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THE CLINICAL
PHARMACIST'S
GUIDE TO
CAREER
DEVELOPMENT

Career Planning

Planning and Having a Successful Career

ACCP CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERIES / Book 1

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Career Planning

Planning and Having a Successful Career

Without a strategic plan for your career, you will be in a reactive mode most of the time. External forces, not you, will determine your success. YOU MUST TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER.

The first step to career planning is to understand your biggest asset—YOU! What makes you “tick” as a pharmacist? What are your values? What are your interests? What are your passions? How does your personality impact your career choices?

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Your professional values are best described as the things you consider most important in your work. Your values are the guides by which you live your life and the reason behind the priorities you set. Your values are the criteria you use when making decisions. For example, you may decide to move 1500 miles away from your home to pursue a specialty residency, whereas your classmate may only consider training opportunities within a 50-mile radius of his or her home.



There are four steps in career planning.

- **Understanding yourself** (your values, interests, and passions).
- **Researching career options** (talking to people in positions that appeal to you).
- **Obtaining the skills and credentials** you need to succeed.
- **Learning new skills** for a changing workplace.

One of the cardinal rules of strategic career planning is that your career choices must be consistent with your values. You risk poor performance and daily unhappiness when you ignore this principle. A pharmacist who highly values collegial interaction with other pharmacists will not thrive in a private practice environment where he or she does not interact with other pharmacists. On the other hand, someone who values patient contact may not be happy working in an intensive care environment where many of the patients cannot communicate directly with the pharmacist.

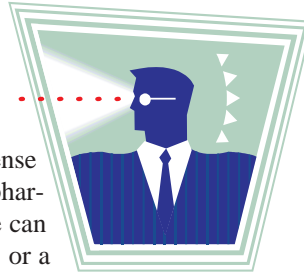
Determine if your personal values link with your professional responsibilities. What areas of pharmacy and health care interest you most? Are you drawn to articles on alternative medicine in the lay press? Do you keep up with trends in managing human immunodeficiency virus better than anyone you know? What job responsibilities do you have that you would do even if you did not get paid for them?

- Giving advice to patients about their diabetes management?
- Teaching pharmacy students?
- Participating in patient care rounds?
- Being a member of the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee?
- Researching drug information questions?
- Writing newsletter articles?

How important is it to you that a patient's confidentiality is kept? Could you work in an organization that skirts or ignores medical privacy rules? Will paying patients and indigent patients have equal access to clinical pharmacy services in your organization? If not, will you work there? If you are asked to upcode drug charges to increase reimbursement, will you refuse to do so or go along with the flow? All of these scenarios cause each of us to reflect on our personal value system. When making career decisions, look for conflicts between your own personal values and values of both an organization and its leaders. If conflicts are apparent, avoid that organization. When conflicts arise, go back to your personal values. They will not change if they truly are important to you.

Interests about which you are passionate are those areas in which you are willing to go "above and beyond". Remember that health fair that you volunteered to work on your day off? Is contributing to public health a burning passion of

yours? If you can identify your professional interests and passions, you are well on your way to identifying a rewarding and successful career path in pharmacy.



Success as a pharmacist begins with a personal sense of what pharmacy is all about. Why do we need pharmacists with today's technology? What difference can a pharmacist make in the life of a child, a mother, or a grandfather? Who would be hurt if you did not go to work tomorrow? Something in pharmacy must create passion and excitement in you for you to enjoy your job and plan a career around various jobs.

Think about the ideal job of a pharmacist. Write your description down on paper and discuss it with your friends. What are the fundamental values underpinning your ideal job? Once you identify values important to you, develop a career plan that incorporates these values. Values help form a vision. When you have a clear vision, you can define goals and then objectives and, finally, plans for realizing your ambitions.

WRITE YOUR CAREER VISION DOWN ON PAPER. Then use it to anchor your career decisions.

