LETTERS

In-House Mentorship

To the Editor. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy established a year-long leadership program, the Academic Leadership Fellows Program (ALFP), in 2004.¹ While there are many valuable features of the ALFP that assist fellows in learning the craft of leadership, the home institution's mentorship has a central role in the ALFP and has been shown to be an effective path in assisting the fellows to develop many leadership skills.² At my institution, my dean expanded the home institution's mentorship and organized an in-house, 60-minute, one-on-one mentorship meeting with 9 leaders from our university and 1 leader from a well-established health system.

I used the 4 frames of leaderships that I learned from the ALFP session I (ie, structural, human resource, political, and symbolic)³ in order to direct my discussions with each leader. My discussions with the above leaders resulted in my learning of their leadership approaches, how they established mutual respect among their teams, delegating tasks, management, essential elements of leadership, challenges they have faced, steps they have successfully taken to meet challenges, and paths they have used to lead a major change at their unit. I also learned how they valued a climate of trust to improve collaboration and communication, how they established time management skills to achieve a work-life balance, and how they built a supportive and collaborative environment. Our discussions often triggered self-reflection on past achievements and what lessons they learned from any mistakes they made.

The in-house mentorship training expanded on the leadership strategies that I had learned from my dean and assisted me in enriching my leadership abilities across multiple levels. First, it provided an opportunity for me to know them on a more personal level, including how each avoided "ego-trap" management in their daily interactions with their teams. Second, our meeting provided the opportunity for more personal discussions which often led to firsthand lessons and stories from their failures and successes. Third, each leader had a unique set of leadership skills, showing me there was no "one-size-fits-all" leadership style. Fourth, an effective communication played an instrumental role in building a mutual trust between them and their teams. Fifth, the issues that kept them up at night often reflected the major challenges they faced. The most significant outcome of this training was that every leader I met extended their hand to be available should I seek further input about the concept of leadership.

In my discussions with the above leaders, the following principles were imperative and may prove useful to other fellows:

Schedule early. Administrators' schedules often fill up quickly; thus, schedule your meetings at the beginning of the ALFP. Try to spread the scheduled meetings over the first 6 months.

Be patient. Many administrators are on "24/7 call." Do not become disappointed if a scheduled time or date changes. Be persistent, however, and ask the administrator's assistant to find another time on the schedule.

Give a heads-up. A few days prior to each meeting, send the administrator a copy of the most recently published ALFP brochure or provide brief highlights about the program.

Break the ice. Open your discussion by explaining the nature of the ALFP and why you believe the ALFP will benefit your personal and professional goals.

Be succinct and clear. Generate a list of topics that you would like to discuss and explore and explain the intent of each topic in your meetings. The clearer your topics are the more productive your discussion will be.

Be confidential. Honesty is an essential skill of leadership, and they will readily share their failures and frustrations with you. Learn from their lessons and keep what they share confidential.

Follow up. A few days after your meeting, follow up with a thank you note.

The entire mentorship process has proven to be of immense benefit to me as these university leaders shared a range of inventive approaches that were not only unique to their positions but also applicable to my learning of leadership skills. Do not miss this unique opportunity. They all have inspiring stories to tell and are eager to share their challenges and success stories with you. They are the fruitful trees in your backyard that have expanded their roots beyond your home. All you need to do is to extend your hand and pick the fruits.

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