

Your professional practice vision

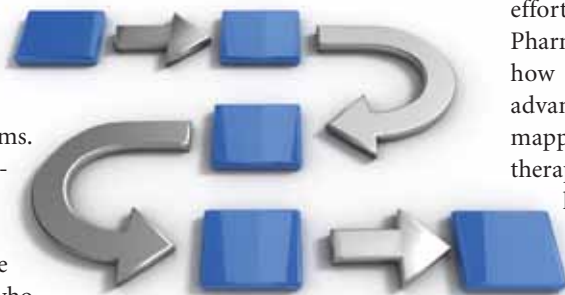
Do you feel engaged and challenged at work? Are you maximizing the effect you can have with your pharmacy expertise? Have you established your professional practice vision and updated it recently? Do the people you work with have a vision that is useful as a touchstone when you have to make decisions? Has your departmental vision been updated, and are the staff's contributions frequently recognized?

The power of a vision. A professional practice vision is your professional mission, passion, or sense of purpose that assists you in maximizing your potential. The tragedy in life doesn't lie in not reaching your practice vision but rather in not having a vision to reach.

Define your future by your dreams. Keep in mind that every great accomplishment was once the "impossible vision" of a dreamer who refused to be deterred. Don't be a victim and live mired in the past; be a visionary who focuses on the future. Replace complaining with gratitude for what opportunities exist and lie ahead for you. Not only does whining drag you and everyone around you down, it keeps your attention fixated on negative circumstances. The price you pay for such behavior is the cultivation of a negative vision for your future.

The wealth of options available to pharmacists today can be overwhelming. It is important not to become "frozen in place" or think you have to accept the sta-

tus quo. Instead, raise your expectations for your future by cultivating a positive vision. A vision serves to mobilize your energy and provide direction to ensure you are challenged and engaged at work. While the following comments on vision apply to your professional practice, realize that you should develop an integrated vision or personal mission statement for your life using this approach. Take charge of your career by identifying your practice vision, developing a strategy to achieve your vision, and maintaining your vision momentum.



Identifying your practice vision. Taking charge of your career means being the chief operating officer of your career. Do not believe that you are entitled to a meaningful and challenging career just because you completed pharmacy school and passed the licensing board examination. You are unique and special. Your challenge is to sift through all the pharmacy options and find what you are meant to do. No one, especially your departmental leaders, can do this for you. As you and health care evolve, you must challenge yourself to reach your potential. This will help you define your practice vision and move toward it.

A personal practice vision rarely comes as an epiphany; rather, it is the culmination of a process of reading,

networking, thinking, and dreaming that coalesces into a mental image of your desired future. Survey the opportunities available to pharmacists by attending professional meetings, participating in professional organizational push news and listservers, belonging to "specialist" groups in professional organizations, examining curricula of colleges of pharmacy, reviewing pharmacy residency standards, and reading pharmacy recruitment advertisements. Talk with successful pharmacists about their practice, where they think opportunities exist, and their prediction of where health care is going in the future. Review professional organizations' strategic planning efforts, such as ASHP's Health-System Pharmacy 2015 Initiative. Think about how pharmacy practice is affected by advances in therapeutic research (e.g., mapping of the human genome, gene therapy) and technology, the challenges health care will face in the future (e.g., aging of the baby boomers), and issues related to patient safety and cost-effectiveness. Broaden your thinking by surveying predictions made by publications not related to health care and challenge yourself to envision the implications for pharmacists. Listen to patients' and caregivers' complaints about their experience with the health care system. Talk with pharmacy students and young practitioners about why they chose pharmacy as a career path and what they would like to do during their careers, as they can provide useful insights. Read or view biographies of successful people, which often provide insight on how others have coped with and overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams.

Dreaming is like a muscle: it becomes weak if not used, so build it up by

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The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.

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dreaming your ideal future vision. This ability to dream is probably more important than the acquisition of additional knowledge. Don't be afraid to dream big dreams, because small dreams limit what you will ultimately achieve. Believe it can be done, and your mind will find the way and see opportunities that occur. Ask yourself how a pharmacist can add value by his or her involvement. As you are thinking about your vision, use big, cheerful words that promise victory, hope, happiness, and pleasure while avoiding words that create unpleasant images of failure, defeat, or grief. In your dreaming, set aside all current barriers or constraints (e.g., laws, board of pharmacy regulations, limits on accepted professional roles, available time, degrees needed, residency needed, experience needed) and trust that these can be overcome. Likewise, eliminate self-defeating thoughts and be willing

to experiment with new roles. Your professional capacity is limited only by your state of mind. Dream in pictures but worry in words, because pictures are more powerful. Ask yourself how you as a pharmacist can be more efficient and effective. As you are dreaming your vision, be sure to capture your ideas by documenting them.

