"It goes on"

Learning on the job for five years

Howard Weissman

When Ed Tasch retired after a remarkable 35-year run as NCADA’s executive director and I was named his successor, I approached the challenge with a mixture of humility and terror. During my first eighteen months—wherever I went and whomever I spoke with—I was reminded of the big shoes I would be trying to fill...as if I didn’t already know.

In my view, Ed was the consummate executive director. There was no dimension of the job in which I considered my abilities superior, and several areas in which I knew them to be inferior. Upon my hiring, I was also made aware that the biggest reservation the board had about selecting me was my sense of humor and my propensity to say “inappropriate” things for the sake of a laugh. So on top of the challenges around becoming the voice or face of the agency, it seemed as if I’d have to do it while self-consciously trying to censor myself.

“...True leadership stems from individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed...”
Facebook COO, Sheryl Sandberg

I knew that I simply couldn’t try to be another Ed; I had to be myself, even if this meant that, sooner or later, I was going to say something that somebody would find inappropriate. As it turned out, that didn’t happen...until my third or fourth day on the job.

On May 11, Howard Weissman stepped down as executive director of NCADA after five years. During his tenure, NCADA purchased and moved into a new permanent home, was honored (twice) as the #1 workplace in St. Louis—and stepped up to confront the largest health crisis in modern history.

When I took over, NCADA took pride in being “a best kept secret”; a wonderful organization that few had heard of. NCADA was self-described as “vanilla,” and wore this as a badge of honor. We actively tried to avoid controversy and fly under everyone’s radar.

But I became executive director at a time when the opioid epidemic was exploding and the legalization of marijuana was being discussed throughout the country. We wanted to be part of these conversations even if it meant that sometimes (like with our very first Super Bowl ad) we’d have to start them. Raising awareness and participating in the public debate over current drug-related issues would require an array of flavors besides vanilla. We needed to make some noise, and I’m proud to say we did.

continued on next page

NCADA Golf Tournament – August 6, 2018

Why is this our most important annual fundraiser?

Not only is the golf tournament our biggest fundraiser, but it provides us with flexible funds – it helps us fix the air-conditioning, patch the roof, and buy paper towels.

Most of NCADA’s funding comes with very specific instructions on how it must be used. That makes sense, and every dime is appreciated, but when the parking lot needs to be plowed, it’s good to have funds in general revenue.

If you’re thinking about attending, please tee up. Invite your friends. Spread the word. The St. Albans course is gorgeous. The food is wonderful. And while the fight against the opioid epidemic is vitally important, the speeches will be short.

Register online at ncada-stl.org/golf, or contact Sarah at (314) 962-3456 x372 or sroberts@ncada-stl.org.

(Every time a new foursome signs up, Sarah pumps her fist and says, “Woohoo!”)
NCADA underwent dramatic growth during these last five years, with new programs, new services, new policy positions, and new collaborations. And improbably, though we kept growing in leaps and bounds, morale among our incredible staff remained high. The paucity of rapid growth and high morale is rare, but it was made possible because our people set high standards for themselves while remaining tremendously supportive of one another. A demand for excellence, an absence of internal competition, and a desire to see everyone succeed, is a very special combination of characteristics, and it is this unique blend that best defines NCADA’s culture.

Of course, change and growth wasn’t always easy. There was ocasional pushback and there have been passionate disagreements along the way. But this was to be expected, and we were always made stronger because of them. Each change needed to be justified to and embraced by everyone, and in this way, as we grew, we all stayed a part of it.

So, I look back on my five and a half years as executive director with a combination of pride, sadness and relief. Pride because I know I gave it my all, sadness because I will miss the people and the mission; and great relief because I will not miss having the responsibility for nearly 60 employees in a funding environment that’s only marginally competitive than the Thunderdome.

Though we did lots of good things and made progress, there is still so much left to do. The number of fatal drug overdoses continues to climb, alcohol kills more people than other drugs, and there will soon be a third addictive drug sold commercially in a funding environment that’s only marginally competitive than the Thunderdome.

