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## PROFILES OF EXCELLENCE

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### On Being a Faculty Member

Nicholas G. Popovich

Being a faculty member is a challenging and very rewarding career opportunity. As Melvin Gibson so aptly stated in his 1979 American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Presidential Address, "You (i.e., members of the academy) come from the middle class. And, essentially, children of the middle class acquire certain values and attitudes. These include ambition, a desire for upward social mobility, a sense of personal and social responsibility, and the idea that work is the means for success. To avoid failure and to achieve success, you realize

*This series will provide the reader with personal information and a career road map of those individuals recognized for their skills as teachers. The intent is that this perspective will help us understand how others achieved their successes and allow us to expand our pool of role models.*

*Professor Nicholas Popovich is a teacher's teacher. His research has focused on how he can become a better teacher and help his colleagues improve their teaching. Nick was one of the earliest pharmacy educators who focused on the process of teaching.*

*Professor Popovich has been a successful teacher for a sustained period of time. He has received the Heine Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching at Purdue five times. In 1997, he was named the Distinguished Educator by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy.*

*Mentoring is an important component of teaching; mentoring is a way to challenge and champion students outside of the traditional classroom. Nick Popovich is a consummate mentor to his graduate students and colleagues. He provides opportunities for others to participate in research projects in a number of ways. One example of this is the Lyman Award; he, his graduate students, and his colleagues have won this award five times since 1976.*

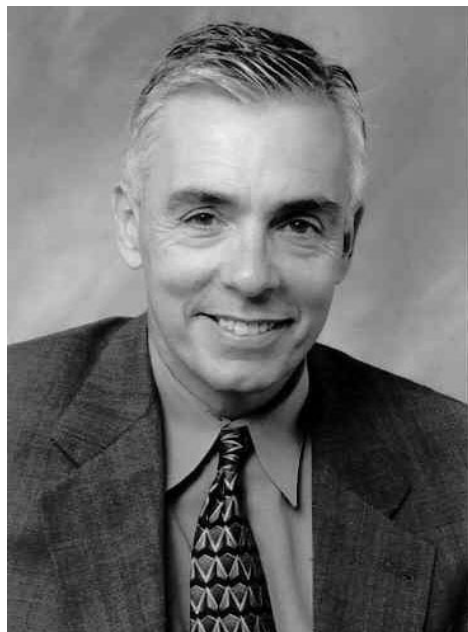
*Nick Popovich provides an outstanding role model for excellence in teaching.*

*Dennis B. Worthen*

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you must work hard, conform to the rules of the game, and do what is expected of you" (1). As I reflect on these words, I find them very true for myself. In addition, however, I have learned that there is much more to enjoy in life than success.

I was born in Evergreen Park, Illinois, and raised on the south side of Chicago by Nick and Florence Popovich. I am a second-generation American, and my descendent ethnic group is Croatian. Besides being blessed with two loving, nurturing parents, I also had a wonderful younger brother, Tom. My parents loved us both unconditionally. But my father especially

touched me through his example, and I recall his words, *"Never forget where you came from, don't get a big head, and always do your best for those you work with."* So, in my life, I have attempted to do this and find it enriching to interact with people of all cultures and backgrounds and social strata. My parents encouraged me to earn a good education and to plan for my future. Like so many parents, they wanted life to be better for me than it was for them, as they were the children of immigrants and lived through the Depression. I have attempted to follow their wisdom and happily so. While I have never realized monetary rewards proportionate to the effort I have expended to get to this point in my life, I never expected to and am more blessed with life itself and the intangibles that it has provided me. Most significant among these are my wife, Laura, and my three sons, Stan, Gabe, and Matt.

Professionally, there have been many intangible rewards that I have experienced and savored as a faculty member. For example, I have been able to choose my level of involvement outside of the university. I have participated in local and national committees to advance the practice of pharmacy, networked with people I never thought I would be able to interact with, and have gained the satisfaction of knowing that through my effort I have had a small role in advancing our profession of pharmacy. It has also been an awesome experience to meet and work with commit-

ted health care professionals outside of pharmacy to gain a perspective of what they believe pharmacy is and how it contributes to health care. At the same time, it has allowed me a rich opportunity to share and demonstrate the value of pharmacy in interdisciplinary health care.

