

LETTERS *to a* YOUNG PHARMACIST

*Sage Advice on Life & Career from
Extraordinary Pharmacists*

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who selflessly give of their time serving as teachers, preceptors, residency directors, and mentors for the future leaders of our profession.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to our many colleagues who contributed their time, life stories, and wisdom to this book. Our sincere appreciation also goes out to Jack Bruggeman, Ruth Bloom, and their colleagues in ASHP's Special Publishing Division for their vision, hard work, guidance, and patience throughout the development of this book.

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Foreword

Paul W. Abramowitz



Dear Young Pharmacist,

I am writing to encourage you, as a new practitioner and an aspiring leader, to provide the best patient care that you can, to be innovative and work to improve our nation's health care system, and to give back to your profession.

Pharmacists have and will continue to affect in positive ways our nation's health care system and lead from many types of positions and in many practice settings. You, too, can seize the opportunity to become a leader in many different areas of pharmacy practice. You can be a clinical leader—treating individual patients—or you can lead by improving the health of populations. You can also lead by designing and managing care programs, directing pharmacy services, or by working with professional health care associations. Some of you will lead by educating pharmacy students and residents. How you choose to lead is up to you and will depend on your unique talents, ambitions, and desires.

Whichever path you take toward excellence, I suggest that you keep several things in mind. Continue to develop and maintain your therapeutic and patient care knowledge. This dedication to self-improvement will serve as the foundation of not only your patient care abilities, but also will enhance your credibility in any leadership role you pursue. Today, pharmacists are an essential part of every health care team and are recognized as drug therapy experts. Your mission is to get and keep your patients as healthy as possible, and it is your

therapeutic knowledge that allows you to do so. Add your creativity to design new therapies and care systems and the problem-solving skills developed during your education and training, and you will be amazed at what you can achieve.

Focus on developing and nurturing relationships, not only with your patients, but also with your colleagues in pharmacy and other health care professions. The importance and value of relationships took me many years to fully understand. You can take advantage of my experience and embrace this principle early. Caring professional relationships are an essential ingredient of leadership. Make it a priority to get to know the colleagues with whom you spend a large portion of your professional life. Developing productive partnerships by capitalizing on strengths and commonality of purpose are two critical parts of building relationships. Take the time to understand the culture of your organization, and learn how to work within that culture. If necessary, learn how to change that culture at an acceptable pace. Never underestimate the value of relationships as well as the power of teamwork and collective wisdom.

Seek and take advantage of opportunities. The future of our profession depends on your willingness to exert yourself in achieving your full potential. This will take your astute observation, keen insight, and also perseverance. Some people look at others who have excelled professionally and say that they were lucky—they just happened to be in the right place at the right time; or they were lucky that an opportunity existed at that time. However, I have learned that opportunities are constantly present and they exist everywhere. Some of us see these opportunities, and some of us do not. Some of us allow these opportunities to pass us by because we feel we are too busy or we are hesitant to act on them. Some of us make an initial effort, but then retreat too quickly. However, some of you will identify and take those opportunities. Be observant and creative, and put in the extra effort. Pharmacists who excel and pharmacists who identify existing opportunities and take a risk in pursuing them will be more productive. As legendary golfer Gary Player once said, “The more you practice, the luckier you get.”

Finally, I would encourage you to become involved in your professional societies—the one(s) that best meet your needs. I guarantee you that whatever you contribute as a member to those societies will be returned to you tenfold through the knowledge and

experience gained and the relationships that you develop. I have found this to be the case with my membership in the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, which began when I was just a resident. Being involved in our professional society has proved to be invaluable to me and to thousands of other members throughout our careers.

Remember, success is never achieved without challenges and setbacks. How you meet these challenges and the decisions you make to do what is right and good will determine how successful you will be and how you will be seen by your colleagues and by your patients. Stay committed to excellence, and you will find your own unique way to contribute to your profession and beyond.

I wish you the best in all of your future endeavors!

Sincerely,

Paul W. Abramowitz, PharmD, ScD (Hon), FASHP

Chief Executive Officer

American Society of Health-System Pharmacists

Preface

Surprising as it seems, most professionals entering the workforce now expect to stay in a job less than three years. That means some can expect to have as many as 15 to 20 jobs over the course of your working life. It is hard to fathom, and when you think about it in those terms, managing your career seems like a full-time job. That should not concern you, though, considering all the education and training you have under your belt, right?

There is no question that the years spent in pharmacy school and postgraduate training prepared you well for pharmacy practice; however, most of us received very little, if any, formal training on how to manage our careers. How do you anticipate the many challenges you might face in your career and prepare yourself to deal with those? How can you achieve the right balance between your professional and personal lives without compromising one or both? And, most importantly, how can you avoid making the wrong decisions when presented with new opportunities or difficult obstacles?

We hope this book, a compilation of letters from pharmacists who collectively offer over 1,000 years of experience on the career journey, will help you answer some of those tough questions. These very personal and heartfelt letters address life and career challenges, sources of inspiration, conflicts between personal and professional priorities, and opportunities for enhancing professional fulfillment throughout the course of one's career.

In deciding to write this book, we reflected on our own careers, the many challenges we faced, and what we learned. We recalled situations where we might have made a different decision or taken a different path had we known at the time what we came to know some years later. It is no surprise that many of our contributors had similar stories to tell. If just one of these stories inspires you, gives you courage, or

guides you in making a right career decision, we will have achieved our goal in writing this book.

With so many accomplished individuals in the ranks of our profession, selecting the individuals to contribute letters was not an easy task. We pooled our collective networks of colleagues to identify possible contributors, taking into account the evolution and complexity of health care delivery and pharmacy practice. We attempted to include pharmacists who represent a variety of career paths. Common among all the contributors are their commitment to investing in the pharmacy leaders of the future and their willingness to share their professional and personal challenges in the spirit of helping others. When we contacted them, each contributor immediately embraced the concept of the book and eagerly agreed to share his or her experiences.

It became clear early on that each contributor could have likely written an entire book about his or her unique experiences, but we had to limit each letter to just a few pages. So, after reading these contributions, we encourage you to seek out individuals and mentors in your sphere of professional practice and talk to them about their valuable experiences. Through these readings and talks with others, we hope that you will benefit from this wealth of experience.

Many of the letters incorporate the concept of leadership and its importance in achieving satisfaction in life and career. We often think of leadership in the context of managerial authority and define leaders as those individuals with executive titles, such as Chief Pharmacy Officer, Director of Pharmacy, and others. However, leadership is much broader than just the authority or responsibility conferred by a management position or a job title. Leadership, with a small “l”, refers to taking responsibility for achievement of a goal or an intended outcome. It most often involves using your influence to maximize the contributions of others toward achieving the goal. As you see leadership mentioned in this book, keep in mind that every pharmacist is in a leadership role, regardless of his or her job title and number of direct reports, and we should all aspire to demonstrate leadership both in our professional and personal endeavors.

Our hope is that this book will help inspire and challenge readers to achieve their own personal and professional goals, with insight from those who have traveled before them to help guide their paths. We hope what you learn about the challenges, obstacles, and setbacks this

esteemed group of contributors faced as they navigated their careers will help you better overcome those that may come your way.

What we have learned from the contributors' letters and our conversations with them will stay with us. We are pleased to be able to share it with you.

Susan Cantrell

Sara White

Bruce Scott

February 2014

Letters



