial)
- City, state, and country you live in
- When you attended Sierra Tucson
- Were you a patient or family member?
- What issues brought you to treatment?
- Contact information: e-mail address and phone number



We will begin to compile a list. Then, if you are traveling and want to find a local meeting or have a cup of coffee with alumni, or maybe your city doesn't have an alumni group and you would like to know if there are others out there, this list will let us put you in touch with those alumni.

I was thinking the other day that they should change the name of Sierra Tucson to *University of Sierra Tucson* (U.S.T. for short),

"A School of Transformation." Like going to college, you had to do a lot of writing, you came away with more knowledge and friends, and you are more equipped to handle the world. The English dictionary says the word "transformation" means a complete change, usually toward something with an improved appearance or usefulness. I would say that fits; you looked better the day you discharged than the day you walked in. Also, you have an

improved "usefulness." By the knowledge you gained, you have learned ways to handle life on life's terms, and you are a better friend, spouse, employee, employer, and parent. You have learned that giving back to society can help you as much as it helps someone else. But, you know what? This all hinges on what you did with your self-care degree when you walked out the door of U.S.T. Did you make a daily choice to use what you learned to walk a new path, or did you go back to a path that was familiar—a path you have walked many times before? If you chose to use your self-care degree, you found that you wanted more, and maybe you decided to do some graduate work. You might have attended another school for a period of time to find more ways to support your new degree; you may attend several workshops throughout the year; you might attend meetings regularly with others who have received their self-care degree; and most of you find time to spend with your Guidance Counselor!

You need to know that if you have set down your self-care degree and allowed it to get covered with dust, your fellow alumni, recovery friends, and professional resources are always willing to support you in knocking off the dust.

Huge blessings,  
  
Tim McLeod

*"Our mission is simple:  
encourage the struggling,  
celebrate the miracles,  
and always bring the love."*

Address correspondence to: Alumni Coordinator  
SIERRA TUCSON  
39580 S. Lago del Oro Parkway  
Tucson, AZ 85739 U.S.A.

**S.T.A.R.R.T.**  
39580 S. Lago del Oro Parkway  
Tucson, AZ 85739

Address Service Requested



Recipe by  
Chef Kevin A. Luft

*"With the cold weather upon us, here is an easy recipe  
that is filling, delicious, and healthy for you!"*  
~ Chef "K"



1 Tblsp. extra virgin olive oil  
1 green pepper, chopped  
3 ribs celery, chopped  
1 onion, chopped  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes (not drained)  
1 28-oz. can kidney beans (drained)  
8 oz. firm tofu, cubed  
2 Tblsp. cider vinegar  
1/4 tsp. chili powder  
1 Tblsp. fresh parsley, chopped  
1 tsp. sea salt  
1 pinch Mexican oregano  
1 pinch fresh cracked pepper  
1 cup grated pepperjack cheese

Saute green pepper, celery, onion, and garlic.  
Do not brown. Remove and set aside.  
Saute tofu until golden (you may need to add  
a little more oil). Combine all ingredients in a pot.  
Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 hour.  
Cook uncovered for 30 minutes.  
Serve with additional grated cheese.

Yield 6 servings  
1/2 cup = 1 Vegetable, 1 Starch, 1 Protein