



*“What specific actions do you have  
for your own personal growth?”*

=====**JOHN W. WEBB**=====

*(1986)*

*John W. Webb retired as the Director of Pharmacy at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, in 1983.*

## **The Art of Growing Professionally**

**W**hitney Award recipients have the privilege of talking on a topic of their choice. With your indulgence, I would like to spend the next few minutes talking about you.

You are all aware of the polls showing that pharmacists are highly respected by the public. If that were a recording, you could listen to it for hours and even play it for your friends. However, on the flip side it seems that no matter which journal you pick up, it will have at least one article urging you to be better. By repeated exposure to such reproofs, it is easy for us to develop a collective guilt. This may explain why one psychiatrist observed that pharmacy leads the professions in self-denigration. By our own standards, we are never satisfied with our performance.

While everyone seems happy to tell you to be better, few tell you how. One basic rule of performance reviews is to recommend specific actions rather than speaking in vague general terms. We are all sophisticated enough to know this, but in your personal performance review what specific actions do you have for your own personal

growth? This is an appropriate occasion to use past Whitney Award recipients as our quality assurance standard. It has been my good fortune to have met each one, so I can tell you some of the actions they took and you can see how yours compare.

First, they were willing to accept help from others. The most obvious is family support. Those of you who were at last year's banquet may remember that Fred Eckel expressed this thought in his closing remarks. I am not as disciplined as Fred. I cannot wait until the end. I would like to pause right here to thank my wife and family for the support that they have given me through the years. In my innocent youth, I thought that all families gave support; but I have sadly watched more than one person with great talent waste years in hibernation before the spouse and family came to realize the need for professional growth.

Next, most of them had a mentor. A mentor will advise and guide you, show you some shortcuts, and help you to interpret the information which repeatedly inundates you. A mentor will teach you how to think properly, help you to shed much of your provincial thinking, and give support to your moral character. H. A. K. Whitney was a mentor to Don Francke who, in turn, was a mentor to such well-known personalities as Bowles, Latiolais, and Phillips. Don Brodie and Herb Flack are other examples of outstanding mentors.

Those of you who find a good mentor are most fortunate. I had two: Ellsworth T. Neumann, M.D., an outstanding hospital administrator, and Dr. John T. Murphy, one of the country's leading hospital pharmacists. He was also Lou Jeffrey's preceptor.

Dr. Murphy was repeatedly an active candidate for the Whitney Award, but he always withdrew his name from nomination if the honor required giving a talk. As I stand in front of this august body, it is easy to understand his thinking. His reluctance to speak before large groups kept him from receiving due recognition. I would like to accept this award in his memory.

It has been stated that one grows by association with something bigger. Whitney Award winners have a history of associating with professional organizations. They must have heard the same remark that you and I have heard: "What can they do for me?" In addition to the obvious educational programs, societies offer committee members and officers the opportunity to gain experience in group dynamics, public speaking, and social grace and to exchange ideas and information with colleagues.

Over 100 years ago, a few wholesalers and drugstore owners established the Boston Druggists Association. It now also includes educators, hospital pharmacists, members of the Board of Pharmacy, and representatives from industry. Socializing with pharmacists other than those in your specialty is a pleasant way to avoid professional myopia. The current president of the group is William Gouveia, our new ASHP Board member.

Participating in regional and national organizations gives you a chance to see how the profession is practiced outside your local community. Not too many years ago, I attended a meeting in a country where hospital pharmacists only worked on weekdays from 9 to 5. I was shocked to hear one speaker tell the audience that plans were afoot to bring 24-hour service, women, and generic drugs into pharmacy.

It is good to get a shock on occasion because otherwise you become mentally lazy and take the familiar for granted. For example, we accept as a norm what women have contributed to hospital pharmacy. Some, like the feisty Evlyn Gray Scott, the exquisitely organized Gloria Francke, and the lovable late Sister Gonzales, have been JMH Whitney Award recipients. In 1984, Mary Jo Reilly proved that the movement continues. We should also acknowledge contributions by others such as Ivey and Patrick.

In 1983, I was in China as a member of an i.v. therapy delegation. During the “show and tell” sessions, nurses would swarm around us because they had never before seen plastic bags and tubing or disposable needles. We take them for granted, but I still remember the excitement of sitting in as my predecessor, John Murphy, worked with a man who was developing disposable needles. Unfortunately, the developer lost his personal fortune before the needle was perfected. Obviously, the pursuit of excellence is not kind to everyone.

You could commiserate with early Whitney Award recipients who lived in a period of permanent austerity. Health care had a layered structure, and there were daily attempts to find funds to treat the indigent sick. The search was not always successful. It is some kind of social commentary that the American public had TV’s years before it had Medicare.

