

**ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN CAREER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**  
**“Getting to where you want to be without knowing where that is”.....**

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Thank you for the opportunity of speaking to you today—I hope that this short time that we have together might provide some insight, a bit of humor and I hope... a challenge.

Let me first tell you about my “trip” as I refer to it. Like many of us, at the beginning I knew that I wanted to be a physician. Just a physician ---not a surgeon, not an internist, not a pediatrician.

As an undergraduate, I worked really hard at surviving physics, advanced math courses—you know of what I am speaking. I knew that I wasn’t a genius—I had to study and really work at it. So I made it to medical school with a BS degree in Microbiology

After Medical school I moved to UNC in Chapel Hill, to begin another stage in my career. I believe we are goal oriented ....OK my next stop will be this, the next one that and so forth. In my residency program, I had to make some tough decisions. Would I stay in academic medicine or go into private practice?

Many of us have functioned like a train—first stop is this goal, second stop is this objective, etc. What we fail to realize along the way is that the scenery may change.

I realized that I couldn’t wait to get out of the lab to the clinics or in the hospital to see patients. I liked the science but not as much as I loved the patients. But I had doubts. So many times I tried to reconfigure my future. Those doubts continued after I had been in private practice for awhile, but one day driving into work and making rounds , I felt secure in the decision that I had made. I knew I had made the right decision ----- I became a much happier person and probably a better doctor.

It was during this time that HIV/AIDS became a major player in the arena of Infectious Diseases. I was the first physician in the community (to the best of my knowledge) to care for a patient with AIDS and I became an “expert” –we were all experts at that time. Nobody knew anything ..it was tough, it was heart wrenching but I was with all the other ID people in the country on the cutting edge. We didn’t have a lot of evidence based medicine to help us. You know the history and today we have the benefit of great medicines and lots of science to guide us in the care of our patients.

It was the HIV epidemic that really drew me into the world of organized medicine and health policy. Kentucky like most states, had issues surrounding testing, notification, reporting and the entire concept of dealing with an infectious disease about which we knew very little. As a very young and inexperienced member of the Lexington delegation to the state medical association one fall, the fun began---I learned what can happen when the democratic process is allowed to function and when you LISTEN to people and they listen to you.

Subsequently I went on to become the president of KMA and now after learning the ropes ( member and chair of the Council on medical Service) in the AMA, a member of the AMA BOT.

It was the combination of knowing medicine and learning how health policy/politics work together that really made sense for me. Today, it is not AIDS that gets my juices going ,as much as it is the uninsured in this country (all 48 million of them) along with a Medicaid system and a Medicare system that are falling apart. Did I really know where I was headed? Did I know that actually a disease known as AIDS would be the “jump start” for a career in organized medicine and health policy along with an opportunity to be engaged at the national level in matters of significant health policy ??...NO. It was doing what I loved, and getting quite passionate and verbal about it.

Quint Studer in his book “Hardwiring Excellence”, entitles his first chapter “ My Journey to becoming a Fire Starter”. And he dedicates his book to fire starters everywhere. Everyone sitting in this room can and should become a “fire starter”. And many of you already are—although you may not know it.

So here are some suggestions, observations, and recommendations for us to reflect upon today...

- Number 1: The first step is to be passionate about what you do----If you don't love what you are doing you may be in the wrong place.

I have just returned from my first trip to the Master's golf tournament. I must tell you I am not a golfer, but I am married to one and by osmosis I have starting learning a bit of the jargon and some basic rules, but I couldn't hit a golf ball if I tried. When you listen to the announcers and read about the players, you get a true understanding about how INTENSE these professional golfers are. They are passionate. That intensity results in incredible focus and an energy that is almost palpable. If they lose that focus, they miss the putt.

In Augusta, the weather although sunny was cool with a brisk wind periodically. The colors of the azaleas and the lush green courses made it beautiful. One of the traditions (and they have quite a few very old ones) is to eat pimento cheese sandwiches. It was the worst pimento cheese I have ever tasted and served on white bread. They boast that it is the same recipe that have used since the Masters began! And it tasted that old also. What they really need is someone to be passionate about the food.

- Number 2: Be willing to be a problem solver.

You see a problem, you say that needs to be fixed or we need to know why that happens. It has been said that “big problems are an opportunity to grow”. Do not accept the status quo. As with the bad sandwiches, tradition frequently needs to be tossed out the window. When someone says “we always do it like this” the response should be it is time for a change perhaps just a small one to see how this goes, or what we can change to make things better. :CHANGE IS GOOD”!!! But in order to solve a problem you have to know what you are talking about. Don't let yourself off the hook....you may not get the answer right the first time but I guarantee that you are going to be a lot further along than

the person who hasn't even given it thought. Stepping up and saying, I would like to give that a try, not only pushes you to produce, but it actually makes you grow and learn.

