

Yen T. Pham

BS Pharm, MBA



Be Persistent and Leave a Footprint

Yen has a unique story to tell, starting with her incredible journey from Vietnam as a child to currently serving in a prominent leadership role in the profession of pharmacy.

Yen is Associate Vice President, Pharmacy Services and Clinical Dietitians, Oregon Health Sciences University Hospital and Clinics, Portland, Oregon. Yen received her BS in Biology and BS in Pharmacy (1997) at the University of Houston. She also completed her MBA in Healthcare Management at the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) School of Medicine, Division of Management.

Yen's advice is: Leave behind a memorable footprint. You can have confidence that you are a great leader when your team functions at a higher level in your absence!

Dear Colleague,



My story is not as typical as other pharmacy leaders. I have not taken a traditional approach to building my career in pharmacy leadership. The journey was not impossible, but it was also not easy. I faced many challenges, opposition, cynicism, and roadblocks. These obstacles never deterred me from my goals and priorities. As such, the challenges helped to build my character, confidence, and the strength I needed for the next level.

Before I tell you my story, let me go back to the beginning. At the age of six, I escaped Vietnam by boat with my father and seven siblings to seek freedom in the United States. We were known as “boat people” or Vietnamese refugees. We were crammed into a small boat with a few hundred other refugees. Food was scarce, and we were provided only bread and water. The ocean journey was long and treacherous. We drifted for three days and two nights before we discovered a small island known as Tarempa, Indonesia. The living conditions in Tarempa were less than ideal. Lack of clean water and poor sanitation resulted in sickness and death among many of our people. After six months, we were evacuated to Galang, Indonesia, in order to avoid a life-threatening tropical typhoon. Galang was considered a temporary safe haven before refugees were processed for resettlement in other countries.

Our family of nine waited for a year and a half to enter the United States. I truly believe this early experience established my core foundation and sustains me now throughout my work and leadership. These adversities taught me the value of being persistent and created a strong determination to prosper. I am reminded of a quote from Jim Watkins: *“A river cuts through rock not because of its power but because of its persistence.”* In fact, possessing this critical trait has propelled me to seek opportunities and find successes throughout my career.

I took a nontraditional route toward a leadership role in pharmacy. After receiving a BS in Pharmacy, I worked as a staff pharmacist in outpatient retail pharmacy. I was promoted to Manager shortly afterward. A year later, I was offered an opportunity to manage a small, family-owned specialty pharmacy. Venturing into specialty pharmacy was my ultimate defining moment and a milestone to jumpstarting my career to pharmacy leadership. Similar to other small, family-owned pharmacies, the pharmacy merged with a larger specialty pharmacy corporation. My curiosity motivated me to learn everything about specialty pharmacy from operations to billing and the complexities of compliance. I credit my success today because of these experiences. After a few years, I found another opportunity and took a position as Pharmacy District Manager for a large retail pharmacy chain.

During my tenure at this company, I was very fortunate to have an excellent manager. She was a great mentor, supportive of me and my career, and a thoughtful leader. I admired her perseverance and work ethic. She had a talent to see the best in people and develop their skills. My approach and leadership styles are patterned after hers. I learned to take a proactive approach in everything I set out to do. Although my accomplishments and leadership skills put me on the list to be the next Regional Vice President, I was at a point in my career where I needed and wanted to learn different things as well as welcome new challenges.

This position allowed me to hone my abilities in all aspects of operations. With the direct or indirect oversight of approximately 200 employees, I have become a more effective pharmacy leader. I managed finances for the department including payroll, operating expenses, and inventory control. By consistently achieving budget and operating goals, I have generated \$8 million in sales and revenue. Additionally, I implemented the first urgent care clinic in Oregon to enhance revenue, improve access to care, and lower overall patient costs. In the next stage of my career, I accepted the new position of Assistant Director for Outpatient and Ambulatory Pharmacy Services with OHSU Health System. The wide expanse of interdisciplinary teams taught me how to manage and communicate more effectively.

Since then I have been promoted to Associate Vice President for Pharmacy Services and Clinical Dietitians. During this time, I have devised and implemented key initiatives including home infusion, specialty pharmacy, mail order pharmacy, compounding pharmacy, and pharmacy benefit management services. Additionally, specialty pharmacy has successfully achieved Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC) accreditation. I am accountable for the efficient operation of the ambulatory, clinical, and inpatient pharmacies as well as clinical dietitians, which includes the operations and strategic planning of seven retail outlets, seven infusion pharmacies, a compounding pharmacy, inpatient clinical and distributive services, and research pharmacy services. My responsibilities include establishing standards of quality, productivity, and performance in accordance with the vision, value, and mission of the hospital's policies and procedures and requirements of state and federal regulatory agencies.