It is my hope that this manuscript will help to mentor and inspire junior faculty to greatness in their careers as educators, and more importantly, as human beings. In my career and life as an academician, I have found inspiration and challenge through the wisdom and writings of others. Just as Robert Fulghum points out in his book entitled *Words I Wish I Wrote*, there have been many writings that I have encountered, admired, and wished that I had written (2). So, what follows are some of those words of wisdom that have inspired me and shaped my philosophy on my road to becoming an effective faculty member with the hope of never losing my ground or moral compass.

*“Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them—work, family, health, friends, and spirit and you are keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls (i.e., family, health, spirit, friends) are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life”* (Anonymous). As academicians we all encounter numerous challenges. The foremost challenge is time and how it is quickly gobbled up by the preparation of learning materials, committee assignments, scholarly activity, research endeavors, travel, and many other activities. Frequently, we have an aversion to saying “no” or “I’m sorry, I cannot help you right now,” and I am no different. I have always thought that if I said “no” to an opportunity, I would not get asked again. Does that sound familiar? Many times, too, my agenda for the day has been interrupted and put far off course by a distraught student or an urgent message for help from the dean or a department head. On reflection, I believe these are all opportunities given to me to do well for and serve others. But, as faculty, we must attempt to keep, as much as possible, balance in our lives—balance between a family life and a professional career.

The most important “ball” is family. Each of us must nurture our loved ones and take time to be with them as much as possible. If we are passive borders who come home late at night, exhausted, and leave early in the morning, it will not be long before we will hear, “Hey everyone, a special guest is home tonight! It’s Dad (or Mom)!” The goal must be to balance family life with academic life. Cherishing, nurturing, and

loving one's spouse and children is the most important goal for anyone who has a family. Not just providing, but being involved. Honestly, I have not done this very well in my life, and few in academe actually do. I hope these words will help others to avoid some of the painful moments that I have experienced.

A personal goal of mine was that when my three sons left the Popovich home for their own life away at college, I wanted no regrets that I didn't take time to be with them during their formative years. Oftentimes people will say to a young couple with children, "Enjoy them while they are young." I've thought that perhaps this sentiment was shared because they didn't. It was a lesson learned, and fortunately, I feel no regrets as all three are now on their own. Certainly, as a provider for the family, a goal is to support one's family, and that is accomplished, in part, by working. In the prayer "Take Time," one phrase reads, "*Take time to work, it is the price of success*" (Appendix A). But it cannot be the price paid for a life not in balance. My advice is to make sure, as much as humanly possible, that we take time to nurture and cherish our loved ones and friends. It is also very important that each of us say "thank you" often to those who have nurtured, guided, encouraged, and done things to make it possible for us to advance on a personal and professional level.

*"There is no limit to the good a man can do if he does not care who gets the credit"* (Robert L. Bernstein, Former CEO, Random House) (2). The goal of pharmaceutical care is to create a covenant between the patient and the pharmacist. In similar fashion, my personal mission of educational care has been to create a covenant between myself and my students (3). In life, I have always attempted to do my best through involvement without worrying about who gets the credit. While it is nice to receive a "twenty-year thank you" from students I have taught, it isn't really necessary or something that I desire. It was more important to be of service to others for their benefit and to accomplish the goal of advancing our profession. I believe it is crucial for each of us to strive to help others, be of service to them, and not worry about receiving the credit. For example, the goal of pharmaceutical care is to provide improved patient care. We must educate our students to become active, integrated members of the health care team and realize that credit always comes back in different, unexpected ways. It can also occur for our students on a one-on-one basis with each of their patients. If they understand to give of themselves freely, in the end, they are truly the winners. It is equally important to point out to them that if one constantly waits for credit to come back, it never will. Indeed, each of us has encountered

individuals who desire the credit. Reflect on that for a moment, and ask yourself how that makes you feel? Truly, it is in giving that each of us receives and a “win-win” situation is created. If we give of ourselves unselfishly, our rewards will be great. The same holds true in our roles as faculty members. Let us all strive to create “win-win” scenarios with fellow faculty, and ultimately, the student is the beneficiary of the effort. However, when it is “win-lose,” invariably the students suffer.