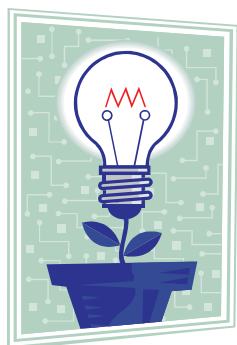
PERSONALITY AND VALUES TOGETHER EXERT A STRONG INFLUENCE ON CAREER CHOICES

Are you an introvert or an extrovert? If you are an extrovert (who gains energy from dealing with people), you probably will do well in an environment in which you have constant patient contact (perhaps in a patient-focused community pharmacy). In contrast, an introvert (whose energy is sapped by people) will probably retreat and avoid contact after a while. An introvert may actually avoid establishing services that deal directly with patients.

Take time to critically examine your strengths and weaknesses as well as your personal characteristics. Every pharmacist has prepared an "interview" answer to the question: "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" When it comes to career planning, you need to be brutally honest.

<i>Rate yourself in the following areas:</i>	Yes	No	Sometimes
• Organizational skills (Do you meet all your deadlines without a problem?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Problem-solving (Do you go to your supervisor often?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Coordinating the activities of others (Do others come to you for direction or advice?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Persuasiveness (Have you been able to convince everyone to change the way they treat a certain diagnosis?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Writing (Have you ever finished that case report?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Verbal presentation (Do you volunteer to give talks?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Juggling responsibilities (Do you comfortably wear several hats at once?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Independence (Do you identify what needs to be done before it is assigned?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Computer savvy (Are you the one people go to when the system is down or an error message shows up?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Knowing your strengths and weaknesses will help you decide on a plan of action within your lifelong career. Once you have honestly assessed your values, interests, personality, strengths, and weaknesses, you can begin to explore the career options in pharmacy and try to match what you have found. Knowing educational and other requirements for your chosen career path allows you to chart a course to get there.



CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN YOUR CURRENT POSITION

Pharmacy, like health care in general, is changing and changing fast. Whatever aspect of pharmacy excites you to learn new skills is great. Learning new skills is

key to career satisfaction. Pharmacists are usually attentive to detail and work well within a defined structure. Yet, these same attributes can limit risk taking and learning something new. Accept new assignments. Ask for new assignments. Create new assignments. If you are an inpatient pharmacist, propose to create continuity of care programs; then start a new clinic. If pharmacy administration has been your home for several years, think about developing a business plan for a new service from a clinician's perspective. Of course, many opportunities exist outside traditional pharmacy settings. Try to link your passions with your career. If helping children occupies your volunteer time, investigate children's health needs such as immunization clinics. Attend an immunization certificate program.

FLEXIBILITY. The willingness to take a risk and try something new will help you adapt to inevitable change.

HAVE A CAREER IN PHARMACY, NOT A JOB

You have chosen pharmacy as a career, and have pursued this career for many years. Write down and track your ultimate career goals. If your career goal is to lead an industry research and development group and its clinical research program, analyze each job opportunity in relationship to this goal. If your career goal is to be a hospital clinical coordinator, look for jobs that help you grow in hospital-wide initiatives. By keeping your long-term career perspective up front, you will look for new opportunities within every job. You also will avoid certain jobs even though they may offer a better salary or benefits. A career is more than going to work every day and putting in your time. A career is satisfying because you devote extra time and effort to nonjob professional activities. A career benefits from professional organization, work and volunteerism. A career perspective also can help you decide when it is time to move on to the next job.