It’s been 90 years since horse-drawn wagons were an ordinary sight on the streets of St. Louis, but the expression “handing off the reins” is still common. The modern equivalent is “your turn to drive,” with the crucial difference that the wagon’s horsepower was alive, with one or more minds of its own.

My new job is very interesting, but I’m equally interested in “handing off the reins” to Leah Scharf, who has stepped into my previous role as director of prevention education. She’s in my old office, dealing with the issues I faced daily for four years.

To push the horse metaphor a little too far, Leah’s stable of prevention educators is an unmatched team, 30-strong, reliable, tough to spook and extremely slow to bite. They deliver vital services to 75,000 kids every year. Somewhat unusual: the wagon driver (Leah) is one of the horses.

While I prepared to succeed Howard as executive director, the phrase “Big Shoes to Fill” became a punchline around the office. Howard talks about it in his cover story, and even gifted me a flower bouquet in a pair of his old boots. I can’t tell Leah that she has big shoes to fill (at least not without laughing), but Leah, here are a couple of horseshoes:

During the last five years it has been thrilling to see so many of our staff grow and change. Another key to our success has been the way we identified and retained so many talented people by making sure they had jobs that matched their strengths and passions. We did not “empower” people as much as we hired people who were already powerful, creative, and dedicated, and then let them go...

I’ve been thinking a lot about NCADA, where we’ve been and how far we’ve come, and it occurred to me that NCADA didn’t start with me, or with Ed, or with the three white guys before Ed. In fact, NCADA’s parent organization was founded in 1944 by a woman named Marty Mann; a tireless advocate, advancing an unpopular, misunderstood cause in a culture dominated by men. It was through her leadership that the prevailing attitude of addiction as a moral failing began to shift, and her ongoing efforts helped the country better understand that alcoholism was, in fact, a treatable disease and a public health issue. There is a straight line connecting NCADA’s mission today, back to the vision and pioneering efforts of Marty Mann.

Past is prologue, so it is entirely fitting that the future of NCADA will be under the direction, guidance and leadership of another extraordinary woman.

I am thrilled beyond measure that the NCADA board of directors selected Nichole Dawsey to become NCADA’s next executive director. Nichole has worked here for more than a decade, most recently as our director of prevention education, and she has excelled at everything she’s done. And to use Ed’s “excellence is inadequate. When Nichole takes on a job, she sets a new standard. If talent were population, Nichole would be China.

Nichole became executive director on May 14th, and for a few more months, she will doubtlessly have to hear talk about filling shoes, just as I did (there’s no filling shoes, it’s just what people say in an effort to be respectful to what came before).

But Nichole has a closet full of her own shoes, and I’m certain those reminders about footwork will soon quiet as she inhabits the job in her own way, with her own abundant strengths, and with her own vision for the future of the agency. It is my hope, that in a year or two I will be largely forgotten, and what lives on are NCADA’s new achievements and the legacy Nichole builds for herself and her staff...along with just a few (mostly apocryphal) stories about the unbelievably ridiculous, wildly inappropriate and hilarious things I actually said out loud during my time here.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Anthropologist Margaret Mead

One reason morale at NCADA remains high, one reason we’re one of the best places to work (as named by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for the last six consecutive years), is because our small group knows that, if we all do our best, we really can help change the world.

In fact, the best part of leading NCADA is having the opportunity to be part of something profound and noble—something that does aim to change the world—and to do it with a team of amazing, talented and committed individuals. Our success is due to the gestalt. Though the individual parts of our board and staff are each great in their own way, the whole is far greater than the sum of us.

I have never loved a job more than this one, and I will miss it terribly. And I’ll miss it both because I grew so deeply fond of the people here, and because of what we did together. Stepping aside now is personally bittersweet, but I haven’t lost my perspective on what my leaving means to the agency. The poet Robert Frost once said he could sum up everything he learned about life in just three words: “It goes on.”

“I am immeasurably grateful to have had the privilege of leading NCADA, and it’s a little easier to say goodbye knowing that I’m leaving the agency in excellent hands, poised for growth, and still ready to change the world.

So say good-bye to me, and say hello to Nichole.

It goes on.”