*“Do not worry that your children never listen to you. Worry that they are always watching you.”* This eloquent statement from Robert Fulghum’s “Family Man” (Appendix B) has made it very clear to me that I am a role model for my three sons. At the same time, all I have to do is substitute the word “students” for “children” and it becomes abundantly clear that I, as a faculty member, am a role model for my students. As faculty members, each of us must realize that as we behave, so too, will our students. If we nurture and give to our students, so too, will they give to their patients once they are within the profession. If we “take time” for our students, they will “take time” for their patients. If we are diplomatic in what we say to them and not condescending in our attitude toward them, likely, they will do the same with those they serve. How we embrace and handle situations in front of them or how we treat them then becomes a model for how they will one day behave as pharmacists. If we give credit to those who deserve it, and our students experience that, then they will do the same in their lives. Research in medical education has demonstrated that cynicism, sarcasm, and the disapproving attitude of some physicians toward their patients has resulted from the education and training that they received from their faculty and clinical residents (4, 5). Simply, that’s how they were treated as medical students. We must realize that our behavior is “modeled” to our students, whether we want it to be or not.

Perhaps, too, if we show our enthusiasm and the joy we have for our faculty roles, there may be some students who get it and then consider post-doctor of pharmacy graduate study, residency training, or fellowship training. Each of us must take the occasion to share with these students that it doesn’t take  $sp^3$  orbitals around one’s brain to be a success in graduate school. It just takes heart, motivation, and perseverance. We should share with our students that the greatest gain in continuing to be a learner is not the knowledge we acquire, but the realization of how much there is yet to be learned. With new schools/colleges of pharmacy being created on a yearly basis, there is a vital need for faculty types in the basic sciences and applied sciences. Otherwise, my personal fear for the future of academic pharmacy is that the blind will be leading the

blind. And, from a professional, futuristic standpoint, that cannot be acceptable. To further encourage postgraduate study, I strongly encourage every faculty member to consider creating an academic clerkship rotation for P-4 students which allows the faculty member to guide and work with these students and to demonstrate the faculty role. It is very interesting how a student's perspective of the faculty changes over the course of such a rotation. Typically, at the end of mine, the consensus is that they were unaware of the wide variety of tasks that the faculty member undertakes. They also share how unaware they were of the time constraints and interruptions that a faculty member encounters during the day.

*"Do not assume, because you are intelligent, able and well-motivated, that you are open to communication, that you know how to listen. Make a motto on your wall of that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, 'Lord, grant that I may seek not so much to be understood as to understand'"* (6). Oftentimes, as educators, we do not listen to our students or attempt to understand their needs. We are so busy with teaching, research/scholarship, and service that we do not ask our students how they are doing and what they need. We have a tendency to provide for them what we think they need rather than asking them what they need. As educators, we must realize that the students are the "most important persons on campus. Without them, there would be no institution and no positions for each of us to do what we have been called to do, i.e., educate and inspire student life-long learning" (7). So, in our quest for funding to support our activities, let us not forget those who make our positions possible—our students, the future of our profession. We must take time to listen to them and then care for them with the intent of creating in them an ethic and character to serve others through their profession.

*"Parachutes, like minds, work best when they are open."* When we listen with an open mind and are willing to accept, wisdom is amassed. Greenleaf points out that "listening is an attitude, an attitude toward other people and what they are trying to express. It begins with a genuine interest that is manifest in close attention, and it goes on to understanding in depth—whence cometh wisdom" (6). As educators, we are in a unique position to assist students in an endless number of ways. Who better to help the next generation of pharmacists? But what do students want? They want to learn from committed, dedicated, and enthusiastic faculty. They want to feel cared for and valued, and they want to know there will always be someone to listen, to guide, and to encourage. They do not want someone who is condescending or aloof. They want to



know that we are interested in them and their achievements. Experience tells me that students do not learn well from superior, distant educators. They learn best when they feel valued and are treated as adults. Students learn when the professional interaction is adult-to-adult, involving give and take, as opposed to the parent-to-child type of interaction, where the child is simply expected to do as he or she is told. As faculty, we have to be “beacons of hope” for our students as a resource to guide them and help them survive the rigors of the pharmacy curriculum. We also have to value them, make them feel wanted, and open their minds, just like parachutes. After all, if they were not on campus, we wouldn’t be either.

