

Durant Award
December 5, 2007
ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting - Las Vegas

Thank you all for being here today. When Tom called to give me the news that I was selected to receive this award I was totally surprised and really speechless – and for those of you who know me that is almost impossible. I also happened to be on the golf course when I got the call – so that made it an especially good day. And here I am 2 months later surrounded by so many other accomplished and deserving past residents. I am very fortunate and honored to receive this award.

Perhaps Kevin Colgan expressed my feelings best in a congratulatory note that he sent. He said “there is nothing better than being recognized by your peers”. Bill Churchill said the same thing the other day when he received the ASHP Distinguished Leadership Award. And that’s exactly how I feel. No one can better understand the challenges we face in our lives, and our work, than those facing similar circumstances – those colleagues who face the same obstacles and opportunities day after day. This award is a validation that the work I’ve done in my career so far has been worthwhile. So thank you to the past recipients of this award for your vote of confidence.

Today I have the freedom to talk about anything I’d like. I don’t think it’s really important to recap the things I’ve achieved in my career – they haven’t been remarkable – just steady. And, really, I don’t believe it’s all about me. It’s more about those who have helped me to be successful along the way. I’ve been lucky to be around good people – to be in the right place at the right time - and just smart enough not to screw it up. So I’d like to begin by thanking people.

I am so grateful to all of you who have helped and mentored me over the past 30 years. At one point I thought I should just spend the entire 20 minutes thanking people – it would have been easy to do. But you deserve to hear more than that. So suffice it to say thank you to everyone I've worked with at Erie County Medical Center in Buffalo, Deaconess Hospital in Milwaukee, the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee County, PSW, ASHP, and especially my staff at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare. At the risk of leaving some names out I do especially want to thank a handful of individuals who have been especially influential. Dave Zilz, Tom Thielke, Pam Ploetz, Steve Rough, Lynn Boecler, Bill Buerstatte, and Deb Devereaux have all played roles that are more important than most of them know. You know when someone has influenced your life when you ask yourself “what that person would do in this situation”. I also want to thank my brother and sisters and parents. But most importantly I want to thank my daughters, Julie, Kathy and Molly – who, for such young women, have been so understanding, strong, and supportive - and who make everything worthwhile.

I started working when I was 7 years old and in the second grade. My parents were both public school teachers in Buffalo, NY but I attended St. Margaret's - the catholic school in the neighborhood. Several days a week after school I worked at a small Italian grocery store that was owned by my aunt and uncle. (That's when a meat market was a place where you actually went to buy food.) My chores at the store were varied – sorting empty soda bottles for returns, sweeping the sidewalk, scrubbing the wooden floors, and delivering groceries with a wagon. Remember that this was the early 1960's - a time before the chains ran everything. Independent business owners could truly make a go of it if they worked hard enough and knew how to treat customers. Every day they got up at 4AM and went to the produce market. Then returned to open the store by 7AM. They stayed open until 9 at night and then got up the next day to do it all

again – 7 days a week. It was a true family run business. At the time I actually thought I had a real job, but it was just my aunt and uncle babysitting until mom or dad picked me up. Little did I know at the time that I was learning many important life lessons that would have an impact throughout my life. I learned what it means to work hard and put in long hours; what it means to be reliable; how to resolve conflict; how to solve problems on the fly; how to have fun at work; and how to deal honestly with others. Most importantly I learned how to work with people. You see, virtually everyone (employees, customers, vendors, relatives, and friends) who had contact with my aunt and uncle absolutely loved them. They simply had a natural ability to know what to say and do in almost every situation so that the outcome was positive and constructive. I had developed so much respect for them that they could ask me to do anything and I would gladly have done it.

I continued to work at the meat market until I graduated from pharmacy school. By that time I could run that place with one hand tied behind my back. All of those years observing the way my aunt and uncle worked with others had a tremendous influence on the way I approach my work, and the way my career has evolved, and the way I live my life. Because of those early experiences I've come to believe that the single, most important factor to achieving success lies in the way you interact with people. So the remainder of my time will be spent on the subject of effective relationships. And these thoughts are directed primarily to the young leaders here today.

You are the future of our profession and you will be counted upon for direction and leadership by your staff and your superiors. You are already well on your way - by virtue of the fact that you are sitting in this room. Those of us with more experience have an obligation to help you develop your skills so that you can become all that you possibly can be. I feel it's so

important to help young people because of my own experience – those that I’ve worked for have allowed me to take on more responsibility and encouraged me to learn and grow.

