



STAY HUNGRY, STAY FOOLISH

Lowell J. Anderson

For those of you who have not read the recent Walter Isaacson biography called Steve Jobs, I recommend it as an essential read. It is that rare book that is interesting, informative and has value beyond the story that it tells. When I picked it up, my first reaction was doubt of the value of reading 658 pages about the computer industry, in spite of my long-time fascination with Steve Jobs as a character, innovator and iconoclast. Walter Isaacson made him to be more significant than any of those -- there is much that applies to life and our profession.

Building on some of the Jobs quotes: These are some of the other thoughts I have.

“Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.” This was Steve Jobs’ advice to the 2005 graduates of Stanford University. The quote was from the 1970’s final edition of “The Whole Earth Catalog.”

I think that as pharmacists we would benefit from being hungry. Hungry, in the sense of being creative: seeking new services to offer, and new ways to deliver them. Hungry, as a way to feed a revitalization of pharmacy practice.

Pharmacists who are hungry are sometime labeled as foolish. Patient profiles, immunizations, pharmaceutical care and MTM: when pharmacists first began to offer these services, conventional pharmacist wisdom saw them as “foolish.” Thanks to the hungry and foolish among us, many of these have become standards of our profession.

Give some thought to today’s “foolish” ideas for opportunities to strengthen your pharmacy practice: pharmacy practice accreditation, collaborative practice, transitional care and walking away from unsustainable managed care contracts. Come up with a “foolish” idea of your own!

“. . . we don't know where it will lead. We just know there's something much bigger than any of us here.” Steve Jobs

Healthcare reform is much bigger than any of us. As Americans we are looking at healthcare vastly different than we did even ten or fifteen years ago. This change in the consumer view of health and the care of health is having a huge effect on the healthcare industry and the way it is responding to its markets. Legislative reform initiatives are a political response to this cultural change. In turn, these reform activities have disrupted the markets for healthcare services, to the consternation of all practitioners.

We don't know where this will lead. We can be assured that it is leading somewhere. Those professionals and business that survive and prosper will lead the change by adapting their practices and products to emerging markets and delivery systems. Be assured that the real and permanent changes will occur at the interface of consumer of services and provider of services.

Our industry is schizoid on this: we are, on the one hand, acting protectively, and on the other opportunistically. It is evocative of the definition of the Chinese word for "crisis" as being composed of two characters: One represents danger and the other represents opportunity. There is opportunity in health reform for the attentive. There is danger for the inattentive.

“Everyone here has the sense that right now is one of those moments when we are influencing the future.” Steve Jobs

Our response to these changes will not only influence but also define the future of our profession. If we respond by only seeking to protect what we have, we will lose. We must grab the opportunities to use our knowledge and skills to respond to real consumer needs in the emerging healthcare system; while protecting our traditional place in healthcare. The report of the Working Group on the Pharmacy Practice Act, which I wrote about last month, is an attempt to free pharmacists to fully participate in these opportunities. (<http://www.pharmacy.umn.edu/clhc/>)

Mark Bertolini, CEO of Aetna views the ACA as “. . . an action-forcing event, through which we can drive some change, not only inside our company, but across the industry. That otherwise wouldn't have happened.”¹

“Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected.” Steve Jobs

When I was a member of the Board of Pharmacy, in the early '70s, there was a board member by the name of John Nelson. John told every class of new pharmacists that life in practice was different from life in school. In school a passing grade was often sufficient. In practice every patient expected and every pharmacist must deliver 100%.

Now that I no longer practice, I visit pharmacies as a consumer. Knowing what I know about the capabilities of the pharmacist to deliver 100%, I observe that “a passing grade” seems to be the value proposition of some pharmacists. These pharmacists seem totally absorbed in managing the filling of the prescription, to the exclusion of managing the patient's achieving the full value of the prescription. Where is the excellence? Indifference to consumer needs is not a sustainable brand for pharmacy practice!

“Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” Steve Jobs

To be innovative is more than having a lot of good ideas. To be innovative is to make good ideas become real. We make good ideas become real through personal leadership – by describing the value of our ideas in such terms that people will follow us.

By this measure we have a lot of innovators and leaders in pharmacy – pharmacists who are meeting the needs of their communities and who, as a result, are financially and professionally rewarded. Unfortunately there are also pharmacists with good ideas that are never tried. These ideas are never tried because of the perceived limitations of board rules, managed care, fear of physicians, management’s reticence, and lack of time.

It is terrible to waste the personal opportunity for leadership through innovation and to accept a career-long position of follower! As Ann Bancroft, the first woman to sled to the North Pole observed: if you are not the lead dog, the view never changes.

"People DO judge a book by its cover. We may have the best product, the highest quality, the most useful software, etc. If we present them in a slipshod manner, they will be perceived as slipshod; if we present them in a creative, professional manner, we will impute the desired qualities." Mike Markkula, angel investor and second CEO of Apple brought the concept of 'imputation' to Apple.

“Imputation” emphasized that people form an opinion about a company or product based on the signals that it conveys.

If you own an Apple product you have “experienced” opening the box it came in. When I bought my first iPod it came in a box that could have come from Tiffany. This box was so cool, I knew this box contained something special – even the part of the packing that was “hidden” was beautifully designed and executed.

Pharmacy may be similar. We know that the products we manage are miracles: they can cure diseases that previously meant certain death or disability. We also know that our knowledge of medicines and their uses are second to none and is absolutely essential for the clinical success of these miracle medications.

How does pharmacy “impute” its value? What is the “packaging” that surrounds our professional services?

Consider the busy pharmacist, who tosses the bag containing the “miracle medicine” across the counter for the clerk to sell to the patient. What value is imputed?

Or, discusses a new prescription across the raised dispensing counter, while on telephonic hold, as the patient writes a check. What value is imputed?

Or, provides medication management services in a cluttered office on the fly, with no history, no take-away information or follow up plans for the patient, and no sharing of information with the physician. What value is imputed?

Or, drive-up prescription windows, “right to counseling” waivers, tele-MTM, mail-order prescriptions. What values are imputed?

This may be the 200th patient the pharmacist saw today. But for the patient it was the ONLY opportunity for interaction he or she had with a pharmacist. What imputation of value was received?

These are the slipshod practices that Markulla spoke of. They define the value of our services, our practice, our profession – and us as individuals. As Markulla observed: “People form an opinion about a company or product based on the signals that it conveys.”

What signals does your practice convey?

“And one more thing. . . . you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.” Steve Jobs

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ⁱ “Health-care law or Not, Insurance is Set to Change,” Anna Wilde Mathews, Wall Street Journal, 13 June 2012