VIEWPOINTS

Tuesdays with Mentors: An ALFP Experience

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Mentoring, considered the primary method by which adults gain new knowledge and skills, has been recognized as a significant influence in faculty development. Although many pharmacy organizations are beginning to realize the importance of mentoring leaders or preparing individuals to become leaders, this seems to occur less often in academia. What is usually witnessed in academia is the “take action and cross your fingers” approach – throwing individuals into academic leadership positions and then waiting to see if they sink, float, or (miraculously) swim. To help foster leadership in academic pharmacy, AACP established the Academic Leadership Fellowship Program (ALFP), with the first class of ALFP Fellows graduating in 2005. I entered the ALFP in July 2007, during my first year as Department Head of Pharmacy Practice and Science at The University of Arizona (UA). The ALFP experience was extremely valuable to my leadership development, and this Viewpoint advocates that many emerging pharmacy faculty leaders may also benefit from structured leadership mentoring. Furthermore, the age-old tradition of placing individuals in academic leadership positions with little to no support should be abandoned, and a new template of vigorous preparation and support, where mentoring is the norm rather than the exception, should be implemented. With increased demand for qualified leaders and an escalation in the volume of leadership positions available, this leadership paradigm recommendation comes at a critical time in academic pharmacy.

As part of the ALFP program, I selected 3 mentors at the UA and participated in a leadership-centered curriculum developed in partnership with these individuals. Each mentor’s curriculum was delivered in his/her own distinctive manner, and the blended mentoring facilitated a transformational experience - one that expanded my vision, perception, and interpretation of leadership. Each mentor met with me separately—although ironically, most mentoring sessions took place on *Tuesdays*. Here I

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share the top 10 leadership lessons reviewed during my ALFP experience with my 3 institutional mentors:

Lesson 1. Be courageous. According to Ambrose Redmoon, “courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.”¹ Leading and being an agent of change requires significant courage in the face of decisions that may engender fear. Actions of a courageous leader include setting high standards and goals that others may perceive as unachievable. Sometimes the risk of failure may discourage one from making the attempt, and the “safe” choice prevails; however, this choice prevents growth and stifles potential. A courageous leader must be willing to go out on a limb and take chances that may involve *not being safe* to accomplish goals. Also, courageous leaders must remain steady in the wake of disappointment, while taking responsibility for their actions and holding others to these same standards.

Lesson 2. Develop a vision and translate this vision into reality. Vision is seeing a future state with the mind’s eye.² A leader’s vision should be clear, consistent, simple, memorable, transformative, and communicated often. It should be timeless and inspirational, as well as provide the foundation for transparent decision-making. It has been stated that “vision without action is a dream; action without vision is simply passing the time; and action with vision is making a positive difference”.^{2(p70)} Thus, great leaders have vision and translate that vision into action and positive results. There should be a direct correlation between a leader’s vision and the organization’s brand, that is, the image, symbol, or philosophy by which an organization such as a college or school of pharmacy is known (identified by) and which reflects the organization’s fundamental values. The challenges of establishing a vision for any organization lie in: (a) creating a single vision out of the multiplicity of visions held by numerous individuals/groups within the organization³; (b) effectively communicating that single vision; and (c) engaging support.

Lesson 3. Communication is key. Persuasive communication, defined as communication that is compelling in directing change or altering another person’s beliefs, attitudes, and ultimately, behaviors, is fundamental to effective leadership. Four major factors determine the

effectiveness of persuasive communication: (1) the source of the message (is it credible?); (2) the believability of the message; (3) the environment in which the message is communicated, for example, an office, a conference room, or a noisy room full of distractions; and (4) comprehension and retention of the message.⁴ Leaders should be careful not to underestimate the power of messages heard through informal means of communication, such as those things heard through the “grapevine.” Although the content validity of the “grapevine” may be questionable at times, it is important to recognize the existence of such routes of communication and the major “grapevine” communicators. When the grapevine and its mechanisms have been identified, a leader may then plan how to minimize, optimize, and/or utilize this venue to his/her favor.

Lesson 4. Be respectful of yourself and others. Respect and trust are the foundation of relationship building and great leadership. A leader who does not respect his/her faculty or staff members and, in turn, cannot trust those individuals to work independently and in an efficacious manner will suppress empowerment and minimize productivity.⁵ As a result, productivity decreases, creativity is stifled, and loyalty falters. However, leaders who respect their workforces will inspire them, and this will facilitate a nurturing environment. Additionally, great leaders must be willing to acknowledge and consider differences of opinion, respect the enrichment diversity brings to an organization, and employ strategies that incorporate differing perspectives while finding common ground, negotiating “win-win” plans, and fostering appealing outcomes. Furthermore, and although it may be challenging, great leaders should not withhold respect when they do not receive it in turn, recognizing that they must extend courtesy and respect to adversaries as well as to allies.

