



Executive Report

On Retirement, Leadership, and Football: Planning for What's Next

Paul Pomerantz, FACHE

In January, I announced my plans to retire from ASA in April 2024, after a decade of service as your CEO. I felt strange doing so. After all, I still have a year at ASA, and there is so much more to do, but I did want to provide ASA sufficient time for a thorough search and a smooth transition. There were many congratulations and questions such as “when do you sail off into the sunset?” These expressions honestly feel peculiar, as I view this step as just another transition to new endeavors. I see this in our members and my colleagues in other associations, as well. We are living longer and healthier. The act of “retirement” offers the chance for many of us to explore the question of what comes next, and what we really want to do with the rest of our lives.

Retirement as a life stage has not always been part of our culture. The concept was defined in the 19th century, and the age that was identified almost arbitrarily (based on expected life span) found its way into corporate policies and federal programs. The growth of retirement as social norm was driven by several factors, including as a hedge against the growing popularity of socialism over a century ago and the need to create space for young workers during the Depression.

I was struck by an article published in Forbes on February 7 by Joseph Coughlin titled, “Tom Brady’s Decisions Tell Us A Lot About Retirement Planning.” Not that I see myself as a great quarterback, but...

“Preparing for your retirement years means identifying the many different retirements you may have in what has been incorrectly defined as a single life stage and experience. Maybe it will be a traditional retirement, but maybe it won’t.”

The article goes on to describe examples of post-retirement careers and journeys that many have taken and asserts that retirement planning could be more appropriately considered longevity planning. “You might just find you are more like Tom Brady than you ever imagined.... Your retirement might be on, off, and on again, too” (asamonitor.pub/417AeO6).

Professionals often leverage their experience and reputation (their personal



brand) to work as free agents, sometimes as volunteers, taking assignments where they can help the most and make

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a difference. Many colleagues have asked me what I will do. That plan is still in development, but I do plan to be engaged with what I am most passionate about – helping mission-driven

organizations and their leaders perform at their best.

It is noteworthy that ASA, under then-president Beverly Philip, MD, FASA, formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Retired Member Engagement in 2020. This committee has made recommendations on involving this growing group of members at the annual meeting and in committees and other activities to leverage their skills and insights.

Observations on leadership

ASA is a superb organization driven by great member vision, staff talent, and a culture defined by the highest medical ideals, service to our members, and, ultimately, their patients. During my tenure, I have worked with outstanding presidents and officers on our Administrative Council. All have been impressive leaders.

Leadership is part of an ongoing study and never fully understood. Like medicine, it is part science, part art. It represents the ability to influence others in service of a mission or goal. Peter Drucker once famously observed that management is about doing things right, leadership about doing the right things. We take our inspiration from leaders from many domains, including politics, business, history, and, of course ... sports.

As a native, but transplanted, Philadelphian, I took a special interest in this year’s Eagles team, which unexpectedly, but deservedly, rose to the top of the NFC to challenge (and lose to) the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LVII. Leadership, as always, was a critical aspect of their performance. The Eagles’ head coach, Nick Sirianni, got off to a rocky start and became something of a punch line when he held his first news conference over two years ago. He fumbled over names and appeared not to know who was on the roster. This was his first time as a head coach, and expectations were low. Yet he has delivered. He inherited a team that was 4-11 and transformed it in two seasons.



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According to a February 7 article in The Athletic, Sirianni did share his leadership philosophy at that first news conference:

“Part of, of my core values is accountability. Right? We have to set our standard early of what’s acceptable and unacceptable on the field ... and what we need to do to get better. Right? And so, that’s my job. Right? That’s my job to set the standard ... And then when you are really cooking, the players are holding the players accountable and everybody’s holding each other accountable.”

Sirianni describes accountability as one of his core values, which also include “connect, compete, fundamentals, and football IQ” (asamonitor.pub/3E1PPzQ).

Leaders are flawed human beings – we can excel in one moment and fail in the next. Leaders’ primary strengths are their ability to connect with others and their capacity for reflection and self-criticism. In the book “Think Again,” by Adam Grant, leaders are described as lifelong and relentless learners. Leaders must balance roles as politicians, preachers, and prosecutors, but the most effective are always seeking new feedback, criticism, and new information. “You can operate more like a scientist, defining yourself as a person committed to the pursuit of truth – even if it means proving yourself wrong. The faster you are to recognize when you’re wrong, the faster you can move toward getting it right” (Think Again. 2021).

We take our inspiration from history, business, and sports. Yet no leader endures. Winston Churchill inspired Britain during its greatest challenge but was voted out in 1945 by a population eager for social reforms at the conclusion of World War II.

Thank you for reading my musings. In my July column, I plan to share with you my perspective on the changing shape of the health care industry and its implications for the specialty. ■