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Be Flexible, Work Hard, and Be Nice

Deb is a pharmacist leader who prioritizes honesty and a direct approach to problem-solving. Deb is currently Senior Vice President, Pharmacy and Clinical Solutions, Gorman Health Group. In 2002, she served as ASHP President. Deb received her BS Pharmacy degree (1976) at the University of Colorado and her MBA (1986) at Regis University, Denver, Colorado.

***Deb's advice is:* Leaders can only be leaders if there are people following them. You can't be a leader if you never acknowledge that you made a mistake or if you can't change your mind.**

Dear Colleague,

I remember my exact “aha” moment when I decided I wanted to become a pharmacist. I was a high school junior and had an after-school job wrapping Christmas presents at my Rexall Drugstore in Paonia, Colorado. The relief pharmacist was Theo Colburn who encouraged me to pursue pharmacy because of my love of science and helping people. She also provided a positive role model for combining work she loved and a family. I have had my fair share of these serendipitous, fortuitous, or happenstance occurrences in my life that allowed me to see a clear path which wasn't at first obvious.



As Dr. Seuss might have said, I have had an “Oh the Places You’ll Go” pharmacy career while remaining in my beloved Colorado. I started in the pharmacy department at an academic medical center, moved to academia in a university school of pharmacy, and am now a consultant in managed care. In each of these organizations, I started off as a staff member and was promoted to a leadership role. I have found leadership to be 90% wonderful and 10% terrible. The 10% terrible is usually associated with crucial conversations with employees and/or colleagues that have negative outcomes. Most of these encounters are permanently etched in my memory—calling security to assist in removing an employee in the middle of a psychotic episode, confronting employees with substance abuse problems, and breaking up a fist-fight between two employees. The 90% is most often associated with a sense of accomplishment and the satisfaction of achieving goals.

I pride myself on being flexible. Each of my jobs positioned me to be successful in the next one. My successes gave me the confidence to assume more responsibility and to give myself credit. My Assistant Director position at the University of Colorado Medical Center and my work with the medical and nursing staff on the institutional review board (IRB), clinical pharmacy teams, and other hospital committees proved to be excellent training for my role in the school of pharmacy managing the drug utilization review (DUR) program. Understanding government regulations and being exposed to government programs positioned me for a consulting role at the beginning of the Medicare Part D program when no pharmacists had that skillset. I have a “Can I do this?” voice that I pay attention to, but my defense is usually to over-prepare so that even if I don’t succeed at something it isn’t because I didn’t make the effort.

How did it all go? Sometimes the answer was not very well. Tragedy sometimes really is comedy plus time. I am not a big believer in work-life balance. **Balancing priorities** would better characterize my philosophy. My family, friends, and health are always in my top five list. It might just be sending a text or making a quick call to my kids, but maintaining connections to family and friends is crucial to socialization and good mental health. Exercise and sleep are fundamental to maintaining physical health and accomplishing all that is needed for your job and other responsibilities. My system has gone haywire many times. My children can relate times when I didn’t meet their expectations. Mom-guilt is definitely a “thing.” I could tell you lots of stories about getting sick because I ran myself completely off the rails trying to do too much. I recall one snowy February day when my pediatrician walked into the exam room and viewed my 4-year-old son, 1-year-old daughter, and myself—all with fevers and strep throat—and shaking his head said “You guys look terrible.” I have missed many