“Quotation is sometimes attributed to John Quincy Adams a world-class plagiarist who, curiously, also claimed to write, “Workin’ 9 to 5, what a way to make a livin’, Really gettin’ by, it’s all takin’ and no givin’, They just use your mind and they never give you credit, It’s enough to drive you crazy if you let it.”
Talk About It STL Community Day
Keeping the Conversation Going

The 2018 Super Bowl provided a platform for NCADA to, once again, communicate with the region about something important. This year, our half-time PSA launched the Talk About It campaign. Talk About It is based on the simple but powerful truth that parents who talk with their kids about alcohol and other drugs cut their risk of use synchronously in half. Talk About It aims to give caregivers not just the motivation, but the tools to navigate these potentially uncomfortable conversations. Reaction to the PSA and to Talk About It was immediate and positive. In the days following the Super Bowl, hundreds of people visited the Talk About It website, and community groups requested Talk About It materials. We knew that airing our PSA once during the Super Bowl was not enough, and that we needed to reinforce the campaign’s momentum. So, NCADA coordinated a Talk About It STL “Community Day.” Leading up to the community day, twenty large pill bottle replicas were placed throughout the St. Louis region. Then on Saturday, April 14th, the sites were staffed by trained volunteers who handed out literature, provided information about the campaign, and encouraged parents to get free, age-specific talking kits at TalkAboutItSTL.com.

We’re still not done – over the next few weeks, watch for Talk About It Metro ads, billboards, Hulu ads, and more.

Pam Hughes, a prevention educator at NCADA, serves on the board of the Mitrata Nepal Foundation for Children, which provides education and medical care for more than 100 children in Nepal. Recently, she traveled to Kathmandu, and while there she conducted NCADA-style prevention trainings. The results were fascinating.

Teaching the NCADA curriculum in Nepal

Pam Hughes
As a board member of the Mitrata Nepal Foundation for Children, I traveled to Nepal to do some work on behalf of the organization. Because of my expertise in prevention education, I offered to do a full-day workshop for the children there.

Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal has a regional population over three million. Nepal is one of Asia’s poorest nations, with an average annual income under $1,000.

Since this was my only chance to teach the Mitrata kids (actually, young adults at this point), we packed in a lot of information on the risks of using drugs, tobacco, and marijuana; on addiction; and on strategies for resisting peer pressure. We also talked about the importance of the brain – a point reinforced by the brain-shaped stress balls which I threw to the audience members brave enough to volunteer answers. The NCADA curriculum is really interactive, so we had a lot of discussion, break-out sessions, activities, and plenty of laughter.

Of course I learned a great deal too, about Nepal culture and the challenges the population faces. In Nepal, hookah bars are becoming quite popular, just like in the United States. Some young people run into problems with marijuana, or ganja as it’s called in Nepal. It’s not legal, but nonetheless it’s prevalent. The students and the public at large really don’t have much information about how drugs impact the brain – particularly the teenage brain. At the end of the workshop the students lined up to hug and thank me; they were so appreciative of receiving such important information.

I also conducted a workshop with the staff, focusing on risk factors and protective factors. I anticipated that this workshop would last maybe four hours, but, because of their intense interest, we ended up talking for close to six.

I began the workshop with an egg drop. We took two identical-looking eggs enclosed in plastic baggies, held them above our heads and dropped them. One egg completely fell apart while the other only suffered a few cracks. Both eggs were subjected to the same amount of stress, but one survived and the other didn’t. Of course one egg was hardboiled and the other was raw. We used that demonstration to talk about how we can help the children in Nepal survive, despite the terrible circumstances they face, which include poverty, neglect, abuse, and a government that does not provide much of a social safety net. While we cannot immediately change those circumstances, we can provide protective factors and developmental assets which help build strength and resilience in the children.

Thinking back on the trainings, I remember a question one of the students wrote on an index card and passed up to me. She wrote that her father was addicted to alcohol and asked, “What do I do?” Everyone, I don’t care what country you’re from, struggles with issues related to addiction. The better we understand that it’s a disease and not a moral failing, the better we’ll be able to address the problem.

