

SVS Women's Leadership Training Grant

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2008-2009 Recipient

Leadership is something often aspired to but the path is usually unpaved and typically not marked. Obstacles present themselves along the way raising questions about the journey and the destination ahead. Women surgeon leaders are rare; female vascular surgeon leaders even more so. Our national vascular surgery society has never been lead by a woman. The first female officer was elected only one year ago. It is clear that women need to be a visible part of leadership in order to attract more women into the field of vascular surgery.

In June 2008 I was honored to be named the recipient of the 2008-2009 SVS Women's Leadership Training Grant in a field of so many highly qualified applicants. As a newly minted Associate Professor of Surgery, I thought the grant would help build the perfect foundation in my quest for leadership success. Knowing that successful leaders come in many shapes and sizes, I strove to develop a balanced curriculum for the coming year that would include not only women leaders in surgery, but those in other aspects of medicine, as well as higher education and business.

It didn't take long for my first opportunity to appear. While cleaning up some email on the flight back to Cincinnati from the 2008 SVS meeting in San Diego, I ran across an old email from Higher Education Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati requesting applications for the Women's Leadership Development program. This coalition was formed in 2003 with the goal of establishing a strong network of women in the Greater Cincinnati higher education community who were interested in developing leadership skills and networking with colleagues at 7 other colleges and universities in the Tri-State area. After a short application and letter of support from my Chair that I would be freed of clinical responsibilities one Wednesday per month for 7 months, I submitted my name and was selected as one of 6 women from the University of Cincinnati. There were criminal law professors, judges, directors of colleges, directors of student affairs, and myself as the lone physician. Though diverse in background, all had the same goal – to try and advance and gain skill in leadership. It was humbling to see how we all had similar experiences with negotiation, advancement, and trying to make career and family work. I came away with newly acquired skills in team building, conflict management, and leadership development – all for the bargain price of gas to drive to the colleges and universities within a 35 mile radius for 2.5 hours per month.

In December 2008 I attended the AAMC Mid-Career Women Faculty Professional Development Seminar. This intense 3 day seminar brought together women physicians from all walks of practice including research and administration as well as a few surgeons. Academic pathways to leadership, financial basics of academic departments, managing conflict productively and negotiation were a few of the many topics covered. All participants were asked to bring their own CV, and then paired off with someone of similar background. After interviewing each other about training, job, and current challenges and goals, each individual was presented to the group. Our CV's were then reviewed to see if they matched how we were presented. It was impressive to see how often the written document did not reflect what an individual was truly

doing! Excellent constructive criticism was given to each participant to help improve organization and presentation of the CV. Sharing personal struggles with negotiations, managing one's boss, navigating family and career were immensely helpful.

In February 2009 I traveled to Houston, Texas where I spent three days shadowing Dr Barbara Bass, Chair of Surgery at The Methodist Hospital. Dr Bass is an icon in General Surgery and the American College of Surgeons. She put together one of the first new academic Departments of Surgery in the country in nearly 40 years. What a breath of fresh air to see nearly 40% of the department be female surgeons who are all talented leaders in their respective fields! During my stay I was able to meet with many leaders in multiple different areas - Methodist's CEO, senior vice-president of the hospital, chief financial officer, division and section leaders, as well as Dr Alan Lumsden who now runs the DeBakey Cardiovascular Institute. How often does one get 30 minutes to "pick the brain" of these various leaders? Frequently one is either conducting the interview or being interviewed for a position. This was a wonderful opportunity to invite the various leaders to relax, divulge their path to leadership, offer advice and field questions. Many myths and preconceived notions I had about rising in leadership were dispelled.

In May 2009 I journeyed to Baltimore for a thrilling three day "fly-on-the-wall" experience with Dr Julie Freischlag. Johns Hopkins, with its rich heritage and longtime leadership under Dr John Cameron, brought Dr Freischlag in as the Halsted Chair of Surgery over 5 years ago. It was truly inspirational to watch her in action! Meeting the Dean, head legal counsel, Chair of Anesthesia, CEO, chief quality officers and heads of finance were outstanding opportunities to gain insight into leadership on various levels. It was impressive to hear the overwhelming support and enthusiasm people had for Dr Freischlag and her leadership. One of the highlights of my visit was being allowed to sit in on a Division Chief search. Listening to how candidates were being evaluated by their CVs, vision statements, commitment to education and research was priceless. I certainly took lots of notes!

As the year is winding down, I still have about 20% of the grant remaining to explore some remaining leadership opportunities. There is so much to learn from individuals throughout medicine and beyond. Our struggles to lead as women in vascular surgery are sadly not unique, but there is opportunity on the horizon and a wealth of experience waiting to be had. I can't wait to seize it!