

## In the shade of old pines

*Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 2016; 73: 991-5

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DOI 10.2146/ajhp151050

I feel enormously honored today to be receiving the Donald E. Francke Medal, and I wish to express my gratitude to the ASHP board of directors, who approved the award.

Unlike many of the previous recipients of this prestigious award, I was never able to meet Donald Francke or his wife Gloria Niemeyer Francke, but I know by the testimony of colleagues that I missed an opportunity to be inspired by two visionary pharmacists who continually moved our profession toward excellence.

After reviewing the list of recipients of this award and examining their outstanding speeches published in *AJHP*, I felt challenged when preparing this speech.

I reflected on my life, calling to mind both highlights and low points, and an abiding and strong memory struck me. Twenty-five years ago, I was a young pharmacist starting my career after many years as an orchestra conductor. While visiting my parents in their home in rural Tuscany, I would sit in the shade of some centuries-old pines surrounding their wonderful house. These pines are impressive. Strong and elegant, they rise from the soft ground that is covered with their needles. In those warm Tuscan afternoons, the trees provide a special place to refresh your body and soul

and reflect on what is most rewarding in your life. And thinking of that memory, an ancient Greek proverb comes to mind: “A society flourishes if the old people plant a tree under whose shade they will never rest.” That afternoon 25 years ago, I was enjoying the fruit of wise people who came before me and who planted small conifers to be a resting place for future generations. Now that I am an old man myself, I love to look on the small emerging shoots of the future impressive trees under whose shade I will never rest.

The old men who planted those pine trees were working for the next generation. During my professional life as a pharmacist, I have found myself in the fortunate situation of leading young colleagues and helping to shape their future.

### Technology and leadership

When preparing this speech, I began to reflect on how the leadership and wisdom of experienced healthcare professionals can be used to improve patients’ outcomes and quality of life, both now and in the future. Major changes in history have been pushed forward by two key factors: technical innovation and human leadership.

We are living in a time of exciting technical innovation. Many of you will eagerly remember that emotional moment—less than 50 years ago—when Neil Armstrong took mankind’s first step on the moon. At that time, even the most powerful government computers fell far short of the performance capabilities of the pocket-sized iPads of today. Back then, I could not have imagined that we would have a revolutionary form of global, nearly instantaneous communication like the Internet. Searching for information used to be a cumbersome and time-consuming task, often involving visiting libraries to track down the right book or journal article. My generation is fortunate to

live in today’s exciting era of technical innovation, with its continuous development of information technology and Internet-based applications. Yet technical innovation by itself is not sufficient to create a better world.

I also consider myself fortunate that I was born at a time in which Europe had finally closed the horrible chapters of two catastrophic and devastating world wars and had commenced a new period of peace and mutual understanding.

In the 1960s I was a young high school student in Italy, and if I wanted to travel to West Germany I needed to present a passport to a border security guard. We had physical border posts and fences in Europe. An Italian was officially considered to be an alien in West Germany. Now, 50 years later, we have the wonderful construct of the European Union, free movement, and cultural exchange. While accepting the diversity of Europe’s cultural heritages, we also created a common striving toward excellence, and I consider myself today to be an Italian and a German European—a person of different cultures but not different citizenships. It is difficult to explain to my children that a few years ago it was considered romantically utopian to imagine that free movement of citizens in Europe could be possible. But who created this wonderful tree under whose shade we are sitting today? The answer is evident: Wise leaders overcame all the obstacles and barriers—literal and psychological—created by World War II. Good leaders created Europe and embedded the spirit of mutual understanding and respect that has provided the basis for peace and prosperity. In contrast, it was destructive leaders, interested only in their power and the suppression of others, who created the horrible era of totalitarianism and World War II.

I believe that in every field of human activity, including our own pro-



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During his tenure at EAHP, Dr. Frontini led efforts to promote patient safety and ensure the continuous improvement of care and outcomes for patients in the hospital setting. He also oversaw EAHP's first European Summit on Hospital Pharmacy, which led to the development of the European Statements of Hospital Pharmacy, the first professional standards for hospital pharmacy across Europe supported by patients, physicians, and nurses. Dr. Frontini was also responsible for EAHP's involvement in projects dealing with pharmacy education, pharmaceutical pricing, and reimbursement. Under his leadership, the association published the EAHP Surveys of Hospital Pharmacy Practice across Europe. The surveys provide an overview of the current status of hospital pharmacy across Europe as well as the emerging and continuing trends in practice. Prior to his role as president, Dr. Frontini served as EAHP's Director of Finance.

