

VIEWPOINTS

Lessons Learned from Experiences in Academic Leadership

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As we reflect upon our positions as leaders in a new college of pharmacy, it occurs to us there are lessons we learned that were not necessarily emphasized in the various leadership development programs we have participated in over the last few years. We certainly have been the beneficiaries of these excellent programs which have enabled our knowledge and skill development in areas ranging from specific leadership strengths and styles to leadership frameworks to goal setting and strategic planning. Furthermore, we are truly thankful and appreciative for the many mentors and friends, in and outside these programs, who have directed us through our academic careers and have served as great sources of wisdom and guidance during times when each of us struggled in developing and improving our leadership skills. Yet, we believe there is nothing better than life and its experiences to mold one's individual leadership abilities, skills, and talents. We have, like many before us, realized some of these lessons can and will only be achieved with service and leadership activities and responsibilities to our college and to numerous professional educational, practice, and scientific organizations. Three specific lessons learned through personal experiences are offered below which we believe may benefit those who have an interest in academic leadership positions.

Lesson Number 1: Successful Leaders Don't Know Everything and Don't Always Need to Be the *First to Know*

Faculty members, staff members, and students will look to you for the answers as it relates to decisions in your role as an academic leader. Leadership brings challenges (and opportunities) that you would have never expected to encounter and that were never discussed in various leadership programs. It seems these opportunities for leadership arise at times when you least expect them to occur. Recognizing your limitations as a leader and seeking the wisdom and experience of your colleagues is the first lesson. Alternatively, you could rely exclusively on your own

experience; which, as someone has sarcastically said, "is wonderful because it helps you to recognize a mistake the second time you make it." The key to remember is that it does not diminish your abilities as a leader to ask others for assistance in new challenging situations. The question is who you should ask for insight and guidance. Depending on the situation, you cannot necessarily go to those faculty members with whom you worked as a faculty colleague, even though this is the easiest approach. Previous mentors can be a valuable source of guidance in some situations. An initial goal for any new leader is to develop a network of leaders within and outside your university who are in similar situations or hold similar positions to assist you in your role as an academic leader and to ask for their guidance. This is certainly not easy at times, but there are others who want to help you (just as you often want to help them).

Lesson Number 2: There Will Always Be Some Individuals Who Are Not Pleased With Your Decision

An important component in any university setting is the concept of faculty governance at the college/school and university level. Many faculty members who go on to hold academic leadership positions often have been engaged in this process and have served on their college or university governance structure. From these positions and groups, you learn the importance of faculty input in the decision process. While this input is useful and valuable in your decision-making process, ultimately, as an academic leader, you must make the timely decision. Be aware that there will always be those individuals who disagree with your decision despite the time and care you took during this process. The key for successful leadership is the demonstration of timely decisions that are made fairly with the intent to achieve the success of the department and college as related to its mission, vision, and goals. The worst action is not acting on a decision in a timely manner.

Lesson Number 3 – Leadership Can Be Lonely so You Need Your Family, Friends, and Hobbies

Have you ever thought about joining *Lonely Academic Leaders Anonymous*? As a consequence of your role as a leader and decision maker, academic leadership can be a lonely position. While you may have had many

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friends while you were a faculty colleague, your day-to-day interactions with faculty colleagues inside and outside the workday changes when you assume an academic leadership position. This transition is certainly not a reflection on your personality or ability to work with other individuals. You likely will want to maintain these relationships (we believe successful relationship building is essential in any leadership position), but you will have the responsibilities for personnel management and leadership. You are now in a different situation and your interactions with other individuals, even your closest faculty friends and colleagues, will be modified by your new position and its associated responsibilities.

The key to success is to remember the importance of your family and mentors as a support network. Academic leadership positions can be demanding in expectations and your time commitment, but you must take the time for your family and personal well being. At the end of each day and week, successful leaders leave the tower and make time to spend with their significant other, children, and/or long-time friends, as well as to pursue their personal interests, hobbies, and a healthy lifestyle. Vacation and

time off are essential to being a successful leader as it allows you the opportunity for reflection and personal growth.

Academic leaders in a new college or school of pharmacy will face many unique and exciting challenges. In addition, our own limited leadership experiences suggest that new and exciting challenges also are experienced by new academic leaders in colleges and schools with a long history and rich traditions. As any leadership team works with the faculty, staff, and students to build a new culture and program or continue the success associated with the history of existing programs, each leader on that team will be challenged in ways one would never envision and lessons learned will come when you least expect. As academic leaders, it is okay to ask for assistance from your professional leadership support network, it is critical to make timely and fair decisions for your organization, and it is essential for you to have your personal support network and activities to allow for a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle. We believe the essentials for any successful academic leader are grounded in a framework where one works diligently and compassionately, learns with passion each day, and enjoys life with ardor and enthusiasm.