Director's Forum

Recommendations for Smooth Career Transitions in Pharmacy Leadership

Elaine R. Mebel, PharmD, MS*; Melissa Ortega, PharmD, MS†; Lindsay R. Massey, PharmD, MS‡;
Kelly Martin, PharmD, MS, BCPS§; Christina Martin, PharmD, MS¶; and Scott Mark, PharmD, MS, MEd, MPH,
MBA, FACHE, FASHP, FABC**

The *Director's Forum* is designed to guide pharmacy leaders in establishing patient-centered services in hospitals and health systems. This article focuses on the process of preparing leaders for future career transitions. Both new and seasoned leaders are confronted with the tasks of overcoming environmental issues, ensuring alignment in all directions during the first 90 days, and implementing change. By gaining a thorough understanding of the expectations during the transition phase, the new pharmacy leader will ensure future successes that maximize department initiatives and support the rapidly changing health care environment.

Career transitions span all industries and impact leaders at all levels. The actions that a new leader performs during the first 90 days of his or her position often impact long-term success. Take a moment and think back to a recent job transition. How did it occur? If given the opportunity to repeat the transition period, what would you have done differently? What would have remained the same? Anyone experiencing a career transition may encounter feelings of angst, confusion, or uncertainty. This process of becoming disoriented and reoriented during the first 90 days is a natural occurrence within this transition period.¹ The new leader will experience challenges that he or she has not necessarily prepared for. To succeed in this transition phase, new leaders need to view this time as an opportunity to learn about the new position and organization and to work at creating an alignment in goals and actions throughout the organization.

DEFINING THE FIRST 90 DAYS

A career transition period can be broken up into a series of milestones, as described in Watkins' *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*.² The *pre-selection phase* is when a leader learns he or she is being considered for a position. In the *pre-entry phase*, before the new leader actually

assumes the responsibilities of the position, he or she has time to recognize and acknowledge the new opportunities and challenges that come along with this new position. The leader must evaluate past experiences and acquired skills in light of this new chapter in his/her career. The leader can prepare for the transition by researching the new organization or new division. Taking the time to do thorough research during this initial phase¹ may translate into later successes for the leader and organization.³ The leader also mentally prepares for assuming new roles and responsibilities. The third and final phase of the transition period is the *taking charge phase* where the leader works to achieve alignment within the respective teams. Once the leader crosses the 90-day mark, his or her key priority is to produce results.²

New leaders and leaders new to an organization are faced with workplace environmental issues. Cultural, generational, and gender issues in the workplace can add layers to an already complicated transition period. The new leader must quickly learn and acclimate to the culture of a new organization. Achieving alignment across organizational architecture – structure, strategy, systems, skills, and culture² – can give the new leader the basis for moving forward to implement change.

*Manager, Clinical Services, Department of Pharmacy, The Western Pennsylvania Hospital, West Penn Allegheny Health System, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; †Operations Manager, Acute Pharmacy Services, Tufts Medical Center, Boston, Massachusetts; ‡Pharmacy Operations Manager, Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics, Kansas City, Missouri; §Manager, Inpatient Pharmacy Services, Virginia Commonwealth University Health System, Richmond, Virginia; ¶Pharmacy Sterile Products Manager, Reading Hospital, Reading Health System, Reading, Pennsylvania; **Director, Huron Consulting Group, Chicago, Illinois.

The need for future pharmacy leaders is well known, and a greater number of pharmacists are now pursuing leadership training.⁴ In addition, an increasing number of pharmacy directors are recruiting new leaders to join their management teams. The purpose of this article is to provide pharmacy leaders with a fresh perspective to ensure successful future career transitions. The content is targeted to new leaders, as well as directors who are transitioning a new leader into their department. The aims of this article are to (1) describe the workplace environmental issues that are present during a career transition, (2) discuss ways to ensure alignment in all directions during a career transition, and (3) analyze and apply concepts described in contemporary change management literature.

