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Figuring Things Out Along the Way

Linda's career is an example of a clinical pharmacist somewhat reluctantly moving into formal leadership while successfully managing a family. She traces the four practice specialties she has had and provides practical advice on juggling her career and life along the journey.

Linda is currently Chief Pharmacy Officer, University of Utah Health Care, Salt Lake City, Utah and Associate Dean, Pharmacy Practice, College of Pharmacy, and Professor of Pharmacotherapy (Clinical), Department of Pharmacotherapy, University of Utah. Previously she was Administrative Director and Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, College of Pharmacy. She received her BS in Pharmacy and her PharmD (1981) from the University of Utah, College of Pharmacy. Linda completed a residency in hospital pharmacy practice at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska.

Linda's advice is: YABTYK. You are better than you know. When you question and doubt yourself, it is not whether you make the *right* decision, but that you make a decision, the best at the time, and have the courage to make a change if it doesn't work or if other opportunities present themselves. You have more strength, courage, and abilities than you know.



Dear Colleague,

Several years ago one of my residents asked me, "How did you do it all? How did you make career and family work?" I responded, "You just do; you

figure it out along the way.” Then I realized, she was really asking! She was going to have to do this in her career.

I have practiced in four different specialties in my career: critical care, poison control, drug information, and administration. One was my choice, one was to follow my husband in his career, and one was to make a move that would be good for both of us. The last was an unexpected opportunity within my current organization. I have taken some crazy risks. If it didn’t work, I regrouped and tried something else. It all worked out in better ways than I could have imagined. You have to be willing to make a change. This takes courage.

I did a residency because I was scared to find a job that, at the time, I thought would be for the rest of my life. One day, while waiting for my advisor, I noticed a flyer on the bulletin board, “Do a residency, one year.” I thought to myself, *I could do anything for one year*. Because my experience as an intern was in chain stores, I figured acceptance was a long shot. In my residency, I discovered that I wanted to pursue a career in a health system so I would need my doctor of pharmacy degree. I applied to many programs, had one interview, and got accepted.

After finishing graduate school, I wanted to be a high-powered clinician, working in a fast-paced clinical environment for a college of pharmacy. I ended up with my dream job. I was well prepared for the teaching and clinical aspects, but not as well trained for scholarly activities. After a few years, I realized something needed to change. I either needed to get new skills or to change positions. But something changed for me. My husband had an opportunity in a different city. I took a position in a poison control center, throwing my energies into developing in this new position. After a year, our daughter was born. Children give you perspective on what is *really* important. I knew for me, I would not be able to return to work full time.

After a couple of years, my husband’s position was not working out. We teamed up to figure out our next move. One requirement was that it needed to be closer to family, and we both found jobs in Salt Lake City. I landed in a drug information position. After a couple of years in that position, my son was born. He arrived a month early, and I had severe complications. I had to be out three months and return to work slowly over the next four months. This is not what I had planned! I had to focus on getting better and taking care of my children. I had to figure out new ways of doing things by adjusting my personal expectations and career trajectory.

The next few years were all about going to work, coming home, and spending time with my children and husband. We did no extra things. Even grocery shopping was a challenge. We kept things really simple. We make friends easily, which

helps in building a stronger support network. We didn't go anywhere after work where we couldn't take our children. Every day was a puzzle; you figure out the plan for the day and hope nothing is derailed. It was like a luge run—going down the mountain, head first, keeping my fingers crossed that no one flinched. A flinch meant a spectacular crash and burn, but we would adjust and figure it out. Even when things seemed dire, there was always someone able to help, and so it was important to be there for someone else.

For 22 years, I served as Director of Drug Information Services. I loved the mix of solving clinical and organizational problems. Although my title was “Director,” we had relatively few staff. However, our work spanned the entire organization. As I developed in my specialty, I became more involved with ASHP. I served on the Clinical Section when it first formed. When my daughter was 10 and my son was 7, I was invited to serve on a Council. However, Council week was the same week as both of my children's birthdays. Since the meeting was always scheduled for that week, it would always be a conflict. I discussed it with my family, explained the opportunity, and that it involved missing their birthdays. When I suggested that we could celebrate on the weekend, my daughter started to sniffle and said that I really couldn't miss their birthdays. My son, always the negotiator, touched her arm and said, “You know if we let mom go, she will probably do anything for us.” My daughter thought about it, brightened, and said, “Okay, you can go.” As it turned out, I only missed two of their birthdays, but my son's recollection as an adult is that I missed more often than not. This is a great example of how we always talked about things as a family and worked them out. We preserved dinner as a time for coming together.

