

Milton Skolaut Award Remarks
“Lessons on Leadership”
D. Byron May
June 25, 2021

Good afternoon everyone!

First I want to expressing my profound gratitude to the RPD’s and everyone at Duke for selecting me as this year’s recipient of the Milton Skolaut Leadership Award. To say that I am honored and humbled is an understatement!

Let me begin by offering my sincere congratulations to the Duke Residency Class of 2021!

I promise I will not dwell on the circumstances you have faced since early 2020, but no one can dispute that the pandemic made your residency year different, unique, and even more challenging. I am sure you can find other words to describe the past year, but I can tell you with absolute certainty, because you were at Duke, you were given the opportunities to grow and learn in ways that residents in other programs only wish they were able to.

The value of your Duke residency training is something unique and special. You have already joined a network of influencers unlike any other in our profession and one that will yield benefits throughout your career. As my friend and colleague at Campbell, Connie Barnes so often says, “it’s all about relationships!” My friends, you have just front-loaded your relationship network by being part of the Duke pharmacy family.

I thought I would share a little of my journey that has led me to this point. Not surprisingly, it began in pharmacy school at the University of Florida. During my time at UF I developed a passion for teaching, academics, and clinical practice through the instruction of the excellent UF faculty. I came to admire their competence, teaching abilities, and willingness to interact with students outside of the classroom.

For the sake of time I will refrain from the stories of faculty and students interacting ‘socially’ playing intramural sports and sharing an occasional adult beverage, but suffice it to say that the relationships built outside of the classroom were invaluable. It was these faculty mentors that were my initial role models and showed me the joy and satisfaction of what a practitioner-educator was.

Now, to reach that goal, I needed to do two things. First, I had to obtain my PharmD (which at that time was not the primary degree in pharmacy). UF offered my class the option to apply to the transitional PharmD program. At that time, about 30 students from my original class were selected for this program. The second thing I needed was to seek residency training. So, following in the tradition of prior UF graduates, I sought out residency training at one and only one

program, Duke. Even back in those days, that was a risky approach (and certainly not one current graduates would undertake today), but I knew that if I was going to reach my goal of being a “Clinical Pharmacist Faculty Member” then there was only one place to go and with a little (well, probably a lot) of luck, I matched with Duke!

Not only did I match with Duke, but my classmate and current faculty colleague, Steven Davis, matched as well. Together in July of 1988, we embarked on a journey from Gainesville, FL to Durham, NC.

Steve and I, along with 3 others, became the 17th Duke Pharmacy Residency Class. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my friends and residency classmates, Steve Davis, Ingrid Christensen-Snyder, Karen Burge, and Nancy Allen Lapointe (who was the 2017 recipient of this award).

So began my pharmacy career and over 30 years later, here I am back to the place where it all began.

Just like residents do now, the first 2 things I started doing when I began the residency was deciding on a research project and thinking about what my post-residency plans would be. To be honest, I cannot recall what my residency project was (obviously it must not have been that impactful), but I knew that I wanted to do something ultimately leading to an academic career at a School of Pharmacy. For the first 6 months of my residency, I was planning to continue my training in Pediatrics either back at UF or at a specialty program in Florida. I staffed in the Peds satellite working with Chris Rudd, Peds specialist extraordinaire, who was also our RPD and Mary Miller Bell who was the Neonatal ICU specialist. That was one of the most rewarding (and frankly scariest) places for a resident to be in, but knowing that everyone “had your back,” and was always available to answer your questions was reassuring and the key to my survival.

Like many of you I suspect, my plans changed about half-way through my residency when two opportunities coincided. The first was my IM rotation with Richard Drew (the 2019 recipient of this award) and the second was the search for clinical faculty at a new pharmacy school in a place I never heard of. Richard exposed me to “internal medicine and infectious diseases” and the challenges of a patient population that varied from ID to Cards to Renal to GI etc. This coincided with the time that Campbell University College of Pharmacy was looking for a faculty member to teach their charter class and to serve as a preceptor for Internal Medicine.

Well, when fate and opportunity converged, I could not resist and so I threw my name in as a candidate. I was selected to fill the Campbell IM faculty position based at Duke and thus began my career as a faculty member at Campbell - 23 of which were here at Duke. (Coincidentally so did Steve Davis and he was hired to teach IM at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital).

As I reflect on my time at Duke, the best thing about being able to remain at Duke post-residency was that I still was able to work with the outstanding practitioners here who mentored me as a resident.

I cannot name all those at Duke who impacted my career, but I do want to mention a few who have been instrumental in my training (and maybe yours) and laid the groundwork for the wonderful opportunities you enjoy as a Duke Pharmacy Resident and/or Pharmacist.

Jim McAllister, who was the Director of Pharmacy during many of my years here, and the person who asked me to serve as the PGY1 RPD in 1993, and the wonderful team of administrators he assembled, especially Mr. Ed Bailey who was the Business Manager AND the person who set up the relationship for me to remain “Duke employed funded by Campbell”.

For 12 years I had the great honor of being the residency program director succeeding Chris Rudd, who was my RPD, and Austin Lee who was the residency coordinator and ER pharmacist. I had the 2 wonderful residency coordinators who shared my passion for the residency, both former residents, Phoebe Li and Julie Gouveia-Pisano (TJ).

Of course, my longtime mentor, friend and colleague, Richard Drew who I owe a tremendous amount of my success (and on rare occasion a little frustration) to. Those who know Richard understand.