*“The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest of minds. Think big anyway!!!* In his American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Presidential Address of 1993, Dean Richard Ohvall concluded his remarks with the ten paradoxical commandments of leadership (8). This writer strongly encourages the reader to read and learn from them (Appendix C). Personally, I have found Number 6 (quoted above) to be the most encouraging. This writer encourages all faculty members to seek new ways to help students learn. It is not uncommon for a young faculty member to share an innovative, creative teaching strategy/idea with an older faculty member or department head and receive the following response: “That was tried long ago and it simply did not work!” Perhaps the innovation was ahead of its time. This situation is not much on encouragement and a lot on discouraging or shooting down what could be a very important teaching innovation. This writer suggests that innovative and creative faculty think big anyway. Why innovate? Because it is for our students, and if we are passionate about their learning, let’s help them learn, regardless. Let’s help them grow intellectually. We should not fear trying. I would also encourage seasoned faculty to encourage young faculty rather than discourage them. Further, we should try not to be discouraged by those faculty who are reluctant to embrace or encourage change and who fall into the “cemetery group.” That group is characterized by the following quotation, *“Getting faculty to change how they teach is much like moving a cemetery. It’s hard and you don’t get much help from the occupants”* (Anonymous).

*“Character consists of what you do on your third and fourth tries”* (James Michener). In late 1982, I was put up for promotion by my department head, the late Robert K. Chalmers. If successful, I would have been promoted to the rank of full professor. Unfortunately, I did not fare very well in the school’s Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee and was devastated after Dr. Chalmers shared the outcome with me. As I

drove home that December day, I felt that I had nothing. I felt gutted and that all my hard work was for naught. At home that night at dinner, my lovely wife, Laura, felt my pain and dismay and around the supper table had each of my three sons share with me “how Dad was important to them.” As tears filled my eyes, all my devastation evaporated. I then fully realized what was the most important thing to me: my wife and family. They are the intangibles. At the same time, I resolved to persevere and go onward. A few weeks later, my dean, the late Varro Tyler, had a frank talk with me and provided insights into my failure with the P&T Committee. Basically, it boiled down to my research interests being too diffuse and not focused. He encouraged me to select a research focus and pursue it with verve. That day, I dedicated myself to pursue my passion, educational research, and my commitment to help pharmacy students learn and become effective practitioners became even stronger.

At the time I began to embark on my personal scholarly mission for educational research, I knew that it would be a scholarly area that would be considered “soft” by a number of my faculty colleagues. I knew, too, that it wouldn’t be the scholarship of discovery and, indeed, some faculty have difficulty accepting the other forms of scholarship, i.e., integration, application, teaching. This period in my life was ten years prior to the time that Boyer promulgated his concept of the scholarship of teaching (9). But I resolved to follow my heart and to take action that would improve the educational process and result in pharmacy students who would be involved in their learning and ultimately contribute to the advancement of the profession once in practice. Ultimately, in 1989, I was promoted to the rank of full professor on my second try, and beginning with the day I was informed of that great honor, this achievement continues to mean more and more to me with each day. I have found, too, that those who chastise or downplay another’s research are inwardly not very happy people and are probably insecure in themselves. I am thinking that if I am confident in myself, why do I have to “throw darts” at another person to make me feel more important? I believe in Covey’s concept of an abundance mentality, “*There is plenty out there for everybody. This abundance mentality flows out of a deep sense of personal worth and security. It results in sharing recognition, profits, and responsibility*” (10).

“*The road to success is always under construction.*” Indeed, when one considers the implication of the statement, success is never realistically achieved. For a moment, think back to your days in calculus. In



calculus, as the incremental change in “x,” (i.e.,  $\Delta x$ ) asymptotically approached the “y” axis, the “y” axis was never reached. However, it became infinitesimally closer. Success is a lofty goal that one aspires to along life’s path, but there are many smaller “successes” along the way. These are achievements of something desired, planned, or attempted.

