

American Academy of Pediatrics

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Tips and insights from distinguished women physicians in leadership roles *Series II*

With the following *insights* from Dr. Renée Jenkins, we begin our 2nd series of interviews of women physicians who are sharing their perspectives on leadership.

Renée Jenkins, MD, FAAP: On Leadership

- ▶ **For women physicians just starting their journey up the career ladder, share some insights into what you feel has contributed to your success as a women physician leader.**

I think the peer group one chooses to work with, one that energizes you, even when you have limited time, is an important first decision. Connecting with other women and men who have the same interests and passion for child health and in my case adolescent health issues, really helped start my career track going forward. Working on projects with enthusiastic and skilled people and in adolescent health especially, with non-physician colleagues, helped me gain a broader perspective on some of the issues.

I also feel that being available for young people to approach you is a key leadership quality. People say to me “oh you’re so down it earth”, well why wouldn’t I be? As a minority and a woman, I’ve always depended on people looking out for me, so I try to look out for the young people coming after me. Sometimes I’m just the one connecting the dots, getting people together with similar interests and complementary skills and perspectives.

- ▶ **List three important traits of women leaders.**

I have found the following three traits important to women leaders:

Be confident and assertive: Women leaders have to be confident and assertive in a manner that allows the unique perspective they bring to get heard. I know really smart young women who are just reluctant to speak up. I try to help them with encouragement to be assertive, not aggressive, and comfortable with who they are and what they bring to the deliberations.

Be a team player: Women leaders have to be “team players.” They need to meld the best ideas and come up with approaches and solutions that are successful and supported by the largest contingent in a group. This is especially important when doing advocacy work. How do we get to where most of us want to be, and identify the common ground?

Be willing to embrace the challenge of work/life balance: Women leaders have to strike the difficult work/family balance and respect it for other women, and men leaders have to be willing to do that also. Whether that balance is children, spouses, significant others, older parents, families fill us out as people, they're an enriching element. We need to embrace the challenge and just recognize that it requires us to be more organized in setting aside the important times to be with our families as we go about doing good things for all children and families.

- ▶ **Has there been a pivotal moment in your career that was instrumental in your success? If so, please describe.**

I can't remember a specific moment, other than when I was in junior high and had a teacher pull me aside and give me one of those "stop goofing off and use the talent God gave you" speeches. As an adult, it's been cumulative. I've benefitted tremendously from getting feedback from colleagues I respect, and I guess one of my "aha" moments, is that if you ask colleagues to help you do something that has merit, most of them will. I think that's the step I had to get over in going from being a junior level faculty, and moving to the next level. You don't do it alone. People help you and you help others.

Renée R. Jenkins, MD, FAAP, of Washington, DC, is the 2008-2009 Immediate Past President of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is the nation's largest pediatric organization. Dr. Jenkins is professor and the immediate past chair, Department of Pediatrics and Child Health at Howard University and adjunct professor of Pediatrics at George Washington University, both in Washington, DC. After completing a fellowship in Adolescent Medicine at Montefiore Hospital in New York, Dr. Jenkins started an adolescent medicine program at Howard.

Tips and insights from distinguished women physicians in leadership roles: Series I

Carol Berkowitz, MD, FAAP:

- ▶ Listen more than you speak.
- ▶ Solicit input.
- ▶ Have a passion and really care about what you are doing.
- ▶ Give others credit for their ideas and work.

Carol Carraccio, MD, FAAP:

- ▶ Make your scholarly activity fit with what you spend your time doing. You will never have "protected" time to carve out for research.
- ▶ Partner with others in your scholarly activities. It is both more fun and more productive.
- ▶ And the most important piece of advice is to find yourself a mentor.

Frances J. Dunston, MD, MPH, FAAP

- ▶ Effective leadership requires vigilance, good planning, collaboration, diligence, and vitality. These are value-laden words, all of which are essential if one is to be an effective leader. Vigilance implies constant scanning to identify emerging issues that impact goals and decision-making. Planning at least three years out helps to establish attainable goals and objectives. Having a good plan sets the tone and provides a framework for sustainable action. Collaboration refers to the need to engage the team, whether it be an academic department, a clinical unit, or a private practice. The best work achieved is the product of teamwork. Somewhere along the way, diligence has to kick in. The best-laid plans often falter due to lack of diligence to see it through. In other words, you must "keep your eyes on the prize." Finally, but not to be minimized, is maintaining vitality that is derived from paying attention to your personal health, relationships with family and friends, and to matters of the spirit. That has been my experience.