A critical, but perhaps neglected aspect of respect is respecting oneself. Leaders have lives outside of their work, and often the demands of work and non-work domains may conflict. When leaders are unable to find balance between these domains, sacrificing one domain (home) for the sake of another (work/career), they place themselves in danger of burnout and discontentment. As Friedman argues, being a leader does not mean you stop being a person with aspirations and commitments outside of the leadership role.³ Instead, the concept of “total leadership” should be practiced wherein an individual is “real, whole, and innovative,” and finds ways to integrate and nurture all domains of life and self.³

Lesson 5. Operate as a transcendent leader. Transcendent leaders are competent, active, effective, inspiring, influential, and exercise a “blend of personal

humility and professional will.”⁶ They recognize their personal strengths and challenges, and are masters of the use of compensatory methods to offset personal weaknesses. Transcendent leaders surround themselves with smart, competent people, and routinely credit others for success and blame themselves for poor performance. They also refuse to tolerate mediocrity and are overwhelmingly committed to achieving excellence. A key characteristic of these leaders is that they attend to people first and strategy second. They get the right people on the bus (analogous to the organization) and the wrong people off, and with their vision clearly explicated, they take the bus to a better destination. In order to identify and recruit the “right” people, transcendent leaders are skillful at negotiating and networking.⁶

Lesson 6. Understand and apply the art of negotiating. To persuade people to follow, leaders must appeal to their constituents’ interests, communicate effectively, and sell their vision — all of which are part of successful negotiating.⁷ In order to be an effective negotiator, you must know not only what *you* want but also what the *other party* wants, the possible positions and reactions of stakeholders, and what you are willing to settle for, if necessary. Leaders should also explore and analyze solutions other than those proposed at the initiation of negotiation. Only through preparation, presentation, appeal, and dialogue can “win-win” deals be obtained.

Lesson 7. Effective leaders network. Simply put, we need others in order to succeed. Although networking is a very important leadership skill, many people *do not like* to network. Part of the discomfort may be attributed to concern over how they will be perceived by others. Yet, the fact of the matter is that all effective leaders need to build solid networks, both internally and externally. As pharmacists and academicians, we should not only develop strong networks within pharmacy practice and academic pharmacy, but reach outside our pharmacy spheres to form connections with other professions and disciplines. Such internal and external networks are utilized to get work done effectively, and can provide a support system for development and referrals that lead to further achievements. Properly used, networks expand one’s “circle of influence” and enhance a leader’s ability to be effective and to affect change.

Lesson 8. Empower others. Empowerment—the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes—is underutilized. To empower another is not to surrender one’s own power. Effective leaders empower through the removal of barriers so that others may act with authority in the interests of the

organization. They empower others to increase internal and external organizational satisfaction, to meet the growing needs of the organization, and to accomplish objectives related to achieving their vision. As a result of empowerment, and the trust and respect symbolized in the act of empowerment, individuals experience greater productivity, creativity, and loyalty.

Lesson 9. Produce, achieve, and market the “Wow!” “Wow!” results are defined simply as achievements so great that they make people say “Wow!” Achieving “Wow” results distinguishes leaders who are good from leaders who are considered great. Although what is considered a “Wow” moment may change over time, the impact of such a moment resonates long after the passing of the leader responsible, and is most clearly demonstrated by the sustained success of the organization or the “Wow” products or services. Effective leaders often think about the next step, and in considering the next step, they acknowledge that what was successful in the past may not necessarily work as well in the future. Thus, they recognize the need for evolving methods and will often create dynamic new strategies to address and achieve objectives, while at the same time marketing “WOW” accomplishments to promote and attract interest and investment in their ideas and organization. Without a doubt, great leaders are pioneers, and their innovative thinking often leads to “Wow!”

Lesson 10. Pay it forward. The final lesson involves “paying it forward” by giving back. Leaders do not become leaders without the support, dedication, and work of others. Great leaders acknowledge these contributions by giving back, not only materially but through symbolic and emotional expressions. Great leaders unlock potential by pausing to affirm people. They promote their belief in faculty and staff members so well that these individuals begin to recognize their own potential, value, and power. The best way any leader can “pay it forward” is to promote change that will improve the lives of individuals both within and outside of the organization.

Through their courage and dedication, great leaders invoke transformational changes by setting directions, demonstrating personal character, obtaining and mobilizing commitment and resources, role modeling, empowering, and engendering excellence. As with the leaders who mentored me, I enjoy serving, being part of a greater whole, and impacting and influencing others to accomplish a shared vision. In July 2008, I officially graduated from the ALFP and although the Tuesday mentoring meetings do not occur as frequently as they once did, the teaching, learning, and relationships continue.

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