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Sometimes the Ideal Opportunities Are Disguised in the Disappointment of Missing Out on Another Opportunity

Matt readily admits that he has more experience in hockey than in pharmacy. But that has not stood in the way of his star rising in pharmacy. In fact, it was a quote from a legendary hockey coach that provided the impetus for Matt to pursue—and excel in—his chosen career path of managed care pharmacy. Matt describes how setbacks and disappointments in his career later opened up even better opportunities.

Matthew (Matt) Lennertz is currently Director of Pharmacy Innovation and Analytics at Gateway Health. His previous experience includes serving as Clinical Project Manager at Magellan Health and Clinical Pharmacist at Healthspring. Matt received his PharmD at Temple University and his MS in Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy at the University of Florida. He completed a managed care pharmacy residency at Walgreens Health Initiatives. He is an active member and volunteer in the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP).

His advice is: ***Seize opportunities, work hard, be open to new possibilities when things don't turn out as you hoped, and, of course, listen to the hockey coach.***



Dear Young Pharmacist,

Considering I have played ice hockey since I was 5 years old and have been a pharmacist for only 7 years, I have more experience in hockey than pharmacy.

Sound advice can come from all areas of life and a quote from the 1980 U.S. Olympic Ice Hockey Coach, Herb Brooks, particularly impressed me. Before the 1980 U.S. Olympic ice hockey team beat the Russians in the biggest upset in sports history, Brooks said “Great moments are born from great opportunity, and that is what you have here tonight, boys. That’s what you have earned here tonight.”

Two aspects of this quote have guided me throughout my life and pharmacy career: you have to *earn* your opportunities, and you have to *recognize* the opportunity in every situation to take advantage of it. Opportunities are earned through bold action and hard work, differentiating you from your peers. Recognize opportunities in every situation because they won't always seem ideal at the time and may arise out of disappointment. Without following these two principles, I would not have advanced to where I am in my career.

If I hadn't recognized an opportunity while in pharmacy school, I would still be working at the same pharmacy chain where I was an intern. In my third year of pharmacy school, I completed a self-study research project instead of taking an elective. I didn't think much of the opportunity—completing a project focused on prior authorization rates in retail pharmacies at the time and learning about managed care pharmacy principles, which were not stressed in school. Although I look back on the project now as the work of a naive student, it was published in a journal with assistance from my faculty advisor. The project and subsequent publication created many opportunities and led me down a different career path.

The new career path was managed care pharmacy. I was intrigued by the population health aspects of managed care and the large impact a pharmacist can have in that setting. I appreciated the individual patient interaction and intervention to improve health through counseling and increasing medication adherence in a retail setting. However, I was more interested in the impact that a program (e.g., adherence initiative in a managed care setting) could have on improving the health of thousands of patients. I also appreciated the challenge in managed care in striving not only to provide the most effective therapy, but also in being the least costly therapy to ensure healthcare affordability.

For pharmacists who are interested in population health and health economics, I recommend researching managed care pharmacy careers and especially through AMCP. I wanted to pursue a career in managed care pharmacy after doing my research; I worried about being too late because students at other schools had been involved in AMCP chapters since the beginning of pharmacy school. I was at a disadvantage compared to them but decided to take bold action to create an opportunity. Although I didn't receive a managed care experiential rotation, I approached the person in charge and was able to leverage the fact that I was very interested in one into a experiential rotation at a PBM. The bold action was taking charge by trying to obtain the experiential rotation after I initially did not receive it.

Following my practical experience on my rotation, I realized the best way to earn a position in a managed care company would be completing a managed care residency. I also realized that bold action would be needed yet again because I found myself competing with others who had been preparing for a residency