Other outstanding clinicians who have graced the halls of Duke and taught me so much are: Joanne “Bo” Latour, who recently retired after many years of running the MICU. The TPN team of Katherine Trexler and John Murray. As well as Collen Gilbert in Oncology.

Two people who I could spend hours talking about the impact they had here at Duke and on my career are the late Gary Dunham and COL Bill Pickard. Gary was, the predecessor to Jeff Washam in the Cardiac ICU. Jeff as well as Tracy DeWald, were former residents during my time as RPD.

Gary was a man I wish everyone could have known. He was a brilliant, humble man who earned enormous respect from everyone.

The second person was COL Bill Pickard. Bill worked with Richard for the Division of Infectious Diseases and precepted the residents & students in ID. Bill was synonymous with Duke and one of my closet friends. Bill was both the toughest and most gentle person you could ever meet. The passing of these 2 legends was a shock to the Duke family and a loss to our profession. I was blessed that Gary and Bill were my mentors, but also my colleagues as we all served together as Campbell faculty. Incidentally it was Bill’s ID rotation for Campbell where I first met my wife of 28 years who was one of his students. For the record she did NOT do her IM with me...

I know there are others I am overlooking but suffice it to say that the people who I met here at Duke, those who mentored, guided, and advised me have been keys to my success and I have no doubt will be keys to yours.

Let me shift away from history. I'm not going to talk about the challenges facing our profession, for which you are better prepared to face than most, but I will share a few life lessons I have learned over my 30 plus year career in practice and academia. Lessons I believe that have enhanced my leadership skills.

Lesson 1: Relationships

You probably have been told this before, but it is worth repeating, "Duke is a great place to be from!" Recall my comment about relationships and the often-heard phrase 'pharmacy is a small profession.' Although our profession has grown significantly since I graduated, it is still true. Cherish your friendships and relationships because there may be a time when the network you started in pharmacy school and expanded upon here will pay off!

I love often repeated phrases such as "it's not what you know but WHO you know" which I can tell you is very true! I cannot stress enough the importance of relationships and networking.

Lesson 2: Reputation

You are graduating from a place with a tremendous reputation that was built, and expanded upon by the people past and present, those in this room and watching via live stream. A reputation propagated by the current Duke pharmacy leadership and one you have been given the honor of maintaining and spreading. You carry with you more than the respect our profession has bestowed upon you but the additional honor of being a "Duke" pharmacist! So, my advice is to use the professional "capitol" you have now earned and grow your reputation with respect, trust, integrity, and honesty, not only as a professional but as a person. I can tell you from personal experience having those attributes as your reputation whether it is among your friends, colleagues, or patients is invaluable. Should you ever have the desire or privilege of being a leader, be mindful that these characteristics must be earned, and cannot be granted with a leadership position or job title.

Lesson 3: Development

I suspect many of you sooner or later will move into a position of leadership. My advice, no matter how much you think your training may have prepared you to 'lead', your personal/professional growth must have time to develop first. (Refer back to lesson 1.)

Understand that your growth as a 'person and professional' is only beginning. None of this is to say that any of you won't be ready for the next challenge, just know that so much will change when you do make that decision.

Lesson 4: Influences

Besides reputation as previously mentioned, another factor for any success has to do with the mentors, leaders, colleagues, and friends with whom you interact over your career. Not just those who exhibit the positive skills and traits you want to demonstrate, but those who possess the negative traits that you would never hope to emulate.

I believe you can learn as much or more from 'negative' role models as you can from positive ones. That is why of the many books I have read on leadership, success, and positive thinking, it is the books I have on 'failing' that may have been even more valuable to me.

Books such as "The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make by Hans Finzel" or "Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? (and how to fix it) by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic" or "The Power of Failure" by Fran Tarkenton" or "Failing Forward by John Maxwell" just to name a few.

And finally

Lesson 5: Your Team

The real key(s) to being successful lie in who you surround yourself with, what you ask (allow) them to do, and how you encourage thinking and ideas that are different from yours that force you to challenge your assumptions. To do this you must be confident in your strengths and weaknesses and not feel threatened or intimidated by those around you. Be patient as you begin your career, soak up the knowledge and wisdom of everyone you work with and chart your own path for success using a compass created by the positive AND negative 'leaders' you encounter.

Effective, admired, and successful leaders have, in my mind, these things in common. They have earned the titles/position they occupy through accomplishment and achievement (merit). Don't accept a position of responsibility just because someone offers one to you, do so because you have the humility and personal insight to know if YOU are ready to accept that responsibility. Are you aware of your strengths and weaknesses and are you confident enough to surround yourself with people who may challenge you or may even be more qualified than you? Do not be threatened by those people, but instead, embrace and welcome them (to a point anyway). In my humble opinion, that will earn you the trust and respect that is inherent in any "office or position" you hold.

Now I could speak longer on what little I have learned about leadership, but fortunately for you there are many others with far greater wisdom than me. I do, however, want to leave you with a couple of final thoughts.

This is probably familiar to anyone who knew Gary Dunham, but it is worth sharing. Gary used to say, "nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." This is so simple, extremely valuable and worth remembering and repeating.

And finally, a philosophy that I think I heard from a classmate in pharmacy school with a military background but was perpetuated and exemplified by COL Bill Pickard. It is called the “6 P’s” –

Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance!

I hope I didn’t bore you too greatly with my personal journey and lessons for success. I thank you for indulging me and for the honor of bestowing upon me the Milton Skolaut Leadership Award!

Best of luck to you all and Thanks!