My career path from Assistant Director to Associate Vice President has tested my reserve. Earlier on at OHSU, I did not receive a promotion to Director of Pharmacy because I was told I was not qualified for the job. I dealt with ongoing challenges and barriers, including lack of support from key stakeholders. Preconceived ideas of my capabilities have never stood in the way of my success. I respond to this by exhibiting confidence and resoluteness in an environment of doubt. I am not rigid in my thinking and always come prepared with different plans to overcome barriers. My mindset is grounded in solution-oriented thinking, and I tend to see barriers as opportunities for novel solutions. The rejection made me stronger and a better leader. I often remind myself that we learn from failures and rejections—a key component of success and leadership. My goal is always to set a good example for my team members who observe and learn from my actions and decisions. Anticipating and managing roadblocks helps me create successful strategies to drive change. My approach is to continue to do my job well despite the setbacks.

I have been at different levels of pharmacy leadership for over 20 years. I have achieved many successes and failures and have leveraged them as stepping stones to better myself personally and professionally. ***Here is my advice and lessons learned for women in leadership:***

- ***Be persistent, strong, and always better yourself.*** You will face rejections and disappointments. I have had multiple setbacks throughout my career. However, I didn't allow it to deter me from my goals and priorities. I continued on and learned from them.
- ***Surround yourself with a team that has different thoughts and ideas.*** I have 21 managers with diverse educational experiences and backgrounds. They continue to challenge me. I don't often make the final decision. Most decisions are agreed upon by a majority. This collaborative environment makes it acceptable to have a difference of opinion because we think differently and come up with better ideas. For example, if there is a problem, we convene a meeting to discuss it. I listen to my managers' explanations of the pros and cons to a potential solution. Then, we build on each other's ideas and come up with possible solutions and decide through a vote. Managers appreciate this process because their concerns and ideas are raised and heard. Your team is an extension of you and your leadership. Nurture them and take care of them.
- ***Don't rush for the next title.*** The knowledge and experiences I have achieved with each position are invaluable. Each one has prepared me to be ready for the next level. If you don't learn from your own failures and successes, then you are not paying attention.
- ***Think outside the box by remaining nimble and flexible.*** Healthcare is changing constantly. Be ready for the changes and adapt. Your team needs a leader to be ready for sudden changes.
- ***Work-life balance is key.*** Dedication to your home life is as important as your career. Companies and corporations will move on and thrive with or without you. At the end of day, time with your family is what matters.
- ***Always remain calm and cool under pressure.*** It is human nature/behavior to label a person, especially a woman, as "irrational" if you show stress or distress under pressure. At this point, people around you will stop listening. Learn how to control and manage your distress/stress. During a tumultuous time, our pharmacy operations were in complete disarray, and I was under a tremendous amount of stress and pressure from senior leadership. Regard-

less, I stayed in control and worked with my team to strategize and respond to the issues. The result was that I garnered more respect and loyalty from my team.

- ***Be loyal to your profession.*** People often mistook my dedication and passion as dedication to the companies and/or corporations. As a matter of fact, my dedication centered on my pharmacy profession regardless of my employer. I am truly dedicated and passionate about elevating the pharmacy profession and making it better. My vision includes our pharmacists and technicians practicing at the broadest scope of their licenses, thereby elevating our pharmacy profession to the next level.
- ***Manage your boss.*** Establish a trusting relationship with your boss. This is critical and can be difficult and challenging. If you can't establish a trusting relationship with your boss after multiple attempts, it is time to move on. Think like your boss and always try to be ten steps ahead of him or her. In order to stay ahead, I have an open-door policy. My team readily shares any relevant information that would affect operations. As such, I relate to my boss the potential issues as well as solutions. Your role is to make your boss shine at the right moment and in the right environment.
- ***And lastly...have fun.*** Have fun doing your job. I love my job and what I have accomplished. I enjoy the innovations, successes, laughter, and even failures along the way.

As I've taken a quick glance back over my career, I am proud of what I have accomplished. I will continue to expand our footprint to create opportunities for our pharmacy team. I push to elevate and move our pharmacy profession to the next level.

In retrospect, I have to admit that my career path was rough and unstable at times. However, I have no regrets because I have accumulated a lifetime of knowledge along the way and continue to enjoy the journey.

Sincerely,

Yen