An attempt to grow professionally is in effect a search for excellence. Perfection is sometimes mistaken for excellence. In striving to become perfect, people become discouraged. Seeking perfection is dangerous since you can never be satisfied with your performance and with time it leads to burnout. In the March 1986 issue of the *American Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, Robert Williams says:

*The pursuit of perfection is frustrating, neurotic, and a terrible waste of time. The pursuit of excellence is gratifying, healthy, and productive.*

Williams’ article is recommended reading for everyone and should be mandatory reading for all who are interested in effective leadership.

In industry, IBM is frequently cited as the hallmark of excellence. Many, including people who work for IBM, believe that its most important asset is respect for the individual. All managers pay lip service to this philosophy, but under duress it may well be forgotten. I am reminded of a prizefighter who gets hurt and forgets his fight plan and all of his hours of training. If he does not get things into focus quickly, he will lose the contest. Although DRGs and fiscal restraint have given new opportunities to pharmacists, the most common complaint I hear from health care workers is that managers have neglected their most important asset.

We all agree that continuing education is a pillar for professional growth, particularly with the information explosion being a part of our way of life. You are forced to pay attention to immediate problems but save some time for a specific topic that particularly appeals to you. Diligence in pursuing a “labor of love” allows you to grow intellectually, and you will be able to see exciting new horizons.

Those who urge you to be better quite often also suggest that you work on a topic of interest to them. It is tempting for me to use this occasion to suggest that you should study how to control infusion rates by programming drug half-lives and patients' biofeedback into a computer. Or you could study solubility problems that arise from concentrating drug solutions for microinfusions. Should we also use solvents other than water? What an amazing coincidence if we should both be interested in the same problems. No need to ask you because somewhere, someone is already toiling in the vineyards looking for answers to these and other perceived problems.

In *Ulysses*, Tennyson says: "I am a part of all that I have met." I have worked in Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts and have been on the faculties of three colleges of pharmacy. I could not begin to tell you about all the wonderful people I have worked with or the pleasure students have given to me over the years. Being with someone like Bouchard, Godley, Heller, Fish, Pierpaoli, or Zilz is always stimulating, productive, and enjoyable. These names come immediately to mind, but there are many others.

Let me tell you about just two people I have worked with. A young methods engineer came into our department fresh from college. His youthful enthusiasm and educational background caused the staff to look at their routine in an entirely new way. It wasn't long before he was contributing in the area of materials management. From there he established the country's first hospital laboratory of industrial engineering. He now has his own company on the West Coast.

I am proud to tell you the next story, but it is also a little embarrassing. A young Latvian lady who joined us as a secretary always seemed to be taking a course at one of the many schools in the Boston area. Only when she asked for a couple of hours off one day did I learn that she was graduating from Harvard. So much for the myth that I have an interest in personnel.

The point is that each one kept chipping away at professional growth and, like compound interest, over a period of time the results are impressive.

If you are a part of all that you have met, logic dictates that you are a part of others. May I suggest that you be tolerant of others who at the moment hold an opinion different from yours. John Locke said: "New opinions are always suspected and usually opposed." Each recipient of the Whitney Award had his or her own strong personality, and there can be no doubt that some of their opinions were opposed. Yet each one had the courage to face rejection and the tenacity to persevere. They would also state their beliefs publicly. Francke had the courage to present provocative and controversial opinions and then stride down from the podium, leaving the audience buzzing. You don't have to be that dramatic, but if you don't speak out no one will know what you believe in.

I doubt that many of you have thought much about the dual role of journal editors. You are all familiar with their unpleasant task of rejecting certain submitted papers so that only those of the highest caliber are published for your reading pleasure. But they also have a role in recognizing new ideas and different approaches to old problems and in encouraging inexperienced or unsuccessful authors to submit their work

for the rest of us to share. I appreciate the courtesy and encouragement given to me by Editors Francke, Provost, and Davis.

When you want to talk with someone about medication errors, you would think of Ken Barker; drug information, Paul Parker; organizational affairs, Joseph Oddis; clinical pharmacy, Donald McLeod; computers, William Gouveia; nuclear pharmacy, Ronald Callahan; and i.v. incompatibilities, Lawrence Trissel. Each one of them nurtured an innovative idea and, despite an incessant demand for their time and the constant clamor for conformity, each devoted much time and energy to his respective area of interest. Each was blessed with one or more of the points we have outlined this evening.

In addition to the ways that we have looked at, you may have others that work for you to attain that nice warm inner feeling of accomplishment. Public recognition then becomes frosting on the cake. The frosting is delicious!

Thank you for a most pleasant evening.

*Harvey A. K. Whitney Award Lectures (1950–2005)*

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