As faculty members, we should strive to improve continually our teaching through personal reflection, peer evaluation, and student-centered teacher evaluations. Criticism is criticism, but if it is offered constructively, it encourages growth. This attitude/orientation to improve constantly should pervade our approach to education. And, when we take the time in class to share with the students that a particular innovation or course improvement came from one of our former students, our current students learn that they are valued. As Robert Fulghum wrote in “Family Man,” *“Learn from them; they have much to teach you”* (Appendix A). One example of this occurred when I administered an examination to a student, who, because of a documented learning disability, had to take her examination at the Student Testing Center rather than with her class. In class, during the examination, I answered a question to clarify a point for a student and announced it for the benefit of the other students. Unintentionally, I neglected to call the center and inform the student. Subsequently, this student found out that I had done so and brought it to my attention because she did not answer the question correctly. Thus, I learned to be fair to all of my students. At the same time, personal reflection taught me how important student interpretation of question intent is for an examination. I realized that student interpretation ability would never be developed if I continually clarified points for them on examinations. Thus, I also learned from the student not to answer any more questions on the examination and have not done so since that time. I simply instruct the students that interpretation is an important component of the examination and, therefore, no questions will be answered relating to the content of this examination during this examination.

*“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence regardless of their field of endeavor”* (Vincent T. Lombardi). As faculty members, I would suggest that each of us embrace all of our tasks and responsibilities with a commitment to excellence. As the support for higher education wanes, it is logical that schools/colleges look to federal grants, among other sources, to support research endeavors that “keep the ship afloat.” However, as faculty we must not give excellence only to our scholarly pursuits. We must also

commit to excellence in our teaching, committee work, and service. If we do this, we create a work ethic and habit that will breed success. Someone once said that a faculty member, "cannot be great at teaching and research at the same time." I wholeheartedly disagree, as one's research can vitalize one's teaching and transmittal of knowledge. It can give us new insights that can be shared with our students. Let us all commit to excellence to change what may be the image of the faculty at our schools/colleges, i.e., that faculty only want to do research/scholarship and not be bothered by teaching.

*"No one is perfect. That's why pencils have erasers." "Good judgment comes from experience; experience comes from bad judgment"* (Anonymous). Innovate, innovate!!!! Evaluate, evaluate!!! Improve it, improve it!!!! Report it, report it!!! Very few of us in academe have been given formal instruction and skill development opportunities in the delivery of instruction. Typically, we model that which was provided to us as students. Thus, I've attempted educational methodologies in my teaching without the basis of any learning theories. Literally, I have learned by the seat of my pants. I have taken the risk of trying, and as my late father and my good friend and mentor, the late Bob Chalmers, always would ask me, "What did you learn from that experience?" It taught me to reflect and realize that failure is alright, as long as I can learn from it. Experience has also taught me that students do not always willingly embrace becoming actively involved in their learning. I have been challenged to determine ways/methods to "get into the students' minds" to get them to think and to develop intellectually. What appears to be a great concept on paper, for me, has failed miserably in the classroom several times. But by reflecting on these experiences, I have identified better ways to improve my teaching. Also, I have learned that it is extremely important for me to take the time to write up my educational research projects and submit them for publication. In that way, I have been able to create new knowledge and disseminate it so that it can be critiqued and improved upon. My hope is always that someone will benefit from my mistakes/misadventures and not have to reinvent the wheel. Indeed, I have benefited greatly from the academic pharmacy literature.

*"Those who ask questions may be fools for five minutes, but those who never ask questions remain fools forever"* (Anonymous). One of the leading causes for concern among faculty is the process of promotion and tenure (P&T). For those of us who have not earned the rank of full professor, this can be an imposing, daunting task, but one that can be met head on. I suggest junior faculty take the offensive. Take the

time to inquire from seasoned faculty, in particular the department head or administrative head, about the process. Second, every academic year, create an annual report, even if one is not required. Include within that report accomplishments for the past year and goals for the upcoming year. I suggest that junior faculty develop a two- to three-page essay that captures reflections on the past year's accomplishments, what has been learned in the past year, and plans for the upcoming year. This report serves as a "template for action" and one that can be referred to during the course of the academic year. Eventually, then, when all of the annual reports are combined, they form the basis for the P&T document/dossier.