- Number 3: It's not about what people think about you.

..... so often women assume that they have to be just like everybody else, and downplay whatever is unique about them. I think it is just the opposite. IN some ways what I have accomplished in my career, has been precisely because I have been different. I have expressed different opinions, and on occasion have been outspoken. It was the AIDS epidemic that made me realize that the message I delivered that was based on sound judgment and basic knowledge, achieved more than just emotional concern based on fear and paranoia expressed by many of my physician colleagues. BUT YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

Along with that goes the ability to withstand the criticism when your decisions or interpretation of something turns out to be wrong. Being a leader or an agent of change requires that you from time to time be assertive and that can be done graciously and with respect.

However, there are limits. I have a colleague on a committee who whenever she doesn't like the way the discussion is going simply and if she knows that she probably has a friend or two who agree, will simply move to table the discussion . With that action no further discussion can take place. What she is doing is forcing her opinion on the rest of the group which is not appropriate. That is not gracious or respectful.

- Number 4: To mainstream or not to mainstream? That is the question.

It is so great to be mentored, it is important to participate in groups that are supportive, BUT always be sure that you have positioned yourself in such a way that you don't get sidetracked or looking at an issue from only one side of the debate.

This has been an issue for women in the past—the example: The Women Physician Caucus at the AMA. The issues affecting women are the same things for men—or at least they should be. Women in leadership represent both genders.

Mainstreaming puts you where you need to be—right in the middle of things.

- Number 5: Be prepared.

I think that many women always have a little twinge of thinking that maybe somebody else is smarter or has the secret formula for reaching the right decision. I know that has always applied to me, and probably always will in the future. It is that sensation for lack of a better term, that when I run for an office or make a presentation to the AMA BOT, I am the best prepared person in the room on that particular topic.

One of my mentors many years ago told me when I expressed my anxiety about presenting in a conference...You are the best prepared person in the room, IF you have done the reading and the studying. OK-that is pretty clear!!!

As an example: when running for the AMA BOT (which by the ways is the most competitive election in the AMA HOD) you under go a series of interviews in a variety of

settings and they can and are very intimidating. In order to prepare myself for the process I literally sat down and put down about 40 questions that I knew I had to be able to answer when under fire. I read and put together answers. I survived the process. As my father used to say, “you can’t just run off at the mouth”!

- Number 6: It is fine to “stir the pot” and point out all the problems, BUT be prepared to offer a solution.

This is one of the most irritating things for me when I am working with a group . We all know who these people are—they are the complainers and the whiners, but they don’t have a solution. They “stir the pot” but fail to help in the solution.

When you attempt to provide some insight or planning as to how to resolve an issue, you are the leader and the thinker.

It may not be the final solution that everyone agrees upon, but it is a starting point, makes people aware that you have thought about it and were willing to make a recommendation.

You gain a lot of credibility and respect for in fact “sticking your neck out”. If you are the fire starter –the one pushing the issue, the one saying lets think differently about this, you must be ready to offer up the first step on how to resolve the problem, or create a new program.

You can’t get the fire started then walk away!!!!

- Number 7: Be Competitive, not threatening.

To succeed you have to want to win—the degree, the job or position. However, that has to be coupled with being able to stand up for yourself in a carefully thought out way, not in a reactive way but in a pro-active way.

Let me give you an example: in my final year in private practice, at my annual review, I was advised that not only was I going to have my salary reduced, but I would lose one staff person. ‘Do more with this and for less’. At that point , I realized that I would not and could not continue to work in an environment where the value that I brought to the practice was not appropriately recognized. I looked at my options. I didn’t react immediately. I thought to myself—I am too young to retire, but I qualify based on my duration in the practice. What if I suggested that I go part-time...great idea!! Their idea of part-time was one less day in the office but take your call as usual. It was then that I began to explore my options here at the University and the rest is history. It, by the way was a very smart move, and I am grateful to those individuals that made it happen.

Prior to my leaving, I was asked to come before the directors to discuss issues and what they might do to encourage me to stay. It was then that I pointed out to them that they had done a very poor job of utilization of more senior and experienced physicians who wanted to back off or step down a bit but yet could make a HUGE contribution to the bottom line. Subsequently, they have lost some excellent physicians.

