

What My Son Doesn't Know About Leadership but Taught Me Anyway

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My most prized possession is a four-inch tall Despicable Me figurine, aptly named “Carl,” which my son gave me around two years ago. At the time, I had developed appendicitis, was admitted to the hospital for about a week, and received treatment with antibiotics. The plan was to treat the infection until my abscess subsided and then remove my appendix a few months later after it had healed and the infection contained. Unbeknownst to me at the time, treatment with antibiotics was (and is) increasingly becoming an acceptable alternative for patients with uncomplicated acute appendicitis.^{1,2} At the time however, I wished an appendectomy was performed right away just to get things over with.

While I was in the hospital, I was visited by my wife and her family (my family resides in Utah). My kids initially did not see me, perhaps because my wife and I did not know how they would react to seeing me confined to a bed, but after being in the hospital for a couple of days, they came to visit. When they did come, it was a shock to them to see all the tubes and monitors I was connected to and to listen to the physicians when they entered the room. I believe this was shocking more so for my son, so as a reward for being “brave,” my wife took both of them to the toy store. The next time they came to visit, my son brought the Despicable Me toy with him. When he entered the room, I thought he was going to show me what he got, but instead he told me that he had used his own money to buy this for me and wanted me to keep it. My wife confirmed this. I was speechless. He never had done something like this before!

As heartwarming as this story may be, and while my son can certainly give, he can also take away (opening my Star Wars figures from their original packaging comes to mind). However, he has his moments, and this one reminds me of his selflessness and compassion for others, which challenges me to be the same. But why am I telling you this? What relevance does this story have to pharmacy, or to this Journal? I believe that this short story reflects some attributes of leadership traits

and I believe that these, or more importantly the pursuit of these traits, can be applied to the advancement of pharmacy practice. So my son is a leader? Well, not quite, or maybe not just yet...

In the book *The 9 Virtues of Exceptional Leaders: Unlocking Your Inner Potential* by N. Karl Haden and Rob Jenkins, virtues that the authors contend are essential for leadership are detailed: humility, honesty, courage, perseverance, hope, charity, balance, wisdom, and justice.³ The main points in this book are: 1) that each virtue is equally important, 2) that each virtue needs to be practiced daily for the duration of one's life, and 3) that each virtue may never be fully obtained or that all virtues may never be obtained at the same time. While my son has certainly not mastered all of these, I do believe he portrayed several of them with this one act:

- Humility: to think about others over himself
- Courage: to walk into the hospital room not knowing what to expect
- Perseverance: to walk back into the hospital room knowing what to expect
- Hope: to believe that things will improve even though they may not look good
- Charity: to serve others by providing for them
- Wisdom: to know when to put aside personal needs for the needs of others

The key to leadership however is in the daily pursuit of these virtues and the continuous attempt towards them as a means to improve not only ourselves, but the organizations and causes we serve. This key to leadership is also key to the advancement of pharmacy practice — a continuous pursuit toward something greater outside of ourselves.

I have been a licensed pharmacist for around twelve years now and an educator for roughly the same period of time. While there are others with much more experience than me, I have seen changes to our profession for the better.

When I graduated from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences in Boston, my career options seemed to be 1) community pharmacy, 2) hospital pharmacy, or 3) residency (with the intent of going into community or hospital practice afterward). There are many more career options for pharmacy school graduates today, and the possibilities seem to be endless (informatics, clinical and regulatory affairs, and veterinary practice, to name a few). More to the point, the ability and scope of entry-level pharmacy school graduates has greatly expanded. The enactment of laws such as Senate Bill 493 here in California, which authorizes all licensed pharmacists to administer vaccines to those three years of age and older as well as to provide smoking cessation, hormonal contraceptive, and travel health services in addition to ordering drug therapy-specific laboratory tests greatly expands our reach and helps to improve patient care. However, advancement in pharmacy practice (particularly when undertaken through the legislative route) is not a straight line. The path is long and arduous and may come with setbacks, but we must believe that things will ultimately improve for the better provided we persist and remain true in our efforts.

Today, this Despicable Me toy sits on my desk at work as a reminder of my son, his actions when I was hospitalized, and what being a leader means. Like many other parents, I am excited to see how my children will continue to grow and develop and to see what path they choose to take in life. Likewise, I am excited to see where the practice of pharmacy will be in the future. Let us all continue to push for the advancement of our profession so that we may better serve the needs of our patients and of the healthcare system and to leave the profession better off than when we entered it for the next generation of pharmacists. We (the practice of pharmacy) can get to this place if we take note of the nine virtues of leadership, practice them daily in our routines, and continuously strive to improve.

Happy reading!



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