



So Here's What I've Learned...

■ JOHN SHUFELDT, MD, JD, MBA, FACEP

I am always amazed by the myriad of personalities encountered on any given day in the urgent care center or emergency room, at the office, or even when simply out and about. Over the years, I've been fortunate to learn a few things from the thousands of patients I've treated and the remarkable individuals I've met along the way.

How is it that some people with serious acute or chronic diseases seem to accomplish so much, are very serene, and always upbeat? Why are some extremely accomplished individuals the most humble people you'll ever meet? How is it that some people never speak an ill word towards or about others?

Over the years, I have often thought about the answers to these questions and others of the same genre. After 23 years in medicine and nearly 50 years on this earth, I have come up with a few ideas.

So here's what I've learned:

■ **At the end of the day, life is simply about perspective.**

If ranked, this is the most important of all the lessons I have learned. Simply changing your perspective changes everything. I recently had a patient who was in moderate respiratory distress from the pulmonary embolism we diagnosed in the ED. He was also dying of colon cancer. When I told him about his PE, he said, "Whew, at least I am still on the right side of the turf." For most of us—me included—the thought of a PE would be horrifying. This gentleman was afraid that his colon cancer had metastasized to his lungs and was actually relieved when he heard the diagnosis. Changing your perspective changes your attitude toward whatever life can throw at you. When all else fails to fix the problem, change your perspective.

■ **Being able to laugh at yourself is important.** I do more stupid things in a week than most people do in a year. Fortunately, I am usually able to laugh at myself slightly before everyone else does. Lacking this trait, I would probably have

a gun in my mouth or at least be constantly embarrassed. Not laughing at yourself, or taking yourself too seriously, often leads to the level of humiliation usually reserved for finding *60 Minutes* knocking on your door or when jumping up and down on Oprah's couch.

■ **It is easier to be nice.** When I am confronted by a rude service person at some retail store, I often wonder what could possibly be making them so bitter that it would be worth ruining their day over.

I suspect some people are simply not wired for kindness. For this unfortunate group, know this: when you are not nice, dealing with the resultant fallout takes much more time and energy than if you would have simply been compassionate the first time around. For some reason in health-care, most people don't seem to actually expect anyone to be nice to them. So, when you do display kindness, it is often met with such appreciation that you are left wondering how many bad experiences the patient has had.

As discussed previously in this space, a professional but patient-friendly demeanor can also help you stay on the good side of a patient who might otherwise be inclined to file suit in the event of a misadventure.

■ **Arrogance is insecurity in disguise.** I have been fortunate over the years to meet some talented individuals who are not only at the top of their game; they are at the top of everyone's game. They are the rock stars of their respective fields. For the most part, none of them had any perceptible arrogance about their abilities or achievements. Why is that? If anybody had any right to be arrogant, these people did.

What I came to understand is that arrogance is simply a cover for insecurity. Insecure individuals will go to great lengths to let everyone know what they have accomplished, how much money they make, how they won some competition, etc. For whatever reason, these people only feel good about themselves while telling others about their exploits. Apparently, these individuals do not have any capacity for meaningful internal affirmation. The take-home point is this: humility counts for much in life.

■ **If it is not fun, don't do it.** In the grand scheme of things,



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Nothing supports this goal more than **Insights in Images**, where urgent care practitioners can share the details of actual cases, as well as their expertise in resolving those cases. After all, in the words of UCAOA Executive Director Lou Ellen Horwitz, everyday clinical practice is where “the rubber meets the road.”

Physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners are invited to submit cases, including x-rays, EKGs, or photographic displays relating to an interesting case encountered in the urgent care environment. Submissions should follow the format presented on the preceding pages.

If you have an interesting case to share, please e-mail the relevant images and clinical information to editor@jucm.com. We will credit all whose submissions are accepted for publication.

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we are only among the living for a short time. Why do things that do not bring you joy or are not fun? I am continually amazed by people who hate their job, their life, their significant other, their body, etc., but do not make any effort to change their circumstances. If they are unwilling to take steps to change their circumstances, they should at least think about altering their perspective so that whatever is making them so miserable is seen with a fresh set of eyes.

■ **Failure is not always bad.** I recently listened to Steve Jobs' (Apple's CEO) commencement address to the graduating class at Stanford. The theme of the address was “Connecting the dots backwards.” In a nutshell, if he hadn't dropped out of college he would have never taken calligraphy; if he hadn't taken calligraphy, Apple's first operating system would not have had such remarkable fonts. If he had not been fired from Apple, he would not have started Pixar or NeXT. Looking forward, he could have never connected the dots from his failures to his future mega-successes. Looking backwards, it was easy.

Michael Jordan was quoted thusly: “I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed.”

The point is this: If you approach failure as simply a hurdle to jump or an event from which you can learn, failing is not so bad. In fact, it may lead to your next success.

■ **The more you learn, the more you realize you don't know.** Socrates was quoted as saying, “A wise man knows he knows nothing.” When you think about it, that is the best part of learning—the knowledge that there is still more to learn. How boring life would become if you knew everything you needed to know.

■ **Most barriers are imaginary.** Most people have greater capacity than they ever give themselves credit for. Most of us have never been truly tested. Think of people who run the Badwater Ultramarathon—135 miles in 120° heat—or Navy SEALs during hell week, or people who against all odds perform heroic feats to save others or themselves from catastrophe.... If asked, probably very few of these outliers would ever admit to “knowing” they could have accomplished the unimaginable prospectively.

One of my favorite stories is about the 97-year-old marathoner. When asked how it was that he was running at that age, he responded, “No one ever told me that I shouldn't.” If you admit to a barrier, it becomes one. Put more simply, you are not beaten till you quit.

This list is far from exhaustive and given some of my personal debacles of the past 50 years, I clearly have a long way to go during the home stretch. However, as Michelangelo reportedly stated, “Ancora imparo.” *I am still learning.* ■