



BY JARROD SHAPIRO, DPM

Life Lessons Learned in the OR

Performing surgery is more than just procedures.

Practice Perfect is a continuing every-issue column in which Dr. Shapiro offers his unique personal perspective on the ins and outs of running a podiatric practice.

Harvey Cushing, the father of neurosurgery, once said, “I would like to see the day when somebody would be ap-

pointed surgeon somewhere who had no hands, for the operative part is the least part of the work.” Dr. Cushing was pointing out that the important part of any surgery actually occurs in the mind. This may be true about executing a specific procedure, but it is also true about life in general. The physical part of life is the easy part. It is the non-physical part of surgery that the operating room (OR) has so

much to teach us about life in general.

Perhaps this is why surgeons of the past used to call that square box where so much life happens an “operating theater”. Just as a theater contains plays about life, so does the operating room reflect more about our world than the simple surgical experience. Let’s talk about a few life lessons from the operating room.

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PRACTICE PERFECT

Life Lessons (from page 39)

Life Lessons from the Operating Room

• **The devil truly is in the details**—Successfully completing a surgical procedure, or any complex endeavor for that matter, requires attention to many small details that may be easily overlooked. Similarly, life is like an impressionist painting which, when viewed up close, looks like a conglomeration of dots (the details), but when viewed as a whole creates a beautiful painting. The details truly make the creation.

• **Preparation is the key to success**—Every procedure, no matter how simple or complex, requires significant thought and planning to execute successfully. Which procedure will lead to the best outcome? What approach is best? What fixation is necessary? What do I do in the case of a particular complication? Detailed planning allows us to prevent errors and face the unexpected when it occurs. Just as in surgery, a well-planned life always moves in a positive direction.

• **Experience is priceless**—Training by itself doesn't make a good surgeon. Neither does skill. Humans

grow best by experience, both positive and negative. In fact, true experience comes from living through our mistakes and growing as a result. Simply having done a lot of a certain procedure is not enough. This is why volume alone is a poor way to determine competency or expertise in our training. Doing 100 of the wrong things may be experience, but it's the wrong type of experience that prevents us from moving forward and growing.

• **Reflection makes us better**—Experience without reflection is wasted time. Every procedure provides a good surgeon the opportunity to honestly critique him/herself, to determine what was done well and what could have been executed better. Honest reflection is what turns experience into growth. We should all do the same with our life experiences.

• **No surgeon is an island**—Execution of a successful surgery requires a team of people. Modern surgery would be impossible without each team member doing his or her part. Similarly, none of us lives in a vacuum. Each of us must interact with other people to live an uplifting and full life.

• **"Hold it like a pencil."**—This is in reference to how to hold pick-

ups. (They usually like to hold pick-ups in the palm, which leads to less instrument control.) This phrase reflects that there are many ways to accomplish something, but there's usually a best way. You can cross the road with your eyes open or closed, but you're more likely to be run over with your eyes closed. Clearly, there's a best way to do it.

• **Equanimity is a powerful tool. Calm temperance in the face of difficulty**—which often happens in the OR—provides us with the clear-headedness to solve our problems.


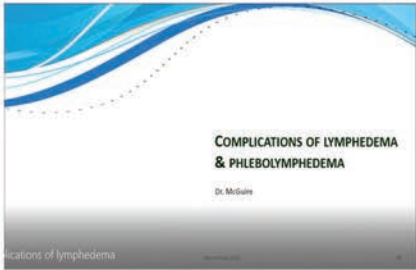
Finally, none of the above qualities are possible without passion. The best surgeons are passionate about their craft and their patients. Without passion, there is no motivation to take the time or the energy required to perform in the OR or in life. Watch the best surgeons you know, and you'll see them demonstrate that passion both during surgery and in life. They've absorbed their own lessons and understand the OR is a microcosm for life. **PM**

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