A researcher in patient safety, Dr. Frontini lectures on pharmacoepidemiology and economics and has served as a trainer for pharmaceutical technology at the Chamber of Pharmacy in Hannover, Germany. He has presented and published on a variety of topics important to the global community, including the use of multidisciplinary hospital teams, the importance of collaboration between academia and hospital pharmacy, and medicine shortages across Europe.

fession of pharmacy, we need wise leadership. Technical innovation is like the engine of an aircraft; it is necessary for the plane to be a plane, but the plane cannot operate without human pilots.

New drugs, the impressive development of biotechnology, and

sophisticated formulations are only parts of what is needed to alleviate the diseases of our patients. We also need a human-led transfer of scientific progress to the patients we are serving, and only leadership by conscious and enthusiastic pharmacists working on the care team can achieve that goal. On the other hand, we have to be aware that the real world is full of false prophets ready to lead us to disaster rather than to prosperity.

### Attributes of leaders

What distinguishes wise, positive leaders from mindless, negative leaders? I believe that wise leaders need three essential qualities. First, they must demonstrate immunity to the temptation of working for the purpose of power accumulation and personal vanity; rather, they must be and behave as servants of society. Second, they must accept the difficulties and challenges of reality when making change but not let those obstacles discourage the pursuit of a vision. Finally, they must trust others and exhibit high levels of empathy.

A frustratingly high number of negative leaders have their own power and personal interests in mind rather than the benefit of the society they should serve. The exercise and possession of power have addictive qualities and are therefore among the greatest enemies of positive leadership. In the ancient democracy of the Roman republic, a dictator with absolute power would be elected if enemies challenged the city. However, after war he had to return to his home as a normal citizen. Power is linked to and is a requirement of leadership but must be legitimate and limited in time. Even the best leader must accept that. It is a too common belief that there is no alternative to achieving successful change other than via one's own persona. This is a fatal error that disregards the fact that society needs diversity and new styles of leadership to continuously progress. Maintaining a balance between the effective exercise of power, the democratic solicitation of opinion, and the formation of

consensual agreement is not an easy task; people without long-term vision tend to only accept simplistic decisions that appear to yield the most immediate benefit. If we are honest, this instinct resides in all of us. It is human. But a leader with long-term vision has to overcome short-term perspectives, even if in so doing he or she may be perceived as undemocratic.

The overuse of antibiotics is an example in which pharmacists should exercise real and decisive leadership. The long-term goal of achieving responsible use of antibiotics can be achieved only if pharmacists fight against the overuse of such agents in other sectors such as agriculture and aquaculture and if they block prescribed therapies that are based more on irrational opinion than on scientific evidence. The financial interests of the pharmaceutical industry, which suggests simply that new antibiotics will solve all problems, are counterproductive. We need the pharmacist's leadership and stewardship in reducing the use of antibiotics in hospitals, and sometimes we have to force prescribers to change their therapies for the long-term interest of our patients.

But of course it is not only antibiotics that are subject to overuse and overprescription. We also see this problem in the field of psychiatric medicines. These agents are being used as a convenient short-term substitute for solving long-term problems created by inhuman living conditions and by work environments in which negative pressure—instead of the fostering of individual creativity—is used as the motivating force. We have to fight against the financial interests of a pharmaceutical industry that suggests that drugs can solve all problems created by increasingly unhealthy lifestyles.

Celebrities too advise their followers to adopt new, so-called "natural" therapies that have little or no scientific support. This is an example of the detrimental use of social authority. This sort of populism is common

in mindless leaders who, instead of working toward the long-term benefit of society, seek expansion of their personal power and financial interests and sometimes even desire further cultivation of their personality cult.

The vanity of leaders who harvest titles and social recognition hampers wise leadership. In the six years of my presidency of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP), I experienced the temptation of such social recognition linked simply to my title of “president.” I wish for more modesty than this in leadership. The number of awards and titles is not the criterion for wise leadership. Leadership is defined by honest dedication to the benefit of society, by enthusiasm to help people who have less capacity and knowledge to understand complex situations, and by achieving the best possible quality of life for the current and future generations.