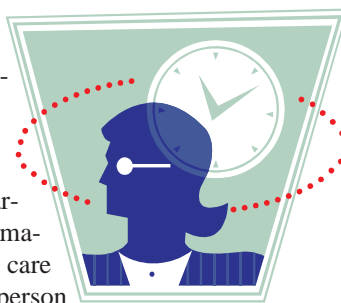
DOCUMENT YOUR VALUE, FOLLOW THROUGH, AND BE PRODUCTIVE

We have all heard it. We have all said it: "pharmacists must document the value of their services." The same is true when managing your own career. How will you show a potential employer your value and your skill set? If you are an

ambulatory pharmacist with experience in clinical management, do you have data on the percentage of your patients within target range international normalized ratio and the number of patients with bleeds both major and minor? Can you demonstrate your ability to manage patients using a 20-minute scheduling block? If you are a staff clinical pharmacist, keep documentation from audits and quality assurance meetings that document your personal value to the team.

Pharmacists usually keep their own professional portfolios. *The portfolio includes documentation of projects, outcomes of new program initiatives, summaries of clinical care statistics, copies of performance evaluations, and letters of commendation.* Keep your portfolio up to date by updating your resume at least yearly and reviewing the portfolio items.

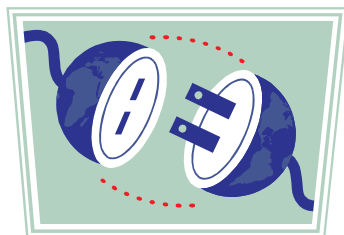
When a new opportunity appears, you will be ready to clearly demonstrate why you are qualified to take on new responsibilities. You also will be too valuable to lose.



Productivity—how do you measure it for a pharmacist? If you have a choice between two pharmacists applying to work with you as an intensive care decentralized pharmacist, would you choose a person who describes the job in number of hours per day or who describes the job in numbers of patients cared for each day and participation in patient care teams, committee meetings, and nursing inservices? Pharmacy, like all of health care, is a business. To be successful, you have to measure the outcomes of your work. Research-oriented academics usually measure their productivity as numbers of funded grants and published papers. Pharmacy managers may measure their personal productivity in meeting budget goals and drug error rates. Productivity demands that you set goals for your own practice and career. *These goals should be measurable. They should be quantifiable.* Do not be afraid to state your productivity goals in writing. Then review your progress in meeting your goals yearly when you update your career portfolio.

START NETWORKING

You cannot and will not succeed alone. Contacts made in school, residency programs, and professional organizations will prove invaluable. Through these contacts, you will gain mentors and become a mentor yourself. Likewise, net-



working in nonpharmacy circles is vital. Your interests may draw you to a local environmental group or a homeless shelter. Whatever your interests, join some groups and, most important, **BE ACTIVE**.

Networking requires time. It also requires you to reach out to others. Just as you will ask others for help and advice, they will ask you. People appreciate helpful people. Pharmacists are used to helping others in their jobs. But the real test of your networking skills is assessing how many professional colleagues you have that never worked directly with you in a job. Networking is key to learning what else is going on in the profession. It is also great fun and provides lifelong friendships!

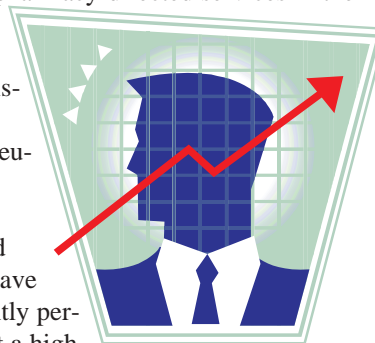
BE A TEAM PLAYER

The old stereotype of an independent pharmacist working alone is long gone. Every pharmacist today works as part of team. So learning to be a team player is critical. Pharmacists serve on and lead a variety of teams. The team literature is worth reading. It will help you understand the natural stages of growth all teams go through. So when your team suddenly breaks down, you can step back and help get the team back on track. Today's pharmacy students are learning more through team projects than ever before. They are even learning that team grades can supercede individual grades. Likewise, every health care organization will first evaluate the effectiveness of the whole team, and then, perhaps, its members. So whether you are a staff pharmacist team member for pediatrics or a management team member for ambulatory services, be a team member. Sometimes you will lead the team. Sometimes you will follow another team leader. Both roles are important to your career.

