

COMMENTARY

Share All Your Stories

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Submitted November 25, 2018; accepted November 25, 2018; published December 2018.

Keywords: resilience, grit, mentoring, advising, sharing

There is continued interest in the educational literature in pharmacy and other health professions in defining and understanding the elements of grit and resilience in our students. Stoffel and Cain have recently written a comprehensive review on the literature in the health professions including the methodological challenges, relationships between the constructs, personal and academic well-being and the educational interventions aimed at increasing grit and resilience.¹ The conclusion of their review was that this topic remains nuanced, complex and not easily measured or understood. Furthermore, Chisholm-Burns and colleagues have recently provided evidence that supports the reliability and validity of the APRS-16 as a measure of academic resilience in pharmacy students.² Additional recent reviews and studies have focused on understanding resilience, assessment and all its associated effects and consequences in medical, dental and nursing students.³⁻⁸

While these are all important contributions to our knowledge on the importance of grit and resilience and how we can help our students to develop the skills needed to be successful in their professional career, perhaps we are missing one additional simple way to help our students understand that all health care professionals experience similar situations. This is simply sharing your personal story, specifically where you struggled, experienced challenging times and even failed; and more importantly, how you were able to overcome this situation, specifically what approaches or strategies for resilience you utilized to move forward to create your new future as an educator and/or health care professional. We can also easily combine these challenging times and failures with the stories where you were successful in your professional activities and were able to make a significant impact in the care of a patient, in advancing a research project, in assisting students in their learning, or by advancing your institution or a professional organization through your leadership skills, to name just a few.

Why is it important to share your struggles, failures and successes with our students and colleagues? For our younger students, it can show how life experiences will make you a stronger person both professionally and personally. For older students and colleagues, it could provide others with a new perspective on how to approach a challenging situation or failure. For ourselves, taking this time for thinking, reflection and sharing can help us to move forward from a challenging situation or an unexpected disruption in our life plan. We have all heard the many success stories from keynote speakers at various meetings. In these presentations, it seems to this writer that most of these individuals often also share when things did not go well for them from challenges to failures. It is this part of their story, specifically the challenges they have experienced and how they overcame these challenges, that many of us remember and are inspired by from these presentations. Many of my favorite TED Talks are from those individuals who can make their audience smile and/or laugh at times in their life where they experienced adversity or even failure, demonstrated their humanity, solved their challenges and then successfully achieved their goals.

Specifically, how often do we, as educators, mentors or advisors show our individual humanity, vulnerability and courage to our students by sharing those times where we may have experienced failure? Are we willing to share with others the times when our career was suddenly shifted from the pathway that we envisioned or when we did not make the best decision and it had adverse effects on ourselves or others? Or, when we were too arrogant to ask for help, which resulted in adverse or negative effects in our performance or in our interactions with others? Perhaps, if we are willing to show to our students how we overcame a specific adversity and continue to advance in our professional career, then they will see how this happens to everyone, and perhaps they will understand that they are not the only ones to experience challenges and failures related to their education and future career plans. It is the rare faculty member who has not struggled or failed at some point in their education, research and practice. During this type of

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conversation, we can take the time to share and truly listen to our student, mentee or faculty colleague so that they can enhance their resilience and grit towards challenging situations. The research of Brené Brown on vulnerability, courage and leadership can be an important foundation for understanding challenges in our personal and professional aspects of life and in forming the basis for working with our students, residents and other faculty colleagues.⁹⁻¹⁰

We are all working diligently to ensure that our students can achieve the key elements of standards 3 and 4 in our accreditation efforts.¹¹ I would propose that we, collectively, as a group of educators, can provide student pharmacists with our vulnerable stories too. We can show our students and colleagues that we all face challenges and failures, and how we developed and enhanced one or more of the skills of problem solving, interprofessional collaboration, cultural sensitivity, communication, self-awareness, leadership, innovation, and professionalism to move beyond a given challenging situation or failure. We can use our stories as a framework to provide a personal perspective to the concepts of grit and resilience essential to a successful and productive career. A way to start this process of collecting our stories, successes and failures, would be sharing with colleagues at various forums in our own institutions to local meetings to national meetings. I believe that one key to be successful in any career is the vulnerability and courage to share your story. Furthermore, sharing is the foundation for caring and essential to our role as educators, clinicians and researchers who collaborate with students and colleagues. The importance of sharing our stories can easily be summarized by the simple words of the teacher and poet Ana Monnar who reminds us that “sharing will enrich everyone with more knowledge” and the author and strategist Lauren Hug who reminds us that “everyone has a story to tell – a story that will move, motivate, change or inspire audiences”. What are you doing to share *all* your stories?

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