The real judge of leadership in pharmacy is the level of benefit we achieve for our patients. Leadership is not self-promotional lobbying for our profession alone or the simple-minded seeking of more power. We must fight for the best care for patients, not for expanded professional prestige. Leadership is not accumulation of power and expression of vanity—it is responsibility.

### Dealing with reality

The garden in the shade of the old pines of my parents’ house is also the place where good ideas were born. Good ideas, old or new, are the spirit of leadership and its legitimacy. Unfortunately, the biggest enemy of a good idea is reality. Dealing with reality is often frustrating because human fear and stupidity undermine good ideas. Unforeseen events challenge every new path, and what you eventually achieve can seem far from what had been the original expressed goal. It is easier to manage the complications of reality by simply keeping what we have. In contrast, the spirit of leadership is change. We should ac-

cept the real problems posed by every suggestion of change; we should take account of real-world hindrances but never give up the pursuit of the final goal. Albert Einstein is reputed to have said that we cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them.<sup>1</sup> What distinguishes a manager from a leader is that the manager is focused on how to run operations smoothly in the real world, while the leader is seeking to take the harder path to a better world. One person’s vision is another person’s utopia, but a leader must never be scared of possessing a vision even if some will accuse him or her of being utopian. Utopia is never achievable, but it is what we should strive for by keeping in mind that drawbacks and failures will always present themselves on journeys of change. Reality forces us to make change via small steps and accept imperfect solutions. The perfect must not become the enemy of the good, but the utopia of perfection can continually challenge us to achieve better. The best leaders are not frustrated or put off by the pursuit of utopia. We should demystify and detoxify the meaning of utopia by keeping it in mind as a final harbor to which we are sailing.

Some decades ago, pharmacy was just the science of drugs, and pharmacists had competency only in preparing and managing drugs. The patient was not a major part of the pharmacy world. Pharmacists being recognized as essential parts of the healthcare team seemed utopian for the pharmacists of that time.

The visionary leaders of the 1950s and 1960s had to deal with that reality, but they understood that the patient is our target and moved our profession forward. It was not an easy task, and the first steps were frustrating, but nowadays we are close to that utopia in some countries and hospitals. However, we have to accept, especially in Europe, the ongoing realities and difficulties in creating change and accept that time and perseverance are needed to achieve cultural changes.

## Donald E. Francke Medal

### RECIPIENTS

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1995	Gloria Niemeyer Francke
1986	Joseph A. Oddis
1978	T. Douglas Whittet
1971	Donald E. Francke

The Donald E. Francke Medal was established in 1971 by the ASHP Board of Directors to honor individuals who have made significant international contributions to health-system pharmacy.

Donald E. Francke (1910–78), the first recipient of the Medal, was widely acclaimed for his longstanding efforts to advance American and international pharmacy. He served in many leadership roles with ASHP, including as President and as Editor of the American Journal of Hospital Pharmacy. Within the International Pharmaceutical Federation, Francke was elected to the governing board and as an officer of the section for hospital pharmacists and of the section on press and documentation.

### Trust and empathy

Finally, the highest challenge for a leader is to possess the twin traits of trust and empathy and to convince people of the best course for change rather than forcing that change. There are two fatal and wrong tracks. The first is to believe that people are stupid and must be forced to do the right things. The second is to believe that good arguments by themselves will

convince every sensible person. Forcing people to make a change, even if it is well-intentioned, will never create strong support for that change, because they will not understand its importance for their own future or will feel suppressed and deprived of their freedom.

Leadership is based on empathy and trust and not on pressure, even if realities sometimes do indeed create such pressure. A leader has to understand the hesitation every human will face in changing his or her attitude, perspective, and opinion on any given subject. We usually underestimate the importance of emotions and are astonished if the best rational and scientific arguments do not achieve the expected effect of persuasion. Humans are complex and emotional. Rationality is only a part of human thinking. Empathy is about respecting emotions like fear and also understanding aggression as a consequence of fear. An atmosphere of understanding and trust is the foundation for progress.

Unfortunately, modern society appears to be moving more and more toward adopting attitudes of no trust and no empathy. This might be understandable by considering the history of recent decades, but leaders who create such environments are killing creativity and diversity. Considering everyone as a potential threat demotivates people and suppresses their will to try new ideas. Putting trust in others is risky and often frustrating, but putting no trust in others is corrosive, undermines creativity, and forces people to stick to accepted behaviors instead of adopting better ones. Placing no trust in others creates a detrimental culture of no transparency and frequent assignment of blame. A wise leader should accept the risk of what I would define as a balanced trust, which is not being blind to the tricks of swindlers but also not considering swindlers as the standard for your partners.