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

The transition into a new position within a department of pharmacy presents both challenges and opportunities for any leader. A leader must understand that he or she is entering an organization with a deep-rooted culture and operations that have developed over time; this understanding applies to both new practitioners and seasoned practitioners entering new leadership roles. The individual must take care to enter the new work setting, or even the same setting in a new role, with an open mind and curious attitude about all departmental and health system practices. The processes of onboarding, training, and development can guide a leader in his or her transition, but the new leader must take ownership of the journey to become an integral and effective part of the department.

Department Culture

When assuming a position at a new institution, leaders are likely to encounter a department culture that is very different from previous institution(s). The position may be at an institution of a different size or an institution that is in a different region of the country. Recognizing and identifying the cultural differences at the new institution is a major part of a leader's transition period. How the leader operates in the new culture will determine future success.

During the first 90 days, the new leader should spend time with staff in all areas of the department. The new leader will be viewed as an outsider when coming into an organization. The trust of the staff and fellow leadership team must be gained. Thoughtful questions can discern the functionality and operations of the department. Frequent communication and following through on tasks (also known as "quick wins") will assist the leader in earning the team's trust. Once the

leader has been working with the new team, he or she can use team-building and trust-building exercises with direct reports.

In addition to learning about the culture of the department and staff, the new leader must be aware of the culture of the institution's leadership team. What are the dynamics of the leadership team? How are decisions made? When first attending leadership team meetings, the leader should spend time engaging in active listening and contributing to team discussions. Strong dissenting opinions should not be voiced until the new leader has an understanding of the institution's priorities and procedures.

Generational Diversity

Within the workplace, a leader is likely to have direct reports from four different generations: Veterans (born 1920-1946), Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), and Generation Y (born after 1981). Generational differences within the team may present challenges to effective communication. However, understanding the influences, values, job assets, and liabilities of these four generations will assist the new leader in motivating and rewarding their team members (Table 1).⁵

Increasingly, the new leader may be a Generation X or Generation Y. Pharmacy residents trained in health system pharmacy administration residency programs are being hired into pharmacy leadership positions. Although these Generation Y leaders may have relatively fewer years of experience, they possess job assets for performing successfully in times of chaos and have the tenacity to lead a team through the turbulent health care environment. Members of the department from others generations may feel threatened by the Generation Y leader; this is not unusual. Regardless of the leader's age, the new leader should recognize that he or she will need to use various approaches that appeal to different age groups to connect with staff from multiple generations.

Gender in the Workplace

Many of today's contemporary pharmacy departments have an essentially equal ratio of male and female pharmacists. Not only has the number of people seeking pharmacy as a profession grown over the last few decades, but the number of women seeking careers in pharmacy has also continued to grow. Highlighting the egalitarian characteristics of the profession, recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data illustrate pharmacists' earnings in 2011. The median weekly earning was \$1,898 for female pharmacists and \$1,998 for male

Table 1. Common generational characteristics⁵

	Veteran Generation	Boomer Generation	Generation X	Generation Y
Common influences	The Depression, the New Deal, Pearl Harbor, World War II, D-Day, the Korean War	Cold War, economic prosperity, suburbia, civil rights, assassinations, Vietnam War, Woodstock, moon-landing	Women's liberation, end of Cold War, energy crisis, personal computers, terrorism, MTV, divorce, AIDS/drugs	Clinton-Lewinsky, technology, violence, drugs, terrorism, over-planned lives
Values	Sacrifice, hard work, conformity, duty, loyalty	Optimism, competition, involvement, personal growth, cares deeply what others think	Global thinking, fun, informality, self-reliance, diversity, peer focus	Flexibility, skills, opportunity, sociability, morality, diversity, street smarts
Job assets	Stable, loyal, thorough, hard-working, detail-oriented	Driven, relationship-building, service-oriented, willing to go the extra mile	Adaptable, independent, creative, techno-literate	Multitasking, techno savvy, tenacity, comfortable with chaos
Job liabilities	Uncomfortable with conflict, uncomfortable with technology, reluctant and uncomfortable with change	Overly introspective, overly sensitive, process is often ahead of the result, little balance between hard and soft skills	Cynical, impatient with the process, inexperienced, poor soft skills at work, intolerance for bureaucracy	Inexperienced, intolerance for bureaucracy, need for supervision and structure, loyalty to organization

