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Give to Others, and You Will Receive Tenfold in Return

It takes only a brief conversation with Steve for one to discover his passion for the pharmacy profession and for patient care. Steve translated his passion into action, leading the development of many notable American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Foundation programs and resources. The ASHP Research and Education Foundation is the philanthropic arm of ASHP and its mission is to improve the health and well-being of patients in health systems through appropriate, safe, and effective medication use.

Steve spent 25 years leading health-system pharmacy operations and then served as the Chief Executive Officer of the ASHP Research and Education Foundation for 19 years before retiring recently. He received his bachelor of science degree in pharmacy from the University of Rhode Island and a master's degree in hospital pharmacy from the University of Maryland. Steve completed a residency in hospital pharmacy practice at University of Maryland. He is a fellow of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

Steve's advice to young pharmacists is: *keep in mind that whatever you invest in this profession of pharmacy, it will likely return to you in tenfold benefits.*

Dear Young Pharmacist,

What a great choice you have made! It has been more than 40 years since I made the decision to select pharmacy as my profession, and I can unequivocally say it was the best decision of my life. You must invest in your profession to reap the rewards, and my letter will speak to your investment in pharmacy and the personal payback that will come with it.

It is essential to me to have balance and connection between my personal and professional life. I was blessed to have a wonderfully loving family who instilled great values in me. My grandmother was particularly influential in my life. She was a woman of few words, but when she spoke she always had something very

important to say. I recall her saying something along the lines of “give to others and you will receive tenfold in return.” This adage has been at the heart of my focus in life and in my professional endeavors.

Let’s face it: college, career, and life can be extremely competitive, but only if you insist on making it that way. It is important to be driven and have a life plan to guide you, but the beauty of life is to enjoy it with others and to experience the sense of accomplishment together.

My experiences as captain of a sports team, president of a fraternity, and a senior resident made me realize that a team of diverse individuals all moving toward the same goal was much better than a disparate group of folks striving for individual accomplishments. I determined that my professional focus would be best suited to lead a pharmacy team. To be a great pharmacist, it is essential to embrace leadership as a professional responsibility because you must lead on your patients’ behalf; lead when working with nurses, physicians, and other health professionals to manage drug therapy; and lead your personal and professional journey.

So can you imagine being 24 years old and your first job after completing a residency is assistant director of pharmacy in a children’s hospital in Washington, DC, with staff representing almost every nationality reporting to you? Well, this young, long-haired, lily-white, residency-trained, hotshot was disdained by most of this extremely diverse staff. I was overwhelmed, constantly challenged, and quickly becoming worn down. Had I made a huge mistake? Could I handle the pressure? Did I believe in myself that I could be successful? Ultimately, after several nerve-racking months, I resorted to focusing on my core values of giving my best and believing that it would pay dividends—and indeed it did! I focused on serving patients with the utmost quality, respecting each individual’s important contribution to the pharmacy team, and being totally honest and demonstrating integrity in all that I did. Guess what? It paid off ten times over. I became the Director of Pharmacy, stayed in the organization 17 years, and was a preceptor to 45 residents. My reward was having patients’ parents tell me how much they appreciated having their pharmacist oversee their child’s chemotherapy regime, having doctors ask me when they could get a pharmacist on their care team, and most importantly, pharmacy residents and staff members giving 110% every day to do the right thing for our patients. Think about what you are willing to give as you begin your career and it will set the stage for reaping rewards later.

I cannot gloss over the vital impact of relationship development among pharmacy professionals and the need for mentorship. I was fortunate to have a pharmacy residency preceptor and a pharmacy director who hired me out of the residency invest in me at a critical time in my professional development. They helped launch my career and I am indebted to them forever for my success. I took a cue from my mentors in becoming a preceptor, and undoubtedly it has been the most fulfilling professional experience, giving me immense pride and joy. My residents are my

lifelong friends and I live vicariously through their accomplishments. I suggest that you seek out a mentor(s) and recognize that you have the same responsibility to give back to other young professionals throughout your career.

Thus far I have talked mostly about work. But pharmacy is a profession and not just the place of employment where you just show up and serve patients. To be an effective professional, you must continually invest in your professional development. Professional organizations, such as state and national pharmacy associations, are fantastic stages for young practitioners to hone their leadership and practice skills. Early in my career I was newly married, expecting our first child, and just appointed the director of pharmacy, when I suddenly became president-elect of the state hospital pharmacy organization. To make the situation more challenging, the association's president took a job in another state, and I was thrust into serving as president for two years. I was scared on the inside but had to demonstrate confidence and poise outwardly. By showing that I cared, working hard, and asking for help, I was amazed at the response and support I received. I made lifelong friendships and honed my organizational skills from that state association leadership experience. So I suggest that you step out and step up and become a professional association participant and leader on a local and national level.

In case you think that my life ran smoothly, let me tell you that I had some dark professional moments and you likely will too. At the time, these professional crises seemed to be earth-shattering. So, what are my dark moments? I was caught in a consultant's downsizing at the peak of my career. I lost my job and a 17-year career in one fell swoop. I was pushed out in the middle of the day and I went home with my professional life turned upside down. I walked into my house; my daughter had never seen me home on a weekday in the middle of the day and she was crushed to think that daddy was fired. I ultimately fared better than the other staff who lost their jobs because of my attitude and professional confidence. Following that devastating day, I had job offers and consulting opportunities due to the investment I made in my career. You should never lose faith in your professional abilities, take a deep breath, and think about how you will handle adversity. Remember to act with poise and confidence and rely on your professional network for support. Ultimately, how we handle adversity speaks to who we are and how we feel about our professional abilities.

I wish to relate one more disappointing professional encounter and describe how it turned out to be a fantastic opportunity. One of my lifelong professional goals was to be on the board of directors of ASHP—my national, professional organization. I had the opportunity to vie for an ASHP board position but lost the election. I was crushed, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. As an ASHP board member, I would have had the opportunity to give back to my profession by serving for a three-year period. In my mind it was the ultimate opportunity shy of being president of ASHP. But, it is difficult to become ASHP president if you can't

get elected to the board. I thought that I was a washed-up volunteer association leader. Little did I know that a few key association leaders envisioned a different leadership opportunity for me. Five years later, I was invited to interview for ASHP Foundation's Chief Executive Officer position, and I was fortunate to be selected to serve our profession. Serving in this capacity meant my responsibilities were solely dedicated to advancing the role of the health-system pharmacist. I had the unique privilege of working every day to give back to those who will follow you and me in our profession!

In closing, keep in mind that whatever you invest in this profession of pharmacy, it will likely return to you in tenfold benefits.

Steve