

# Quality Qorner

## Drink, Steal, Swear, and Lie

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We all have them: friends who send us e-mail messages containing birthday greetings, cute poems, colorful photos, interesting video clips (have you seen the one about the jetliner that lands on the freeway on top of a car?), or profound messages to help us live a better life. Mostly, this e-mail just clutters up my in-box and makes it harder for me to find the important stuff. Often, I just click and delete them unseen because I simply do not have the time for them. However, as I was sitting at my computer the other day, casting about for a theme for this column, the computer signaled a new message, and for some unknown reason I decided to read it. Here is what it said:

"I met this guy from France and he has a motto he lives by every day. He said, 'Listen carefully and live by these 4 rules: Drink, Steal, Swear, and Lie.'

I was shaking my head 'no,' but he then told me to listen while he explained his 4 rules. So here they are:

*Drink* from the 'everlasting cup' every day; *Steal* a moment to help someone who is in worse shape than you are; *Swear* that you will be a better person today than you were yesterday, and when you *Lie* down at night thank God you live in America and have freedom."

Well, that certainly got my attention! The power of human beings to be clever and insightful never ceases to amaze me in light of all the negativity and violence that constantly surrounds us. So, of course, I decided that this e-mail was a message for me to share with a laboratory quality theme. What we editors will not do for an idea when we face a deadline!

### *Drink from the ever-growing cup of knowledge every day.*

It has been said that the amount of new information available in the world doubles every 5 years. Surely, that timeframe is even more condensed now, what with all the blogs and podcasts and e-newsletters, and Google, and new digital radio and television stations. The amount of laboratory knowledge alone must be growing logarithmically. Long ago, I had to give up reading every word of every professional journal I received and focus just on my clinical specialty. And now, considering the overwhelming advances being made just in cellular therapies, I am woefully behind in those developments as I strive to keep up with the burgeoning quality-management body of knowledge. My point is that we should attempt to learn at least 1 new piece of information about our chosen medical laboratory profession every day, so that we can make our best-informed contribution to patient care. And, if you are already learning 1 new thing every day, then make it 2! The new things you learn will benefit your laboratory and the patients you serve.

### *Steal a moment to help make the laboratory a better place.*

Japanese employees do it every day. It is called "kaizen" (kai, meaning "change," and "zen," meaning good). It means gradual, unending improvement by doing little things better and setting and achieving higher standards. The message here is

for you to continually find small ways to make your laboratory processes function faster, better, and less expensively. You know you have ideas for improving work processes in your laboratory. Stuff the suggestion box with those ideas—and, if your laboratory does not have some way of collecting suggestions, recommend one yourself. Good laboratory leaders welcome suggestions for improvement, but do not expect to see your name in lights. Just knowing that you have helped your laboratory to better help its patients might have to suffice as its own reward. Really good leaders know about the book on 1,001 ways to reward staff without cash.

### *Swear that you will be a better employee today than yesterday.*

Years ago, when I landed my first paying job as a cashier in a grocery store, I asked my father for some advice on being a good employee. He responded, "See something that needs to be done and do it. Don't wait to be asked and don't expect thanks." A good friend has this bumper sticker propped on his kitchen counter, "Commit random acts of kindness every day." So, look around your laboratory, find someone who needs help and just pitch in. There is always something to be done: clean up the clutter, reorganize the bulletin board, restock some supplies, do the dreaded maintenance. Do not wait to be asked and do not expect thanks. If you are a supervisor, seek something to praise someone for and . . . just do it. These are "random acts" that you can perform at a moment's notice.

### *When you lie down at night, know you have made a difference.*

Whether or not someone thanks you, or rewards you, or recognizes your laboratory's contribution to patient care, please be assured that you have definitely made a difference in some patients' lives this day and every day. Of course, it would be great if the laboratory got the kind of attention and praise that other, more visible, hospital departments receive. But you can live with that, knowing that you really do make an important difference. Just silently strive to be competent, confident, and happy in your laboratory profession. And let's remember to thank those in our armed services who continue to fight for the freedoms we enjoy so that we may live wherever we choose and work at whatever we want, making that difference.

### *This Month's Quality Quote:*

"Leadership is the subtle accumulation of nuances, a hundred things done a little better."

—Henry Kissinger

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