pharmacists.⁶ With nearly equal salary for both genders, gender equality issues may be at a minimum in the profession.

There has been a trending increase in the number of women seeking leadership positions. In 1965, 1985, and 2005, research has shown a steady increase in the opinions of having women in leadership positions. These data demonstrate a shift in the phenomenon from advancing equal opportunities for gender and cultural differences to managing these differences⁷ that now exist widely in many industries, especially in pharmacy.

Leaders should recognize that communication styles may vary tremendously between their male and female staff.⁸ By talking frequently with direct reports, the new leader will connect with both male and female staff of all generations on a personal level; this strategy will assist the leader in building relationships and determining how male and female staff prefer to receive feedback, recognition, and rewards.

ALIGNMENT

After the new leader has evaluated the new culture and workplace issues, they need to move toward alignment across the entire organization before implementing significant changes.

New leaders must align expectations in all directions: up, down, and across the department or organization. Achieving alignment will help to ensure a successful onboarding as well as establish the potential for some early wins. When aligning and setting expectations on

projects or responsibilities, new leaders must be clear and concise with all communication. They must set realistic expectations within the department and organization without diminishing opportunities for growth or relationship building. A key part of achieving alignment overall is ensuring alignment with the leadership. Failure to effectively “manage up” to the boss can result in miscommunication about expectations and cause wasted time and effort on tasks not in line with organizational or department goals. This can be detrimental when a new leader is taking on a large-scale project within the first 90 days. It is the responsibility of the new leader to serve as a positive representative of the department and to assist the leadership in addressing challenges proactively with courage and innovation.

It is also critical for the new leader to have a thorough understanding of the new role, what is expected, and who will be the support system. Questions or concerns will likely decrease to only a few major concerns upon clarification. The new leader needs to encourage and foster two-way communication. When there are issues to be addressed, they should be presented from the perspective of the solution, so that the new leader is seen as being proactive, rather than reactive. One method to build alignment both down and across the department is to gain quick wins by removing a barrier that can be considered low-hanging fruit. Asking one's direct reports, “What can be done that would make your day easier” can allow the new leader to obtain a needed resource for the team and

build alignment. The new manager owes his/her boss and direct reports loyalty and commitment. In return, these parties will show their support. One of the greatest opportunities that exist when entering a new environment is providing a fresh perspective. Managing up to the boss, across to the department, and down to the direct reports is a win-win-win situation where everyone, including the organization and project, wins.⁹ Once the new leader has learned about the organization and has made progress in achieving alignment, he/she can begin to produce results.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change Leadership Versus Change Management

Due to the relative nature and rate of change demanded by health care reform and national organization initiatives, such as the American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP) 2015 Health-System Pharmacy Initiative, change models are being implemented by new leaders and seasoned leaders who are transitioning into new leadership roles. In transitioning into new roles, leaders are challenged with *providing change leadership* versus *executing change management*. *Change management* is the ability to use a set of processes or functions one step further; it is “putting an engine on the whole change process, and making it go faster, smarter, more efficiently.”¹⁰ *Change leadership* is more closely associated with large-scale changes that have to be executed within a short time frame or small windows of opportunity. New leaders are encouraged to challenge their new environment via implementing new automation and technology, establishing new pharmacy services, advancing pharmacy practice models, redefining medication distribution models, and other large-scale departmental initiatives. How does one overcome the challenges of a new leader transitioning into their role when time is not dedicated to fulfill or complete the formal transition phases and leading change is the main expectation?