Empathy and trust are the crucial platforms for effective collaboration. Rational understanding of different

opinions is not enough; it is paramount to depart from one's own perspective and watch the world through the eyes of the other. This includes culture and emotion. As a European, I have had to deal as president of EAHP with the diversity of Europe, with the 34 member countries of our association speaking 29 different languages and using three different alphabets—34 countries with very different cultures and educations but nevertheless willing to work together. I had to learn that the perception of good ideas is highly dependent on the culture in which one is born. Friendship grows from mutual respect and acknowledgment. Friendship overcomes different opinions and harnesses diversity as an essential background for progress.

Including patients in therapeutic decision-making is perceived by some European physicians as a challenge to their authority or competency. Some pharmacists in Europe are reluctant to assume responsibility for decisions about medicines. Both attitudes are creating misunderstanding, conflicts, and failure of rational proposals aimed at the best outcome of patients. Only by employing empathy can emotional barriers to change be overcome.

As I become older, I am also gaining a heightened understanding of the need to possess empathy for and trust in the next generation. We must foster the enthusiasm of our young colleagues and not limit our mind to only what we believe to be true from our own experiences. Empathy is also the bridge for generational changes, planting seeds not for your own future but for the future of others. Empathy is listening, not imposing.

Helping people to communicate by understanding and accepting their culture, education, and perception was the key to the success of the 2014 European Summit on Hospital Pharmacy, at which patients and health-care professionals created a joint and shared vision for the future of hospital pharmacy in Europe.<sup>2</sup> We have a long journey ahead of us to bring each

of the 44 statements from the summit into reality; the statements are indeed somewhat utopian—the far harbor toward which we are sailing.

### Leaders as conductors

There is no better example of what leadership can achieve as well as how it can fail than the delivery of a symphonic performance. Just see how differently the same orchestra performs under different conductors! The same opus can excite you or be boring and without any message. However, what is the art of conducting? First, it is deep knowledge of the musical score. Just as a conductor who is giving life to a piece of music needs a composer to write it, a pharmacist leader needs an understanding of science to transform what is known about drugs and their effects into benefit for a patient. But knowing the score intimately is not sufficient; the conductor must create in his or her mind an interpretation, a vision of the composition's message. This is the most important part of the work and a task that leaders must complete in advance. A performance will fail if the conductor is unable to translate his or her utopia into a language understandable by the players—just as a pharmacist will fail if he or she is unable to communicate with patients and other health-care professionals. Some conductors do not care about their players; they simply force them to carry out orders. When this happens, the result is a performance without enthusiasm, like an artificial tree—nice, but nothing more. The art of conducting is listening! Great conductors recognize the diversity of their players. They listen and shape at the same time. They make the players feel that the music they are performing is their own. They create a social movement based on enthusiasm. A good conductor knows the technical hurdles of the instruments and trusts the players and their ability to overcome such limitations. A good conductor has no vanity but serves the music being performed as a pharmacist leader serves

patients. In pharmacy there are no violin or trombone players, but there are other pharmacists and technicians. There is no audience, but there are patients. The path to excellence is the same: it is listening and shaping; it is having a vision and educating; it is loving the profession and creating enthusiasm by trust and empathy for the best outcomes for patients.

### Conclusion

Leadership is about creating awareness; awareness feeds the fire of social movements, which ultimately result in change. Nevertheless, leadership also needs some favorable winds and some strokes of good fortune, and some good leaders will remain unrecognized. We should not forget to acknowledge those leaders who failed

because of unfortunate situations. In thanking you for the prestigious award I received today, I would like to acknowledge the merit of all the colleagues who, like me, worked for the future of our profession.

As I was educated in Germany, let me close my thoughts on leadership by translating a quotation from the great philosopher Jürgen Habermas<sup>3</sup>: “Where the oasis of utopia dries out only a desert of banalities and helplessness will spread.” Like the seeds of the old pines at my parents’ house, the next generation needs wise leaders and leadership needs utopia—otherwise leadership will fail.

### Acknowledgment

Richard Price is acknowledged for helping me in polishing my English.

### Disclosures

The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest.

### Additional information

Presented at the ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting, New Orleans, LA, December 7, 2015.

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