In Nepal, there is even more shame connected with addiction than in America, so often people are afraid to reveal it to their families. Many people are ostracized from their families and from society, sometimes even dying. It’s terribly sad. I felt very privileged to travel to Nepal and share a different perspective, and hopefully increase the understanding that addiction really is a disease, and one that can be treated.

PhHughes@ncada-stl.org

Pam supervises on egg drop, to illustrate the importance of protective factors.
NCADA Awards Luncheon
Annual Event Honors Exemplary Service in the Field of Substance Use Disorders

On April 27, we celebrated our colleagues at the Spring Awards Luncheon at the beautiful Norwood Hills Country Club. More than 180 attendees recognized the accomplishments and contributions of this year’s award recipients.

Pioneer Award: Dr. Theodore Cicero, in recognition of his groundbreaking research in the field of substance use disorders.

Gateway Award: Mike Sneed and The Arbor Group, for their extraordinary efforts to spread the message that addiction is preventable.

Helen B. Madden Award: Tina Hoester, in recognition of an exceptional career devoted to the treatment of substance use disorders.

And congratulations to Vianca Cuevas Soulette, this year’s recipient of the Tasc-Kopolow Pioneer Award: Dr. Theodore Cicero, in recognition of his groundbreaking research and important services.

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Kathryn Ellis
Thomas and Nancy Erickson
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Daniel and Eleanor Ferry
Fifth Third Bank
Ellis and Patti Fitzwater
Frederick Pitman Fund
Gateway Foundation Inc.
Givable St. Louis
Robert Gulino
Lee Haynes
Christine Kahana
Laurie Lester
Patrick and Diana Kiesel
Jeffrey and Harriet Kopolow
Lasvegas Local 310
Julie Leicht
John and Laura Mayer
Curt and Lori Nerenberg
Steve and Julie Plax
Celeste and Steve Player
Barry Rosenberg
Mark and Jill Schupp
Suzanne Simon
St. Louis College of Pharmacy
Allamore Inc.
Lyonna Allain-Moise
AmazonSmile Foundation
American Addictions Centers
The Aria Recovery Center
Bank of America Employee Giving Campaign
Nancy Berrington Racing Company
Gift Match Program
Lawyer Corporation
Lynn Maier
Jessica Masters
Ardene Miller
Chip Miller And
Debbie Brom
Eric Marks
Moondance Foundation
James and Nancy Murphy
Network For Good
Node
Commercial Motors
Paul Orndorff
David Patterson
Peter and Meredith Perkins
Celeste and Steven Player
Tina Preston
Preferred/Bridgeway
Behavio Health
Queen of Peace Center
Sarah Radke
Steve and Ann Roberts
Sarah Roberts
Barry Slavin
The Salvation Army
Schumacher Markets Inc.

NCADA Prevention Educator Joy Carter was inducted into the Gateway Metropolitan Section of the National Council of Negro Women on May 8, at the Berkeley Civic Center.

On the Menu
In an increasingly competitive funding landscape, NCADA is working to find fun and easy ways for people to support our critically important services.

The GO! St. Louis Marathon selected NCADA as a charity partner organization for the second year in a row. Fifteen people registered to be a part of “Team NCADA,” with participants running in the 5k, 7k, relay, and half-marathon events. In addition to their physical efforts on the race course, Team NCADA members raised additional dollars through sponsorship sign-ups.

Clockwise from top left: Theodore Cicero (Pioneer Award); Mike Sneed (Gateway Award); Lee Haynes, Tina Hoester (Helen Madden Award), and Howard Weissman; Vianca Cuevas Soulette (Tasc-Kopolow Scholarship).

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Suzanne Simon
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Allamore Inc.
Lyonna Allain-Moise
AmazonSmile Foundation
American Addictions Centers
The Aria Recovery Center
Bank of America Employee Giving Campaign
Nancy Berrington Racing Company
Gift Match Program
Lawyer Corporation
Lynn Maier
Jessica Masters
Ardene Miller
Chip Miller And
Debbie Brom
Eric Marks
Moondance Foundation
James and Nancy Murphy
Network For Good
Node
Commercial Motors
Paul Orndorff
David Patterson
Peter and Meredith Perkins
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