Trust your instincts, always project confidence, and own you success. This is how it is done.

Shut out the negative noise (which by the way, most of which we create ourselves). If you have based your decisions and recommendations on sound, solid, evidence based issues, have confidence in your decisions and own your success. This isn't an easy thing to do—but you get better with practice.

I have another confession to make—when I first went into practice, and my first review came around which included my salary for the next year, I remember telling the individual handing me the information when I saw the salary quote—“thank you, I didn't that I was worth that much!” NOT GOOD!

Classically women don't like to talk about money but we are getting better at it. Don't view wanting to get paid well as inelegant or “not classy”. Men make decisions based on the bottom line, why shouldn't we.

- Number 8: A good leader is a great listener.

I have two grandchildren—one is 5 and the other is 3. One morning, after I had been doing a lot of traveling for the AMA, the youngest one came into the room while I was dressing. I asked him where he was going that day and he said- Kindercare. Then I asked him where his brother was going and he said to Montessori, of his grandfather he said to school ( he is a college professor) and Nana? Where is she going – and he replied “to Chicago”. A frequent destination of mine for the AMA. He had been listening.

By listening to what others say, you may be able to find a way to blend ideas or concepts into how you might need to get something accomplished. Frequently we get ourselves “boxed in” because no one “gives in” and then you have what appears to be an irresolvable issue. A huge mistake that I am guilty of along with probably everyone else in the room, is to be thinking to myself while someone else is talking or explaining something ...along the lines of how am I going to make a rebuttal to that in order to defend my position? Instead I should be thinking how we could somehow use ideas from multiple sources to resolve an issue. We are frequently not good listeners—a good listener is a great leader. Really listening is hard work—we hear what we want to hear or we superimpose “group think” into the process.

I recently had the opportunity of spending time at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. This was an executive leadership program and superb. We listened and worked from 8:30 am until about 6pm daily and let me tell you—I had forgotten how hard it is to sit still all day long. One of the sessions was on Negotiating Productive Agreements. Another session was on Executive Decision making. I learned some very important things: a). once people have made a public commitment, they may be reluctant to change their view even when given new information b.) we paradoxically express more confidence in estimates of events we are less familiar with than with the events we are the most familiar with c). events that are vivid , easily imagined or consistent with memory structures are judged to be more likely than equally probable events.... just to name a few. It is how we listen and interpret what people are saying that is so important.

But you may ask—what do you do if they aren't listening to you? You are still listening to them, and you can determine what they really want or think they want. It is call their “BATNA” –best alternative negotiating assessment. Frequently you can get them to your side of the argument if you understand what it is they must actually have or need.

- Number 9: “When you want to feel warm all over, don’t acquire things. Head for the aisle marked ‘experience’. (Jean Chatzky, Money Magazine Editor)

The pursuit of money and the pursuit of happiness often get equated, especially in our success-addled culture. If you are going to spend your money in search of greater happiness, you’re better off buying experiences instead of things.

In a recent on-line article Jean Chatzky pointed out several things we all should be doing and feeling good about it.

1. Follow your everyday bliss—focus on the things that happen that make us happy not the things that are negative ( avoid feeling bad about the jerk in traffic ) –think about lovely it is to be outside even if for a few minutes to feel the sunshine.
2. Savor the warm-up : savor the planning. “anticipation is where the greatest pleasure lies”
3. Do something new
4. Do something selfless
5. Two Princeton University professors (one an economist and the other a psychologist) studied 900 women. The women were asked to reconstruct their previous day’s activities and their feelings about them. Of the 16 activities ranked, work was by far the one that took up most of the time yet work ranked second from the bottom in terms of the positive emotions it created. This doesn’t have to be. How many of you have been so immersed in your reading, or bench work that you forgot to eat or go to the bathroom? This probably doesn’t happen every day but if it only happens occasionally you are most fortunate.

- Number 10: Put yourself first.

This is very difficult for women to do. We are by nature care-givers. We feel guilty when we say NO---people will think ill of us. BUT we all have to set boundaries. We can’t be all things to all people all of the time.

This is so easily said, but we don’t put it into practice.

We fail to keep our health maintenance up to date—we believe in prevention, RIGHT? Keep a calendar and live by it---make that appointment far enough in advance that nothing interferes with it.

For the sake of our careers and our many roles, let us do a better job of caring for ourselves, otherwise we can’t take care of those who need us now and in the future.

So; be a fire starter, stir the pot, and listen. You might be surprised at how great the trip is!!