Review of Change Management Literature

Ray and Breland summarize change management models and describe the leadership challenges that must be confronted to foster such change within a practice model at the pharmacy department level.¹¹ They performed a comprehensive review of various change models and elaborated on the methods used in health system pharmacy departments. The most common theme depicted in their article was the ability to apply one change model successfully and understand how each step relates to the overarching goal or initiative. Numerous models exist within the literature;

however, a common framework is followed within many health-system pharmacy departments. This framework closely follows the change model described by Kotter, which includes 8 specific change-management steps or functions¹² :

1. Create urgency
2. Form a powerful coalition
3. Create a vision for change
4. Communicate the vision
5. Remove obstacles
6. Create short-term wins
7. Build on the change
8. Anchor the changes in corporate culture

There is little guidance in the literature on how new leaders should incorporate these change models or concepts of change leadership as they exercise change management. A thorough understanding of the key fundamentals in change management is necessary to be successful in implementing change, as well as leadership techniques such as the ability to motivate others, effective communications skills, and ability to give recognition to others.

If the new leader finds himself/herself implementing a large-scale change during the first 90 days, the state of urgency has likely been created either by superiors or direct reports (step 1).⁹ If this is the case, the leader's goal should be to continue to maintain the level of motivation and urgency necessary for a successful change. This is a great time for the leader to learn about preexisting issues that staff is seeking help with and identify guidance for improvement. Recognize the people who can help and how things work within the new department and health system. On the contrary, if the state of urgency has not been established, it may be best to wait until the first 90 days are complete before bringing forth change within the department.

It is also important to note that there is a fine line between pushing the envelope (or creating a state of urgency) and being in alignment with the priorities of the boss and department. Be aware that the concept of “speaking out of turn” is very relevant during this stage. It is imperative to become aware of contextual issues around a particular initiative and openly acknowledge why things were done a particular way in the past. This will require asking many thoughtful questions, listening, learning, observing, and, eventually, participating. These subtle actions performed by the new leader are imperative as the new leader may not be following a standard onboarding plan at the

new organization. Through careful examination and familiarization with documents that govern particular initiatives impacted by change, such as policy and procedures, new leaders can effectively initiate change. It is most likely that the new leader will not have dedicated time to accomplish these organized processes. Therefore, he or she must use discretionary time to research the department; this extra analysis and planning on the front-end will prepare the leader to move forward with change.

The main focus of the leader's time during regular business hours will be spent building and establishing relationships and understanding his or her new roles, breadth of influence, and responsibilities within the department. At this point, the new leader should identify the key supporters as the department begins to move through stages 2 to 8 of the change process. Key supporters may include a colleague, boss, or mentor. A boss or mentor with established and earned credibility will aid in the sequential steps. Utilizing a support system, the new leader should move forward and create a team (step 2) of experts who have influence to guide the initiative through completion. The new leader may be considered the content expert but does not yet have a full understanding of the current environment and will need to ask the team's permission before continuing. It is likely that others will be observing how the new leader works, how decisions are made, how the new leader communicates, and how the new leader contributes to the organization's success.

During the change implementation, it will be important for the new leader to remain in contact with the support team and superiors; this ensures that the new leader is in alignment with the overarching goal of the project. Aligning expectations is crucial. Failing to do so could be detrimental for the new leader. If misalignment occurs, the support system can be called on to step in or aid in leading the team in the right direction. If done correctly, the new leader will retain credibility. This step can also be described as establishing the change vision (step 3).⁹

Once the change vision has been established, the end result can be summarized as a focused, realistic, achievable, desirable, clear, and concise vision to communicate to others (step 4).⁹ At this point, it will be important for the leader to utilize all available avenues of communication to share the vision. The new leader should take the opportunity to introduce himself/herself via e-mail, staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, and other department meetings. All messages should be over-communicated to ensure that all staff has been reached throughout the department. These messages

allow the new leader to create an open dialogue and open lines of communication, not only about the project, but also about their new role.

