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Setting Yourself Up for Success – 5 Lessons for Early Careerists

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From day 1, I approached my administrative fellowship with a set of values that guided me through a productive year. Whether you are beginning a fellowship or another role, the opportunities for growth, development, and exploration presented to early careerists are unique. Define and act on these five values for yourself, your role, and your organization to have a successful launch to your career.

1. **Intention.** The administrative fellowship I completed was a one-year position. Anticipating that this year would fly by (and it absolutely did), I began the position with a few pre-determined goals while also allowing myself a couple weeks to develop additional goals specific to my organization and my role.

Some goals can and should be kept at the forefront of your mind regardless of your role. For me, these types of goals included improving my skills in financial analysis and professional presence. Goals that are specific to your role or organization will take time to develop. After the first few weeks in my fellowship, examples of these became goals such as working on a major project with each senior leader and being a part of a few published papers.

The point is not to establish a set of goals that is rigid or that remain stagnant. Since fellowships, or your time as an early careerist, are finite, having a mindset driven by goals and timelines will help ensure you use this limited time productively to boost your career in its early stages.

2. **Agility.** I quickly learned that agility is one of the keys to success at my current organization. A few months into my fellowship I began working with the patient transport department at the health system where I work. With a goal that no patient in our community ever miss a medical appointment due to reasons related to transportation, we set out to address an important social determinant of health for our county.

Through this project and many others, having an agile mindset was critical. We tripled the volume of free rides provided for patients to medical appointments in our county in less than 3 months. At present, we're transporting more than 300 patients each week in an around Washington County, helping them get to and from their homes and medical appointments safely and timely.

As you can imagine, we also had to increase our staffing and infrastructure during this time. This meant hiring drivers and dispatchers, buying more vans, training hundreds of scheduling staff on a new process, and many other endeavors. When we started this process, we wanted to learn from others. This is where agility comes in... We quickly found out there were not many other health systems who were providing transportation services in the way we had envisioned. Rather than letting this lack of available blueprints bring us to a screeching halt, we chose to be agile and pressed on. In this context, agility meant understanding that we would not have access to all the answers we wanted, but still moving forward. It would have been easier to wait on making big changes and adopting new processes until we had more answers. But because we chose to be agile, we provided over 1,500 patients with free rides to medical appointments who may not have received them otherwise.

- 3. Humility.** Keep your ego in check. Whether you're in an administrative fellowship or another early career position aimed toward leadership, you may be given big opportunities with lots of responsibilities and high visibility. Take these opportunities seriously, but avoid letting them inflate your ego. Your role is to learn, support your teams, and work hard.

First impressions only happen once. Whether you're meeting a security officer, a nurse, or the chief executive officer, present your authentic self. Choose to act with kindness, curiosity, and respect to build social capital at the start of your career.

- 4. Curiosity.** The most effective leaders are those who approach tasks and projects with an intent to learn. One of the first major projects of my administrative fellowship was project managing the opening of a retail pharmacy. While I was fresh out of graduate school, early in my career, and with no pharmacy experience other than picking up my own prescriptions as a consumer, this seemed daunting.

In addition to the fantastic leaders and team members that I worked on this project with, much of my success came from having a curious approach. I originally viewed my lack of experience as a weakness in the workplace, but overtime I learned how to use this to my benefit. When approaching something totally unfamiliar, like how I felt opening the pharmacy, a sense of naivety can actually be helpful. This should prompt you to ask questions, learn from the people doing the work, and get to a point where you understand the process like the back of your hand. Use curiosity as an opportunity to develop connections with other leaders and team members, add to your toolbelt of skills, and have an open mindset when approaching new tasks.

- 5. Reflection.** I am 6 weeks into my first role post-fellowship and while I frequently reflect on lessons learned during this time, intentional reflection should happen on a regular cadence.

Reflect to stay on track – don't let a leader tell you the same thing twice. If you are delivered feedback, carve out time to act on it.

Reflect to stay ahead – anticipate the needs of your teams. Think of leaders or team members who are relying on you, what have they shared that you can act on? What challenges can you anticipate and mitigate before they arise?

Reflect to stay motivated – try to quantify the progress you have made. As an early careerist, the list of tasks to complete, competencies to master, and goals to achieve can be overwhelming. Take a moment to reflect, understand what you have accomplished, and give yourself a pat on the back as you continue forward.

I recently transitioned out of my administrative fellowship into an operations supervisor role. The new teams, leaders, and tasks that come with this role provide the opportunity for me to redefine these five lessons and carry them with me into my new role and beyond.

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