Of course it is important for you to be highly productive, to keep up with technology, to increase your clinical knowledge, and to become financially astute. However, the problems you will have to deal with over the course of your career will change, so what’s most important is to prepare yourself to deal with any kind of problem or challenge. And the single most important predictor of success revolves around your relationships with others. If you think about it, as a manager or leader in any position, you are only as effective as the people who work for you. So to be successful you must make them feel good about coming to work every day. And think about it further - almost every person that you respect, and has achieved great things, possesses great people skills. Trust me - if you can develop those skills (and you can develop them if you don’t have them) then everything else falls into place.

Let me read the first two paragraphs in the book “Working with Emotional Intelligence” by Daniel Goleman:

“The rules for work are changing. We’re being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other. This yardstick is increasingly applied in choosing who will be hired and who will not, who will be let go and who retained, who passed over and who promoted.

These rules have little to do with what we were told was important in school; academic abilities are largely irrelevant to this standard. The new measure takes for granted having

enough intellectual ability and technical know-how to do our jobs; it focuses instead on personal qualities, such as initiative and empathy, adaptability and persuasiveness. This is no passing fad.....”

He then goes on to clearly document and articulate the importance of these skills. And although this book was written 10 years ago, it applies today as much as ever, and I think you all must read it.

So having said that great people skills is critical to success, here are my nine priorities on developing relationships with others. Much of this is common sense, and you’ve heard it before – I’m just the messenger here. (And this is all with apologies to the people who work for me and my residents because I know you’ve heard this all before).

1. Treat everyone with respect. Regardless of how difficult or contentious the person or situation, it is critical to truly respect the other person. Learn to disagree without being disagreeable. Never demean another person – to their face or behind their back.
2. Learn to listen and don’t be defensive. Listen to what is important to the other person before telling them what is important to you. In fact, at times you might never get to say what is important to you - but consider it like money in the bank. The respect and good will you generate is priceless.
3. Be sincere in dealing with others. You can’t just go through the motions and check things off of a list when trying to improve a relationship. Most people can see through a façade and know when you don’t really care. If you are truly sincere it shows and it makes all the difference.

4. Be patient with others. Give people a chance to catch on and adapt to changes. Not everyone has the same capacity for learning or mastering new skills. Give them the benefit of the doubt and a chance to develop their depth of knowledge in whatever they are assigned to do. This is how you develop a diamond in the rough.
5. Meet NEW people. Constantly network and go out of your way to meet someone new. And not just at professional meetings, but back at your work place. I know that getting to know new people is often a difficult thing for some – especially young people – but you can learn how to do this. You have a tremendous group of people to help you if you just look around the room. Remember, you can't make a relationship better until you have a relationship with someone to begin with!
6. Get to know those around you better. One of the things that my staff loves more than anything is when I ask them about their families, their vacations, their hopes and their dreams. They could care less if I ask them about the Pyxis upgrade or the new computer system. But when I ask them about their kids, their eyes light up. Frankly, I wasn't very good at this when I started out, but I'm getting better.
7. Help others to be successful; especially young people. Help them develop their skills and confidence. Often just taking a few minutes to talk to them makes a lasting impression. This applies regardless of your age. They need it and appreciate it more than you know.
8. Learn good people skills from those with bad people skills. Consciously think about how you DON'T want to be like him or her. I'm sure that as I've gone through some of my points over the last few minutes some individuals came to mind that you wish were just a bit different when it comes to working with others. For some reason it's easier to see those faults in others than in ourselves – so try to learn from their mistakes.

9. Finally, take care of yourself. Find an appropriate balance between your professional and personal life. There are times when you can spend more time on your professional responsibilities, and other times when family or personal obligations take precedence. To be very effective you have to do what's right for you at the time. And if you don't have a good relationship with yourself, it's going to be more difficult to have them with others.

Now that you've heard some of my philosophy for relationship building, there's one final, important point I want to make. I decided to focus my remarks on this topic today because despite the fact that there is widespread agreement on the importance of people skills and relationships, we all continue to witness and live with the problems created by poor relationships. Every one of us needs to do a much better job in this area of our work and our lives. I hope my thoughts help you to be more successful in your relationships.

And since this award is given for achieving success, I'd like to end with a favorite saying that keeps success in perspective: "Success is getting what you want, but happiness is wanting what you get."

I wish all of you great success in your careers and years of happiness in your lives. Thank you.