I had actually put my name in for Board of Directors but was not slated. Although disappointed, I knew there would be other opportunities. About a year later, I was thankful it had not worked out. My kids were in junior high, and I needed to spend more time at home.

The realization was dawning that I needed to take care of myself. I had that moment where my doctor told me I needed an exercise plan. I groaned. *How was I going to do this?* That evening, my children's soccer league called and asked, “Do you want to be a soccer referee?” I said “yes,” thinking it would be better than jogging alone. I ended up liking it. Being the referee meant I had to leave work on time. It made me think about something else besides work. When I was on the soccer field, I guarantee you I was not thinking about work. Although more juggling was involved, it also meant I had to make smarter decisions about both home and work, and what was really important. The result was that I slept better!

Many years later, I was talking with a friend at a national meeting. I said that I got behind when I was on maternity leave, when my son was born, and I had not caught up. Another person asked, “How old is your baby?” I replied, “22.” She said that 22 months was such a fun age. I elaborated, “22 years.” I gave up the notion of being caught up long before. I had to set priorities and make choices. You have to forgive yourself for not getting everything done. If you are really engaged in your job and invested in your career, you will see all kinds of possibilities. However, you will never be able to do them all, so it is important to be realistic—learn how to say “no” effectively or negotiate the deadline.

In 2008, I became the Interim Director of Pharmacy. I was a clinician and was really happy with my current role. I was a good crisis manager and would help get everyone through this interval. After six months, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) asked me to apply for the position. I said, “You know I don’t want the position; this is not a position I am prepared for.” He asked that I think about it. As interim, I had the opportunity to solve different problems that allowed me to connect at another level in the organization. If the COO had faith in me, maybe I should give it a try. *But what could he possibly see in me?*

I had underestimated several things. Few people had the experience I did of interfacing between the health system and the college of pharmacy. What I hadn’t really realized through my career voyage was that I developed leadership skills. No one labeled the things I did as leadership. My skills at influencing—long-rooted in high school debate—were applicable to the position. Most things I did in my work and with ASHP involved leadership skills. My experiences had given me a rich foundation for the position. Someone told me early in my career that if clinicians weren’t willing to take formal leadership roles, then how would clinical pharmacy practice advance? I just didn’t think that someone would be *me*. So, I began to think that perhaps I should take the chance.

I was pretty overwhelmed in my new role. My new favorite word was, “Yet.” So often I would feel like I couldn’t do something, but then I would say I couldn’t do it yet. *Yet* gave me permission that I didn’t have to do everything at once, and I didn’t have to know everything. I could ask for help. I would figure it out.

I am currently in the right position doing the right things. My path was not smooth or even. I am still on a steep learning curve. I couldn’t have predicted where I would end up. ***I offer you the following additional advice:***

- ***Take care of yourself.*** You will not be there to take care of those around you if you don’t take care of yourself.

- ***Have the courage to make a change, both in your career and your home life.*** It is easy to just keep going along. But sometimes, it just creeps up on you—you are really not happy with what you are doing or what you are doing is not working. Be it your job, career, home life, or other, you just need to make the change. Life is too short not to be happy. You have options.
- ***Be flexible.*** You, your loved ones, and your co-workers will crash sometimes when the first plan doesn't work. You will have alternatives, and you are often figuring it out as you go along. This is not always your first instinct. Adjusting to new things, new realities, and new ideas is really important. It can open doors. Your ability to be flexible and work as a team member will define your success.
- ***Imagine the possibilities.*** Have a bias for yes. My husband says I am persistently, relentlessly, optimistic. Optimism is an important leadership trait. Early in my career I was persistent in doing things well, and doing them better. This overly critical view could be perceived as pessimism. I realized that negativity would sap my energy, and I didn't have any extra energy to spare. Positivity becomes really energizing.

YABTYK. *You are better than you know.* My husband started saying this to our daughter when she was in junior high. What happens in the teenage years that cause girls, in particular, to doubt themselves and their ability to take risks? Yet, when I think back, it has happened so many times in my life. We question and doubt ourselves. It is not whether we make the *right* decision, but that we make **a** decision, the best at the time, and have the courage to make a change if it doesn't work or other opportunities present themselves. We have more strength, courage, and abilities than we know.

We make a difference and serve as role models in other people's lives in ways we don't always recognize. No one sees the extreme juggling that we do to balance our rich, multidimensional lives. When the doubts creep in, remember that YABTYK. You have the strength and courage to figure it out.

Yours,

Linda