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It's Not Easy, But a Gal Can Have It All—Family and Successful Career

Kathy traces her career and personal life evolution, offering specifics that can benefit others, while sharing how she jointly raises children with her husband. She explains that intertwining career and family are just part of normal day-to-day living. There are times when work requires more attention and other times when family requires more—the key is to know when one requires more attention over the other.

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Kathy's advice: ***Take the first step and get involved in your career beyond your "day job," and do something every year to recommit to that involvement.***



Dear Young Pharmacist,

When I graduated from high school, I had no expectations for what life would have in store for me. My only hopes were to graduate from college, get a good job, have a family, and contribute to the world in a meaningful way. Growing up in a small, rural farming town in the middle of Michigan, I would never have imagined the career opportunities and possibilities I have had the privilege to experience. Working hard, taking advantage of opportunities, and committing to family

and community were fundamental to my parents' belief system in their actions and words. Little did I know that these foundational principles would provide the tools and beliefs necessary to be successful in pursuing a career in pharmacy. Of course, it was up to *me* to put those qualities into action.

I always knew I would go to college, but I didn't have a clear career path. Only after I stumbled into a pharmacy one day to buy a medication did I consider pharmacy as a career. I met my husband (also a pharmacy student) while in pharmacy school, and we were married 2 weeks after graduation. When I entered the workforce in the early 1980s, I quickly began chiseling a career for myself as I learned about residencies and hospital pharmacy management tracks. I wondered how I could juggle a career and have a family at the same time. In my first years of practice, I asked several women for the key to successfully accomplishing this. I quickly learned that no one had the answer.

One would think that 30 years later, somewhere along the way, the question would be answered. However, I still see young men and women struggling with the same question and finding no perfect solution. What I have found as key ingredients are the same values my parents instilled in me: hard work, leverage opportunities, and commitment.

My husband and I have raised three children who are all successful in their own careers (a lawyer, an engineer, and a college sophomore—hopeful accountant). Managing both home and work life required hard work and a lot of organization, but it was all worth it in the end. For me, that meant late nights after the kids were in bed answering emails and working on projects, sharing the responsibilities at home with my spouse, and going the extra mile with my children. I was bound and determined that a two-income household would not prohibit my children from getting involved in activities. For us, this meant organizing our schedules to accommodate family. My husband took morning duty of breakfast and seeing them off to school; I took evenings, filled with pick-ups from daycare or driving them to activities.

I fulfilled my desire to become involved in professional organizations in those early years by sticking to local associations that required limited travel. I also felt it was important for my kids to have an understanding of where I went every day, rather than leave it to their imagination of why mom disappeared early in the mornings and was up late doing work. To satisfy my mind (and I hope my kids' curiosity), I made sure they visited my work occasionally and especially when I changed jobs. And finally, I made a personal commitment to myself that my children would have a home-cooked meal every night. So, we created a routine of shopping and cooking the following week's meals every Sunday. (I must confess we might have relied a little too heavily on crockpot meals, based on the looks I get from them now when I mention a good crockpot recipe!)

I sometimes chuckle at “work-life balance” comments. For me, work is career and career is part of my life. Hence, intertwining career and family are the norm and just part of living. Sometimes work requires more attention and sometimes family requires more—it is all relative to the moment and making sure you know when one requires more attention over the other.

In the early years of my career, I started doing one thing right without even realizing it. When talking with other pharmacy managers and leaders, I listened carefully to what they were doing and the opportunities they took advantage of to advance their careers. Initially, this listening and learning resulted in my obtaining a hospital pharmacy residency and a Master’s degree in Hospital Pharmacy Administration.

Through each career experience, I learned another important lesson. If you focus on your current responsibilities by working hard and doing what is right for patients/staff/organization, new opportunities will arise. This has proven true throughout my career. My focus on changing pharmacy practice to support hospital goals resulted in a chance to lead a hospital process improvement initiative focused on multiple areas of operations throughout the institution. This door opened another to have administrative responsibility for several other departments. I find that each increase in responsibility requires more work, chances to practice what I have learned, and experiences to learn new skills. Today, I am fortunate to say that I have been a Director of Pharmacy at three facilities, a Hospital Administrator responsible for several non-pharmacy departments, and now Vice President and Chief Pharmacist. I know my learning is not complete, but the challenge of contributing to the work and care of others continues to motivate and inspire me.

Just as my father was a businessman committed to the small community we lived in, pharmacy is my community that I dedicate my loyalty to. In a small high school, in a small town, getting involved is pretty easy. If you talk to your classmates and listen to your teachers, you can learn about volunteer opportunities to make contributions to your school and classmates. Professional organizations work much the same way. After my residency, during my first job, the Director of Pharmacy asked if I was interested in being a newsletter Co-Editor for the regional health-system pharmacy organization. This single step to become involved in creating a successful newsletter opened up opportunities to become Banquet Chair followed by Secretary, Treasurer, and ultimately President for the organization. What I didn’t realize at the time was that local involvement overlaps with state involvement. Hence, as President of the local association in Michigan, you are a Board representative to the state organization, and this begets opportunities to be involved at the state level, which in turn is a great introduction to involvement at the national level. For me, it resulted in becoming a Delegate for Michigan

in the ASHP House of Delegates. I cannot emphasize enough the true value of involvement in local and state organizations and the importance of networking and connecting with others in the profession.

Through work at local and state level organizations, I was asked to become Program Chair for the ASHP Section of Pharmacy Practice Managers. Introduction to section activities through this role eventually lead to section Chair. At the conclusion of my section leadership responsibilities, ASHP embarked on a Task Force for Organizational Affairs. Having had state affiliate leadership experience and recent ASHP experience in the section (and the House of Delegates), I was asked to serve. The task force's focus was to evaluate the current membership structure and policy development process for the society. As in the past, I couldn't say "no" to this opportunity to do more work for my community. During the involvement with the task force, I was fortunate to also be elected as a Board member to the ASHP Board of Directors. Although I have just completed my term as a board member and I don't know what my next opportunity to the profession will be, I am confident something is right around the corner that requires a "yes" response.

Each new role and responsibility is an opportunity to contribute to the work of others in your community, providing new experiences to practice old skills and learn new ones. Each opportunity has the possibility of leading to the next opportunity. I wouldn't change anything in my career path—each step along the way was important to my development and understanding of patient care and professional organizations.

Although the work is hard, the rewards are great. My advice to new practitioners is: (1) take the first step and get involved in your career beyond your "day job," and (2) do something every year to recommit to that involvement.

And don't forget what I learned along the way:

- Be loyal and committed to your community and family.
- Work hard.
- Take advantage of opportunities (say YES).

Good luck with your future, and never underestimate what you can accomplish.

Kathy