PERFORMANCE SUCCESS

One of the biggest complaints people in any career have when discussing their performance success is that they never seem to be able to catch up with all of their job responsibilities. Pharmacists are at particular risk for finding themselves in situations that hinder their performance success because of so many opportunities for involvement inside and outside the workplace (e.g., professional organizations and community involvement).

In the pharmacy profession, it is hard to identify “only” a few professionals who have achieved performance success during their careers. In every aspect of our pharmacy careers, we can all name colleagues, supervisors, and mentors who have consistently achieved success and recognition for their hard work and endeavors. In academia, this person may be the faculty member who has received funding from the National Institutes of Health and consistently has many publications annually. For the pharmacy clinician, this person may be the one who has developed and managed several pharmacy-directed services in the hospital while still maintaining an active teaching career. For the staff pharmacist, this may be the pharmacist who not only fulfills distributive functions, but also develops several hospital policies regarding the use of pharmaceutical products and devices.



Regardless of whom these persons may be and what their different career paths are, they all have one thing in common—the ability to consistently perform not only at the expected level, but also at a higher level that they have dictated for themselves. By setting their career goals and standards higher than what is expected, these individuals are essentially guaranteed to succeed! All of us can learn from these “high achievers,” and we should realize that their success has just as much to do with this work mentality and dedication as it does with their natural abilities, training, and knowledge.

We also can learn how successful people face work on a day-to-day basis. Most of these individuals are goal-oriented. They also tend to stay focused on that goal, whether it is achieving tenure in an academic setting or becoming director of the pharmacy in the hospital setting. By continually staying focused on their career goals, these individuals can better navigate the tasks that frequently bog others down and distract them from more meaningful assignments.

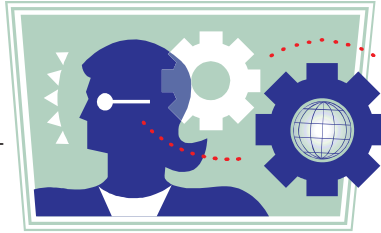
Individuals who achieve performance success maintain positive attitudes, even when things do not happen as they would like. They are focused on responsibilities at hand, and do not allow their emotions to go unchecked when times are stressful or when disappointment occurs.

It has been said that “luck favors the prepared mind,” and this is what you will see if you examine the careers and lives of pharmacists and others who have

achieved performance success. They have prepared themselves not only through education, but also through setting goals, focusing on tasks at hand, and achieving success at a standard higher than what is typically expected.

SET CAREER GOALS

The first key to performance success is to set career goals for yourself and to develop a career plan for achieving them. The first thing to remember, however, is to be realistic with career goals and the time frame that you have given yourself to achieve them. For example, it is unlikely that a junior faculty member will achieve a position as a dean of a college of pharmacy in a 10-year period. A more realistic goal is that the faculty member will have already received promotion and tenure to the Associate level, and will be close to achieving full professor status.



Setting career goals is important because it gives us a map, so to speak, on how we can direct our day-to-day work activities to allow us to better achieve our goals in the most directed way. Often, it is necessary to identify several career goals, and to divide them into short- and long-term goals. For example, a pharmacy director may have a short-term goal of honing his management skills and increasing staff involvement and productivity. However, his long-term goal is to move into a senior administrative position in the hospital, which he works on through relationships he develops, committee involvement, and receiving consistently high performance and satisfaction scores by his staff. By dividing goals into short- and long-term categories, the individual who achieves performance success is directed toward completing short-term goals, but never allows distraction from long-term goals to occur in the process.

PRIORITIZE DAILY WORK ACTIVITIES

We have all had days at the office or hospital when it seems that all we do is work on small insignificant tasks, rather than focus on the larger more important needs, such as caring for patients, teaching students and trainees, or writing grants or papers. Although it is not always possible to avoid these “wasted” days entirely, there are ways that we can learn to protect ourselves from this scenario.

