

## Some thoughts from Dr. Bailey Lipscomb

### 1. **What skills did you develop in graduate school that have allowed the career trajectory that you have taken?**

The product of a graduate school education is more than the resultant degree and title. When I entered the program, I was relatively naïve about scientific research. I had never designed a research protocol nor had engaged in any laboratory work other than the standard labs associated with undergraduate science courses like chemistry. Therefore, my graduate program forced me to learn and apply proper scientific method. I had to design a research plan, execute it, analyze the data, and make conclusions. For me, under the direction of my major professor and committee, it was on-the-job training.

What I gained from this was multifold.

- A. Since I was pursuing a PharmD degree simultaneous to a Ph.D. degree, I learned to allocate my time to accomplish both, in essence, learned to multi-task. Also, I began to appreciate the importance of work/life balance. It would have been easy to spend most of my time in the lab or library. However, it is important to have a life outside of work..
- B. In undergraduate classes, I struggled with writing. The graduate program, which involved the writing of a dissertation and a research-related article for submission, compelled me to become a more skilled writer.
- C. As with any graduate program, oral presentations were required. These may be seminars, the oral part of the preliminary exam, the oral defense of the dissertation, and even classroom teaching. Doing these greatly helped me overcome my fears of presenting to an audience. The importance of this skill cannot be overstated in career advancement. Like it or not, how you are perceived is important. Lacking the ability to speak comfortably, whether one on one or to large audiences, can negatively affect perception and mask true intelligence.
- D. Even though my career path was not based on the subject of my graduate research project since my career was more clinically related, the knowledge gained from the graduate training was transferable. In designing clinical studies, the same aspects of proper and sound scientific methods apply. Also from some of the graduate courses that I took, most notably statistics, I had a good appreciation of how to design a study and how to analyze the resultant data in order to make conclusions.

Graduate school will not give you every skill necessary for a career path but it certainly provides foundational knowledge of proper research fundamentals and principles. How these are applied will vary from graduate to graduate.

**2. What is one of the skills that you acquired since graduate school that could have been developed during your doctoral studies?**

My career was in the medical device field, which is heavily regulated by government oversight, e.g., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States. Since CGHS is training potential pharmaceutical and medical device researchers, it would be good to have some course work on the drug/device/biologic regulatory approval process in order to have an appreciation for what is involved. For example, how must preclinical and clinical research be conducted? What are the elements of a product approval application? How does the regulatory review process work? What is required after the product is approved?

Another thing that was undeveloped in my graduate training was an appreciation of life in the corporate world. Even though there are a number of similarities in academic and corporate life, there are some differences such as board/shareholder expectations, product liability, sales and marketing, etc. This probably does not rise to the level of a required academic course and the goal is not to make MBAs. But it would be good to bring in guest speakers for some seminars.

**3. Interpersonal relationships are important for all professions. Is there a strategy that you have found for dealing with difficult relationships?**

Interpersonal relationships are indeed important. Good relationships among co-workers are essential to achieving success within an organization. An environment characterized by back-stabbing, gossip, and confrontation is not conducive to achieving success; and it must be dealt with since it is usually not self-correcting. There is no universal strategy for addressing interpersonal difficulties. However, the following are some considerations for handling them.

- A. I believe that one needs to go to the source of the issue and address it there, as pleasantly and professionally as possible. It needs to be handled in a way that is not embarrassing or widely known. I would encourage one to seek advice from an experienced, respected person, like a supervisor.
- B. Some personalities just collide. Find a way to disarm it such as searching for a common interest where there is no conflict and expand from there.

- C. Keep it civil. The goal is the greater good, not winning a personal victory. It is a good idea to rehearse what you plan to say in advance.
- D. Try to understand his/her side and help the person understand your side.
- E. Care must be taken on whether to intervene or not. Someone may have just had a bad day or something unrelated to work may have caused the issue. It is the ongoing conflict that must be resolved.

Hopefully, these considerations will help resolve the situation. However, if it does not rectify it, more advanced steps may be necessary, even up to relocation or termination. Harmony in the workplace fosters success and it has to be cultivated and maintained.

**4. No doubt you've had to make career-direction decisions. What advice do you have for someone who might be wavering between choices?**

Career changes are important decisions and must not be taken lightly, or made without much consideration. Take your time to consider as many aspects of the change as you can imagine. I would encourage one to discuss it with family members, trusted friends, and even a mentor. As a caution, you need to be prudent with whom you discuss your plans since some organizations frown on interviewing with other places, even to the point of dismissal if they learn of it.

I have found it useful to make a list of pros and cons associated with the decision. Some of the considerations to grade are as follows.

- A. What is the future of your current employer versus the possible future one? Is one growing, while the other is stagnant? Which place is more respected to the scientific community and the public? Which place provides the best opportunity for intellectual growth?
- B. What is the type of work you will be doing at each place and which is more desirable? What is the level of responsibility you will have at each place and what is the level of responsibility you want? Not everyone wants to be a CEO or even a manager. Is there a way of advancing without being a manager, i.e., a scientific career path?
- C. Which place is the more employee-aware? I know of two companies. One offers free lunches to its employees and the other gives Friday afternoons off in the summer. I know these may seem trivial but you would be amazed at the goodwill it promotes.

- D. There are the obvious considerations of salary, benefits, and job location. Also, you must consider where you are in your own life. Decisions about career changes are sometimes age dependent. If one is older, it may be more difficult to move based on retirement vesting and family considerations. Plus, a younger person has more time to rebound from a career move that went badly. As an aside, if a career move proves to have been a wrong one, it is not the end of the world. Just plan the next move, execute it, and do not dwell on the past.
- E. Do not underestimate the value of “gut feel”. Pay attention to a “gut feel” that is telling you something different than the obvious.
- F. Be deliberate in your decision making and do not be rushed into a quick decision. Also, once you have made a determination, sleep on it and see if you feel the same way the next day.

Not all of these considerations are of equal value. A decision should not be based solely on the number of pros and cons but on which considerations are pros or cons. Be honest with yourself when you consider these and other aspects, and pray about it.

**5. What is the best career move that you made and why?**

This is easy – retirement. On a more serious note before I try to tackle this question, I want to state that I was blessed throughout my entire career. Every place that I worked was good and I learned so much at each. Plus, I was fortunate to have approachable, helpful “bosses”. It is difficult to answer this question since every career move that I made had its benefits. Each move was a building block for the entirety of my whole career. However, my last career move was particularly memorable. It was a lateral move as a director of clinical and regulatory affairs to a young orthopedic company. The company’s primary focus was on spinal medical devices. The entire company had unbelievable energy. There was a desire from top to bottom for excellence. The expectations were high and challenges abounded; but these made the successes all the more fulfilling.

Departments in the organization were not isolated. There was a team environment in which representatives from various departments, such as product development, marketing, and clinical/regulatory, worked together to bring new products to market. There were some strong personalities on teams; however, no one tried to dominate. The focus was on the good of the company.

The company appreciated the employees. This was readily evident in the compensation and benefits. There was the opportunity for upward mobility. The company permitted participation in organizations outside the company and provided training seminars periodically.

Best wishes on finding career opportunities that can grow you both professionally and personally.