Next, the leader should determine what barriers are in place and work with the support team to remove these barriers as far in advance as possible (step 5).⁹ The leader should empower others to act when needed, while he or she is still in the process of building credibility and understanding the workplace environment. As the process moves along, the leader should take time and celebrate short-term wins by saying thank you or recognizing the efforts of others. This small act of appreciation will continue building the momentum (step 6).⁹

The next greatest challenge for the leader will be to make sure that resistance does not result in set-backs (step 7).⁹ The leader should continue to count on the support system and team to overcome challenges that may re-emerge later in the process. Small wins and positive changes should be acknowledged and celebrated, until the change is embedded within the culture (step 8).⁹ The pace of change is considered far less important than the creation of an environment in which change can thrive.

Finally, the leader should take time to reflect with the support system and team along the way to ensure that he or she is on a positive trajectory in building credibility and rapport with staff. It is important that the new leader be seen as the catalyst to positive change and as a vital member of the team that has carried the change through a sustainable future process.

CONCLUSION

The first 90 days of a new leadership role is an exciting, emotional, and crucial time period. Thoughtful actions during the transition phase will predict future success in the leadership role. During this period, the new leader must learn the culture of the new organization and align expectations in all directions. Taking time to observe, build relationships, and learn the culture during the first 90 days is essential to success, but this may not always be possible due to the expectations placed on the new leader. To prepare for a successful transition, the new leader must anticipate challenges.

Seasoned leaders must work with their new leaders to engage, enable, and energize them during the onboarding process. Health care reform and national organization initiatives require the new leader's involvement in these large-scale, rapid changes in the health care environment.¹³ During these transformational times, pharmacy departments must position

themselves to be moving *with* rather than *against* hospital initiatives to support improved health care quality and cost containment. The most successful leaders will enter their new role with an open mind and embrace these challenges as opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The transition of knowledge is an important, yet often forgotten, step in the career transition process. We would like to thank the following pharmacy residency directors – Rick Couldry, Scott Mark, Steve Rough, and Robert Weber – for providing rich learning opportunities and fortifying the foundation on which we relied during our first 90 days.

REFERENCES

1. White SJ. Managing change transitions. *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2008;65(24):2334-2335.
2. Watkins M. *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press; 2003.
3. Painter NA. Establishing a clinical practice: advice for new practitioners. *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2006;63:519-520.
4. White SJ. Will there be a pharmacy leadership crisis? *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2005;62:845-855.
5. Dorsey JR. *Y-Size Your Business: How Gen Y Employees Can Save You Money and Grow Your Business*. Hoboken: Wiley; 2009.
6. US Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Highlights of women's earnings in 2011. October 2012. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2011.pdf>. Accessed April 27, 2013.
7. Barrett M, Davidson MJ. *Gender and Communication Issues at Work*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing; 2006.
8. Holmes J. *Gendered Talk at Work: Constructing Gender Identity Through Workplace Discourse*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing; 2006.
9. Kotter JP. Change management vs. change leadership – what's the difference? *Forbes* [Internet] July 2011. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkotter/2011/07/12/change-management-vs-change-leadership-whats-the-difference/>. Accessed March 10, 2013.
10. Ray MD, Breland BD. Methods of fostering change in the practice model at the pharmacy department level. *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2011;68:1138-1145.
11. Kotter JP. Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Bus Rev.* 1995-73;:59-67.
12. Gilley A, Gilley JW, McMillan HS. Organizational change: motivation, communication, and leadership effectiveness. *Perform Improve Q.* 2009;21(4):75-94.
13. Matuson RC. *Suddenly in Charge: Managing Up, Managing Down, Succeeding All Around*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing; 2011. ■