Currently, teaching portfolios are being suggested as a means for faculty to demonstrate their teaching abilities. I would strongly suggest that junior faculty do this and within it include the articulation of their personal philosophy of teaching. This teaching statement can be supported by the inclusion of course material samples (e.g., syllabi, rationale for selecting a specific instructional methodology, samples of students' graded assignments). Faculty should also welcome the opportunity to be assessed by a peer trained in teaching assessment. This assessment, based on direct observation and review of supporting teaching materials, is very powerful over time because it demonstrates the faculty member's continual improvement and development as an educator. The department head's annual statement/assessment of the faculty member should also be included in the portfolio if possible. The annual assessment can supply a formal record of the faculty member's instructional activities and a synopsis of course evaluations. It can also demonstrate and highlight the faculty member's contribution to the teaching mission of the department and the college/school. A list/description of activities that support the teaching mission is also invaluable. Included within this list are curricular and program innovations, invited presentations, publications related to the scholarship of teaching, committee work devoted to teaching and learning, and any involvement with university support programs that concentrate efforts toward learning and improvement of student learning.

*"Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each passing moment. The view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey"* (Harold V. Melchert). I will close by adding that, like you, I have not reached the summit of my journey. But at this time in my academic career, this occasion gives

me pause to relish the beautiful scene that surrounds me. Foremost, that scene includes my lovely wife and sons, my friends and colleagues in academe, our students, and those who constitute the profession of pharmacy. I know that there are many among us who strive to provide the very best in education for our students and practitioners. At the same time, I am privileged to count many as colleagues and friends who have enriched my life. I am heartened by this view and know that the summit still awaits us all. So, let us continue upward and onward to advance our profession of pharmacy through our commitment to our students through pharmaceutical education. And, as we do, I realize that, "*I, among academic faculty members, am truly blessed.*"

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#### APPENDIX A. “Take Time”

- Take time to think, it is a source of power.
- Take time to play, it is the secret of perpetual youth.
- Take time to read, it is the fountain of wisdom.
- Take time to pray, it is the greatest power on earth.
- Take time to love and be loved, it is a God-given privilege.
- Take time to be friendly, it is the road to happiness.
- Take time to laugh, it is the music of the soul.
- Take time to give, it is too short a day to be selfish.
- Take time to work, it is the price of success, and
- Take time to do charity, it is the key to eternal happiness.

#### APPENDIX B. “Family Man”

- Children are not pets.
- The life they actually live and the life you perceive them to be living is not the same life.
- Don’t take what your children do too personally.
- Don’t keep scorecards on them—a short memory is useful.
- Dirt and mess are a breeding ground for well being.
- Stay out of their rooms after puberty.
- Stay out of their relationships and love life unless invited in.
- Don’t worry that they never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.
- Learn from them; they have much to teach you.
- Love them long; let them go early.

Finally, a footnote. You will never really know what kind of a parent you were or if you did it right or wrong. Never. And you will worry about this and them for as long as you live. But when your children have children and watch them do what they do, you will have part of the answer.

—Robert Fulghum  
*It Was On Fire When I Lay It Down*  
Villard Books, 1989

## APPENDIX C. The Ten Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership

1. PEOPLE ARE ILLOGICAL, UNREASONABLE, AND SELF-CENTERED. LOVE THEM ANYWAY!!
2. IF YOU DO GOOD, PEOPLE WILL ACCUSE YOU OF SELFISH ULTERIOR MOTIVES. DO GOOD ANYWAY!!
3. IF YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL, YOU WILL WIN FALSE FRIENDS AND TRUE ENEMIES. SUCCEED ANYWAY!!
4. THE GOOD YOU DO TODAY WILL BE FORGOTTEN TOMORROW. DO GOOD ANYWAY!!
5. HONESTY AND FRANKNESS MAKE YOU VULNERABLE. BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY!!
6. THE BIGGEST PEOPLE WITH THE BIGGEST IDEAS CAN BE SHOT DOWN BY THE SMALLEST PEOPLE WITH THE SMALLEST MINDS. THINK BIG ANYWAY!!
7. PEOPLE FAVOR UNDERDOGS BUT FOLLOW ONLY THE TOP DOGS. FIGHT FOR THE UNDERDOGS ANYWAY!!
8. WHAT YOU SPEND YEARS BUILDING MAY BE DESTROYED OVERNIGHT. BUILD ANYWAY!!
9. PEOPLE REALLY NEED HELP BUT MAY ATTACK YOU IF YOU DO HELP THEM. HELP THEM ANYWAY!!
10. GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU HAVE AND YOU WILL GET KICKED IN THE TEETH. GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU HAVE ANYWAY!!