By prioritizing our work activities, either through a scoring system (most to least important) or a numerical system, we are less likely to get caught up in the less important issues that come across our desks on a daily basis. At the end of the day, we are going to be more successful if we have accomplished all of our most important tasks, rather than all of the least important tasks. By ranking or scoring tasks by their level of importance toward your career goal, you have avoided working like crazy but finding nothing of real importance accomplished when all is said and done.

Mission statements may be overall guiding lights for a department or an institution. At the same time, work teams often have their own goals, which are more specific than the global mission statement. As a member of the work team, a pharmacist can link his or her own activities back to the team goals.

Another way to prioritize the work environment is to allow yourself protected time that is not cancelled or interrupted. For example, the pharmacy clinician may designate the first hour of the day to reading scientific journals to keep abreast of topics. You also can designate less important tasks to certain times of the day (e.g., answering voicemail and e-mail messages only at the end of the day).

USE TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Fortunately, in today's society, there are numerous time management tools to help us organize our time more efficiently. From planning systems to calendars to handheld computers and even corporate seminars, there is a method for increasing the productivity of every type of person. The first step to becoming more efficient is to pick the system that works for you, learn how to master it, and explore all its capabilities.

One critical goal in time management is devoting a certain amount of time at the beginning of the day for planning and prioritizing tasks and responsibilities. The practice of making lists, schedules, and plans are critical to learning how to manage your time efficiently without getting buried with less important tasks.

For important tasks and responsibilities, always allow yourself a sufficient amount of time for com-



pletion. Individuals who do not allot time realistically will find that they are never able to complete goals or tasks on time, but rather are working fervently down to the wire or continually asking for extensions for projects. In addition, avoid the temptation to answer e-mail or voicemail messages, or even to answer the telephone (if at all possible in your work environment) when working on your most important career responsibilities.

Learning how to limit additional tasks and responsibilities may be one of the hardest things to do in the work environment and also one of the most important career changes or decisions you can make. On one hand, we see it as an honor that our colleagues or supervisors have entrusted us to higher levels of responsibility. On the other hand, additional commitments can be the biggest time killers and obstacles that we face in achieving our ultimate career goals.



The pharmacy profession is filled with avenues for committee, professional organization, academic, and community involvement. Although involvement in these arenas is important to keep us well rounded and involved in our profession, it also has the potential to be a deterrent from fulfilling other more important career goals.

In situations when you are overloaded on the job, it is in your best interest to decline tactfully the offer to accept additional responsibilities or projects. Although you may not be able to turn down a supervisor who asks you to take on additional responsibilities, it is important that he or she understands your workload. Meet with your supervisor to discuss your career plan and to delineate involvement opportunities that will propel your performance success and those that may hinder it. Often, an individual is working diligently and completing multiple tasks without realizing that none of the completed tasks are important for success on the job. By meeting with your supervisor and going over these issues, it is less likely that he or she will ask you to be involved in projects that will not be important for the evolution of your career.

As far as extracurricular involvement is concerned, it is much easier to say no in the first place than to be unable to invest the time and energy needed to do a good job. That way, you avoid looking bad in front of colleagues for performing poorly due to other commitments, or neglecting your more important job responsibilities while you concentrate on other projects. If it is something you would like to be involved in, but are too busy to commit to at the moment, explain that your career plan at this time does not allow you to take on any additional responsibilities, but that you will be interested in participating the following year when your schedule will be more flexible.

BALANCE HOME AND JOB

The most important concept for performance success is ensuring that you do not neglect yourself in the process. By keeping yourself entertained through exercise, hobbies, and involvement with family and friends, you are allowing your mind and body to take a well-deserved break from the activities of daily working, thereby rejuvenating and preparing yourself for more work the next day. By saving time for yourself, you avoid burnout and career disenchantment, and at the same time you encourage your own performance success.



From the leader in clinical pharmacy



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