Consider shifting your thinking to be more creative by replacing the scarcity thinking of "or" (not enough opportunities or possibilities) with the abundance thinking of "and" (anything is possible). For example, "I can assist patients in navigating the health care system *and* be paid for my time." To further clarify your vision, ask yourself questions using what you have learned in your research and document your answers so you can refer to them later. Identify your favorite activities and how you might use them to solve future unmet pharmacy needs. Consider what scientific, therapeutic, and technological changes will require a

pharmacist's expertise. Don't try to be a perfectionist in developing your practice vision. Your vision is never really final, so trust that part of it has yet to evolve as your career progresses. Think of your vision as an adventure, a journey, and a direction rather than a specific endpoint or outcome. Consider discussing your vision with a mentor or respected colleague, as this will force you to be specific about your vision and help you document it in your own words. When you are comfortable with your documented vision, the next step is to develop a strategy to achieve it.

Developing a strategy to achieve your vision. If your vision is sufficiently big enough, you will probably have no idea how you will ever be able to make it come true. That is to be expected. Realize that you don't need a detailed plan for everything. Remember that until your vision has become real in your mind it

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is unlikely to ever be manifested in the outer world. Think about and visualize yourself doing the things you would have to do in order to transform your vision of today into reality for tomorrow. A way to accomplish this visualization is to write your personal history in advance, as if you were to publish an article about your career. This autobiography acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy because you see yourself actually practicing your vision, making your vision more real, more tangible, and far more likely to come to fruition. Begin with a statement that contrasts your practice vision, as if you had achieved it, with the reality of your current practice. Then write the story of how you achieved your vision.

Realize that a vision is just a wish until you take action. Action determines the difference between a daydream and your future. Be aware you don't have to do it all at once; small actions consistently applied can yield great accomplishments. The key to developing a strategy for achieving your vision is to establish specific goals. Big documented goals are often more likely to be achieved than timid goals, because they inspire you to work toward their achievement. Relative to the potential reward, big goals often require a proportionately lower level of risk and effort than smaller goals. Once fulfilled, big goals become the platform for even bigger goals. Think of your goals as stepping stones by which the practice vision you imagine today gradually becomes the reality you will live with in the future. Think of the goals as your direction, so you won't waste time going in different directions. Be sure your goals are documented, specific, measurable (evident when achieved), achievable, and have a specific date for their achievement. Sequence your goals in the order they need to be achieved for your vision to become a reality. For each goal, develop an action plan with the steps you need to take to achieve the goal. Develop a timeline for the action steps after you prioritize them. Couple impossible goals with impossible deadlines to create the sense

of urgency that leads to inevitable results. Keep your goals and action steps in front of you to ensure that you continually work on them, thereby creating momentum. The secret is to do something every single day, if possible, to maintain your momentum.

Maintaining your vision momentum. You need to believe in your goals; when you are committed to working toward their fulfillment, they will give you incredible power. Maintaining your momentum is a matter of asking yourself what action you can take right now, what price you will have to pay, whether you are willing to pay it, and what other resources you will need to achieve your goals. Then, be conscious of what you choose to give your attention to, as it will create the platform upon which you will move toward your vision. Focusing your attention wisely tends to be more important than just managing your time, because it is how you choose to spend your time. You can spend each moment's attention only once, so what you choose to pay attention to today will substantially define the boundaries of your actions for tomorrow. Weekly, plan what you want to achieve toward your vision. In other words, make each day count. Your persistence is going to be needed, and one way to keep it up is to track your successes, no matter how small, so you can review them when you feel like you aren't making progress. Learn from setbacks, because if you don't occasionally fail, you are probably not really stretching yourself. Importantly, don't ever give up. Reread the autobiography you wrote, and don't be afraid to ask others for assistance and ideas. Think about using the concept of your own personal board of directors (mentors and some of the people you respect professionally), because having accountability by sharing your vision, goals, and action plan with others is a way to maintain your momentum.

Accept the fact that you are going to encounter tough times and obstacles along the way to achieving your vision. The key is not to let these deter you; rather, these are merely bumps in the road. There is always a way to move around

these challenges, and you have to believe you can figure out a way. Having a mentor or respected colleague with whom you can discuss options can be very helpful in trying times. Along this journey, try to have some fun with your job. Being enthusiastic, passionate, and excited about your work generates the energy needed to work on your action plan. Being bored and miserable destroys your energy. When you are enthusiastic, you feel strong, have drive, and are courageous. You believe that you can overcome any obstacle and meet any challenge head on. Likewise, know when to back off from your career and do something different. It is human nature to do the logical thing and to work harder, but the brilliant thing to do is to stop working and go "play" for a while. A change of pace gives you a fresh perspective because you come back with a renewed enthusiasm and a different outlook.

Make a commitment to yourself and others to envision your personal practice vision, stretching yourself by establishing goals, action plans, and deadlines. Keep your vision in front of you and persevere until you achieve it.

Suggested readings

- Blanchard K, Stoner J. Full steam ahead!: Unleash the power of vision in your company and your life. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler; 2003.
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Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach
550 Ortega Avenue, B123
Mountain View, CA 94040
rxsjw@yahoo.com

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