Susan Guralnick, MD, FAAP

The most important thing I had to learn in order to enter into the "leadership" world was to begin to believe that I could ever belong there.

- ▶ I remember wanting to become more involved in the Association of Pediatric Program Directors and not even knowing where to start. When it was suggested by a mentor that I run for a position on the APPD Board I was sure that I was in no way worthy or ready for such a role. I forced myself to give it a try, and I lost the election. However, I won something that probably changed my life and brought me where I am today. I learned that if I wanted something badly enough I could get beyond my insecurities, put myself at risk, and go for it. That new belief in myself allowed me to enter and win election to the Board and eventually the presidency.
- ▶ Believing in myself as a valuable contributor in many settings—when in the past I would sit quietly in the background—has allowed me to achieve things I hardly dared to dream of. While I remain in awe of the leaders around me, I do not become intimidated. Their achievements motivate me to continue to strive for excellence.

Mary W. Lieh-Lai, MD, FAAP:

- ▶ When you are starting out in your career – choose a good mentor. That mentor should be someone who represents the person that you would like to become. The mentor should have your interests at heart. For example the mentor I chose (although he chose me as well) is an excellent teacher – so I tried to teach like him. He is compassionate and kind, and truly cares about the critically-ill children that he takes care of. He instilled this compassion in his trainees. In this aspect, I have tried to be like him as well. He also nominated me for committee work both at the local and national levels – and gradually, I became increasingly involved in local and national committees.
- ▶ Prioritize and organize. You have to make use of whatever time you have. For example – when my son was much younger – I would often do my work after he went to bed. It is amazing how much you can get done from 10 PM to 12 midnight (or in my case, 1 AM). I think part of my success in my endeavors and in my career is that I always get the tasks done. I try to never miss deadlines. I always respond to queries as soon as I can. You must

develop an attitude that when you are assigned a task – people are relying on you to get it done. Don't accept a task if you cannot complete it.

- ▶ Of course spousal (or significant other) support is crucial. However, having a great, supportive spouse or partner is pure luck and a bit of work on your part (it takes two). I had lots of luck in this regard. Remember, that when you are with your family – pay attention to them (quality counts more than quantity). Unhappiness at home leads to unhappiness at work.
- ▶ Pick a job that you love. You must be able to bounce out of bed every morning and be excited to go to work. The rest will come naturally.
- ▶ Always be grateful to the people that helped you along the way and remember to say thank you (this does not take any effort). Treating people with disrespect and being condescending does not achieve anything.

Beth Pletcher, MD, FAAP, FACMG:

- ▶ Identify a mentor (male or female) and meet regularly to discuss career goals and what steps you need to take to get where you want to be in 1, 5 and 10 years.
- ▶ Keep a careful record of all professional activities including clinical care, teaching, service, and/or research, so you have it at hand when you are up for re-evaluation, re-appointment, or promotion.
- ▶ Take time for your family, and identify which school or community activities are most important to your children. Plan ahead of time so you can be present for those "critical" events.
- ▶ Take your children to work once in a while so they can appreciate what you do. Who knows, there may be another pediatrician lurking in the family!

Debra Sowell, MD, FAAP:

- ▶ Most importantly, get involved. Don't use all the usual excuses...I've got kids, my spouse wants me to spend time with them, I'm tired, etc. You can't expect to ever lead if you are not taking the first step. Look at the committee structure within your state chapter. If you have a specific interest such as adoption, government affairs...ask to be put on that committee. Most chapters are going to be more than willing for you to participate.
- ▶ Schedule time off—rejuvenate yourself. Don't have all time out of the office events tied to CME/AAP meetings.
- ▶ Participate in as many local/chapter/regional/national events as possible. In particular, the NCE is a "big" meeting, but my family has enjoyed the locations and activities tremendously through the years. Networking at events such as the Women's Breakfast Forum is always one of the highlights for me.