

Turning a license into a legacy

Step off the sidelines and become a leader



By Peter J. Lee

I love good stories, and pharmacy school provides literally hundreds of them. Although I may not recall the chemical structure of Levaquin (levofloxacin—Ortho-

McNeil), I do remember the dramatic story about a patient who survived a gruesome automobile accident. I feel certain that you, too, recall pharmacy experiences that made you laugh and cry. However, few truly understand the extent to which stories guide their personal and professional future by teaching them basic principles of practical daily living.

During the first difficult months of pharmacy school at the University of Southern California (USC) School of Pharmacy, I was rather downcast and even outright frustrated over feeling that pharmacists must continually prove their abilities and worth to other health care professionals. The mantra of “lick, stick, count, and pour” tattooed across the foreheads of many pharmacists did not help either. So how did I respond? I ran to the library and dove into my textbooks. I decided to block out the vision of my bleak future and instead focus on the thing that brought me the most satisfaction: getting good grades.

Then, for some mysterious reason—maybe even divine—I drove 6 hours alone to attend APhA2001 in San Francisco. As I look back, I still have no clue as to why I went to the Annual Meeting, but I realize that what occurred there transformed my life. Over 3 days, I met student leaders from across the country and, more importantly, visionary pharmacists passionately driven to radically reshape today’s health care world. While in San Francisco, I committed to stop whining and start winning as an outstanding pharmacy professional. So what did I do when I returned to USC? I ran for APhA–ASP chapter president and won! So began the story of a future with endless possibilities.

Numerous ways to get involved

The pharmacy profession continues to establish itself as a relationship-centered profession whose members provide health care to individual patients and to communities. For many years now, APhA–ASP has provided opportunities for students to get involved in a variety of enriching and practical

experiences that serve schools and communities. However, many student pharmacists still suffer from “WIFM syndrome,” a chronic condition that causes them to ask, “What’s in it for me?” Students with this illness fail to realize that professionals who serve from the heart turn ordinary jobs into extraordinary professions. Providing service to the community and profession as a whole empowers student pharmacists to regain a sense of community and purpose for their extensive education. Through volunteering, students learn new skills, gain a strong sense of self-worth and pride, and unleash their potential for managerial and leadership roles.

Selfless participation in health fairs and homeless health outreach programs links students to the wider community and exposes them to people and situations outside their everyday environment. Such interactions imprint vivid images on the hearts of aspiring pharmacists and helps shape them into well-rounded individuals. If this explosion of emotion and sacrifice has not yet boomed at your school chapter, then you may hold the keys that will unlock the door to a promising future.

As you read this article, I challenge you to step off the sidelines and compete for a position of leadership within a pharmacy association. Your job as a leader is not complete until the passion of your life rekindles the hearts of those around you. As the late President Harry S. Truman said, “A leader is a person who has the ability to get others to do what they don’t want to do, and like it.”

The following are some ideas that inspired USC chapter members to serve from the heart and encouraged them to remain involved in APhA and the profession of pharmacy.

Communicate your vision with conviction

People easily empathize with the emotions of a person who speaks with true conviction. My sincere convictions in the value of membership in professional organizations have driven me to communicate my vision to members. I use this simple and easy-to-remember acronym enthusiastically to explain the benefits of APhA membership:

A—Access/Awareness. APhA provides access to new opportunities for involvement to student pharmacists and working pharmacists. Active membership will open up previously hidden doors to cutting-edge practices and elements so that members may discover areas of matching talents and interests.

P—Purpose/Passion. As new prospects open up for active members, apathy will begin to transform into passion. Pharmacy will grow from an isolated job into a worthy profession that demands a high standard of sacrifice and vision. This renewed sense of professional and personal meaning allows the leaders of tomorrow to lead a purpose-driven life.

H—Helpers/Supporters. Students energized by a new understanding of fulfillment and experience of zeal also get to network through APhA, which connects them to mentors and fellow practitioners who share the same dreams. These advisers can provide students encouragement and guidance to effectively work out this newfound vision.

A—Achieve Success. With the support of mentors and colleagues, students can achieve success in ways they never even imagined, such as gaining access to higher compensation, better career opportunities, or simply increased satisfaction from leading one's life in such a way that you make a difference in the lives of patients. Author John Maxwell clearly articulated my concept of success when he proclaimed, "Success is: Knowing your purpose in life. Growing to reach your maximum potential. Sowing seeds that benefit others."

Create an environment of excellence

After reviewing the accomplishments of USC's APhA-ASP chapter for the past years, I gladly informed the APhA-ASP Executive Committee about the countless and dedicated deeds undertaken by the school's students. As a result of this assessment, my fellow students and I accepted the sensible decision to faithfully carry on the tradition of excellence by rewarding and encouraging the board members who served well beyond the call of duty. Throughout the year, board members who demonstrated excellence have been privately thanked and publicly acknowledged. A leader who inspires his or her colleagues must first value them, and then praise them by praising their invaluable efforts and rewarding them generously for outstanding performances.

Without the complementary talents of motivated individuals, a leader's vision will crumble. An inspiring leader thus seeks to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. Fred Smith, a business executive from Dallas, wrote in the fall 1996 *Leadership Journal* that several traits that mark someone as capable of leading: leadership in the past, the capacity to create or catch vision, practical ideas, a willingness to take responsibility, mental toughness, peer respect, and a quality that makes people listen to them.

A leader has the responsibility to observe and discover the potential and talents of his or her associates and to provide them with direction so that they may exercise their gifts and

begin to appreciate themselves as vital members of a diverse team.

Break out of the comfort zone

A title is short-lived, but a testimony lasts forever. I hope this article challenged you to add a bit of creativity and adventure into your personal and professional stories as they unfold before you. If you are content with the title PharmD and never seek to discover the uncharted secrets of your soul by taking risks and investing your talents for a greater cause that satisfies and surpasses your imagination, you will never break out of your comfort zones and overcome selfishness in order to make a significant difference in the profession.

In the near future, I look forward to hearing the great stories of your passion for patients and the amazing advancements made in the pharmacy world because you chose to turn your license into a legacy.

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