

Daniel J. Cobaugh



Love Being Exactly Who You Are

You will likely leave your first encounter with Dan impressed by the charismatic and sincere person he is. You will find him very engaging and obviously someone who is appropriately confident and comfortable in his own skin. Arriving at his current state of self-confidence and comfort with himself was, however, a long and sometimes challenging journey. In the following letter, Dan explains that his strong belief of being comfortable within your own skin and loving who you are will enhance your enjoyment of life and of your profession, leading you through difficult times.

Dan is Vice President of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Research and Education Foundation. Prior to ASHP, Dan had a distinguished practice as Director of the Finger Lakes Regional Poison and Drug Information Center and the Director of Emergency Medicine Research at the University of Rochester Medical Center in Rochester, New York. As Associate Director at the American Association of Poison Control Centers, he implemented the nationwide toll-free number for poison centers. He is also recognized as a Fellow of the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology, a Diplomat of the American Board of Applied Toxicology, and has served as President of the Association of Poison Control Centers of New York State.

He received his bachelor of science degree in pharmacy from the University of Pittsburgh and his doctor of pharmacy degree from Duquesne University. Dan completed a residency at Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh and a clinical toxicology fellowship at the Pittsburgh Poison Center/Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

Any readers who have wondered about their ability to contribute or their "fit" in the profession will find value in Dan's message: *Love being exactly who you are.*



Dear Young Pharmacist,

To be effective in our professional roles as pharmacists, first we need to be comfortable in our own skin. This is something that I struggled with for decades. Many times over the last 30 years I have been asked, “When did you know that you were gay?” The reality is that I have always known. As early as the tender age of 6 years, I knew that I was different somehow. As a teenager, in the late 1970s, I began to struggle with coming to terms with being gay. As you can imagine, on some levels it was even harder then than it is today. Simply stated, the world was different and, to be honest, there was a lot more blatant discrimination in our society. There were no visible role models—family members, friends, political leaders, athletes, entertainers—who could provide a sense of normalcy to a confused adolescent.

Nonetheless, as I entered pharmacy school at the University of Pittsburgh in 1983, I began a 13-year journey of coming out. It was a scary time. In the spring of that year, AIDS made the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. I was a 20-year-old gay man who was beginning a difficult journey that was made harder by the weight of the AIDS epidemic. At that time, we did not know what microorganism caused the disease, how it was transmitted, or how to diagnose it. It was terrifying to think that a death sentence might be one of the implications of being the person that I was born to be. I heard disparaging comments about homosexuality from health professionals in the pharmacy school and in hospitals where I trained as we learned about and provided care to individuals with AIDS. During Professor Rounds one morning during my residency, the team went in to see a 30-something man, who was incarcerated at the time, admitted to the hospital for treatment of an AIDS-related infection. I remember the professor, an esteemed attending physician, harshly questioning the patient about the sexual activities that led to his HIV infection. At the time, I wondered if his approach to me would be equally judgmental if he knew that I was gay. The fear that I experienced made it impossible for me to be comfortable with myself; in retrospect, I realize that it affected both personal and professional relationships.