

# Leadership reflections

BY LISA VAUGHAN CHRISTENSEN

For the past year, **Lisa Vaughan Christensen** has been the President of the American Academy of Audiology. In this article, she shares the journey that led her to this position and offers some brilliant advice to anyone interested in leadership.



Lisa Vaughan Christensen at the Academy's conference in March 2019 in Columbus, Ohio, USA.

When I reflect on the past year as the President of the American Academy of Audiology, it still feels surreal. Being elected to the Academy's Board of Directors in 2013 was an amazing honour; anything higher than that I thought of as the icing and sprinkles on the cupcake. And as I reflect about the journey here, I know the exact moment it began. It was in 2000 at the Academy's annual convention, held that year in Chicago, where as a student I sat in the General Assembly listening to the current Academy President, Dave Fabry, and the Academy's Convention Chair, Carol Flexer. There was a slight idea that went through my head that morning that serving

as Academy President would be the highest honour for an audiologist and if I ever found myself there, it would be the pinnacle of my career.

After the convention, I went back to classes at Louisiana Tech, graduated a little over a year later, and then began working as an audiologist. I am not sure that moment in Chicago with Drs Fabry and Flexer entered my mind again as a young audiologist. I loved working as an audiologist and found quickly that paediatrics would be what made my audiology world complete.

It wouldn't be until 2008 that leadership would enter my mind again, when I heard about a new leadership development programme through the Academy. The programme is now known as the Jerger Future Leaders of Audiology (JFLAC). It was through JFLAC that I learned everything about leadership through an amazing group of mentors and 15 audiologists from around the US. JFLAC will always be the most pivotal point in my leadership path. It was after JFLAC that I started the

Arkansas Academy of Audiology and started to volunteer with the Academy. I was on various committees within the Academy during the years following JFLAC. These experiences really helped me grow as an audiologist. My heart has always remained in patient care but, through these other experiences, I learned the importance of advocacy for our profession. I also realised that each of us have a part to play in a profession as young as audiology.

Growing up in rural Arkansas, I spent my childhood watching my parents run a small business and helping there when possible. I like to say my first career was as a mechanic and this is why I always default to fixing something myself in lieu of calling for professional help. This, as you can imagine, says a lot about my leadership style and work ethic. I am a big picture thinker and I jump into all my projects without fear and a 'do or die' attitude. I love to surround myself with likeminded professionals, however I have learned over the years that it is very helpful for me to have detailed and reserved professionals in this arena with me.

Throughout this past year, many individuals have wondered and asked how it's possible to have two kids, manage a fairly large audiology programme in a paediatric hospital, and still function as the Academy President. Well I am here to confirm, this is indeed possible. One of the many things that makes it possible is the highly-skilled staff we have within the Academy. While they are not audiologists, they are dedicated to audiology and have been amazing to work with this past year.

When I entered my term as President last year, I had a couple of goals for myself and the Academy. The first goal was to communicate more directly with membership in ways that worked with our busy world, like quick video announcements that are direct and compact. My second goal was to handle all Academy business with a positive attitude and a mindset that helped us grow together, and not separately, as audiologists. My goal of growing

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Lisa with her children, Estella and Michael.

audiologists in a united sense was so that we would not further divide our profession by excluding any audiologist regardless of their workplace. I am hopeful both of these goals were well-received by our membership and know that they will be carried forward by our incoming Academy President, Catherine Palmer.

My advice to all aspiring leaders is to choose to have a positive attitude and realise early on what you can and cannot change in life. People will always be drawn to a positive over a negative attitude in the long run. Negativity might get a few people to jump

on board with you to voice some complaints, but it rarely solves any problems and it always causes conflict and discord. Positivity will always take you farther, especially when you let others see your passion. So find your passion and embrace it.

Knowing what you can and cannot control, combined with how you handle each of these, is truly the most important aspect of leadership to me. Life always has a way of throwing obstacles in our way. Learn to handle them with dignity and grace. You are always judged by your actions and not your intent. Your intent can be the

best in the world but if your actions differ, your leadership will suffer. Our challenges will always exist; it is how we accept the challenges that will change audiology.

It is an amazing time to be an audiologist. There are so many things that will shape our profession over the next few years. Let us all remember to be present and thoughtful in how we can take any challenge and turn it into an improvement for audiology. I am very proud to have been at the helm for this brief moment in time and will cherish this once-in-a-lifetime honour forever.



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