



ELSEVIER

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

What I have learned about being successful as an orthopedic surgeon



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Jim Andrews was a pole vaulter in college at Louisiana State University, winning a Southeastern Conference title, and then attended medical school there before his residency at Tulane, followed by a fellowship at the University of Virginia. He began practice at the Hughston Clinic, where he became known for expertise in sports medicine, later leaving to form the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. He has trained numerous sports medicine fellows, including almost 100 primary care sports medicine fellows. Andrews has become known for treating high-profile athletes and has served as a team doctor or consultant for multiple professional sports teams and college teams. He is especially known for treating overhead throwing athletes and has published numerous articles on ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction, also known as the “Tommy John procedure,” including a summary article of his work on over 1300 ulnar collateral ligament reconstructions.—W.J.M.

There have been an abundance of orthopedic surgical theories and practices through the centuries, some good, some bad, and with lots of inconsistencies! The one fact that has been consistent through medical history is that if you strive to take the very best care of your patient with high moral and ethical standards, you will be successful in your career and in your life!

In my own career I have been very fortunate to have learned from 2 orthopedic giants, Dr. Jack C. Hughston and Dr. Frank C. McCue. For example, they taught me what it takes to be a good physician and surgeon as follows:

- Availability
- Communication
- Compassion
- Gentleness
- A true love of caring for my patients

Orthopedics, as you know, is the care of the muscles, bones, and joints of active as well as inactive individuals. Regardless of what it is, it is always a “team effort.” It is never an “I” situation but is always a “we” situation.

By the way, success begins right in your “front office.” Your front-office staff and nurses are extremely important. In general, they are the front line and first contact with your patients. They are all-too-often isolated up front, out of the sight of the physicians and not appreciated enough. Starting with your office personnel, hospital nurses, and operating room nurses and all the way down to the cleaning staff, treating these individuals with appreciation, dignity, and respect is part of your legacy! As far as your day-to-day practice, make a habit of giving something away free daily to your patients.

Now let me present to you my “key recommendations for success” in your careers. First, I am not a know-it-all, and I will quote Friedrich Hayek in his book *The Road to Serfdom*: “A man does not, and cannot know everything. . . and if he acts like he does, disaster ultimately follows.”

However, I do speak with some authority and I feel qualified, having grown up as a small-town southern boy from Homer, Louisiana, to give you some advice based on

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down-to-earth common sense! Therefore, I want to discuss with you the following: success in your orthopedic career with a purpose-driven life.

1. Positivity—Leading a positive life is powerful. Positive thoughts should have a 5:1 ratio, preferably a 10:1 ratio, over negative thoughts.
2. Humility—Humility is equally as important as positivity for a successful career. Humility allows you to be a listener, not a talker, and is the first step for greatness. Remember the following quote from General George Marshall: “A person is destined to do great things if he doesn’t care who gets the credit.”
3. Burning desire—You must have or develop a burning desire; in other words, don’t ever be content. When I select fellows for our Orthopaedic Fellowship Program, one of the key ingredients I look for in our candidates is a burning desire that overshadows all of their previous accomplishments. I would also recommend that you, as a young orthopedic surgeon, keep a journal or diary of all of your successes. Be sure to write down all of your goals; don’t just think them. Dreaming them gets you nowhere!
4. Goal setting—It is important to establish your goals, which help determine your priorities in life. Your first priority of course is your faith and a close second is your family. Orthopedics is down the list, and as you get older, you will understand why I am making this emphasis.
5. Compassion—Compassion is a necessary attribute to develop, particularly in the medical field. Compassion is something you need to work on. If you don’t, as is the case with a number of orthopedic surgeons, you will be looked upon as being arrogant.
6. Appreciation—Appreciation is also extremely important in your career development and success. By the way, appreciation for what others do is the best motivator for those who work around you.
7. Persistence—Persistence has its own legacy in your success. It can absolutely be the key that unlocks the door and defines your future!
8. Never giving up—Never giving up is also extremely important. By the way, there is no substitute for maximum effort in whatever you do.
9. Availability and communication—I have already mentioned availability and communication: They are also essential for success. In orthopedic surgery, I have often commented that the lack of availability and the lack of communication are the 2 major reasons for career failure.
10. Honesty—The next category that is so essential in the medical field is to be honest with high ethical standards. This goes without saying.
11. Medical ethics—The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has laid down principles of medical ethics and professionalism. It says that the orthopedic profession exists for the primary purpose of caring for the patient. The physician-patient relationship is the central

focus of all ethical concerns. The orthopedic surgeon should be dedicated to providing competent medical service with compassion and respect.

12. Medical economics—To be successful in orthopedic surgery, you must also be successful in medical economics! But never let economics interfere with doing what’s best in the medical care of your patients.
13. Success and happiness—There is a quote by Albert Schweitzer that is also important: “Success is not the key to happiness; happiness is the key to success. If you love what you do, you will be successful.” I would add that once you are successful, the real challenge is to maintain that success. Once you are successful, you cannot believe how easy it is to fall off the ladder and fail. My overall advice to you then is to go to bed early, get up early, make your medical career your hobby, and remember that economics is important but don’t let it overwhelm your objectives to provide the best patient care possible.
14. Spirituality—In closing, I would be remiss about your future unless I mentioned the importance of spirituality. Remember there is a Supreme Being up there that has a guiding hand on us. We should honor Him, give credit to Him, and thank Him for our success as we move forward with a purpose-driven life! Remember you never have to walk alone.
15. Your spouse—Also in closing, you should never underestimate the value of the supportive role that your spouse makes in your life and in your career! Remember it is a journey for both of you. By the way, I am often asked about the best advice I was ever given for my orthopedic career, and it came from my wife, Jenelle Andrews, when she said, “Remember, if you are still talking about what you did yesterday, you’re not doing much today.”
16. Personal health—To conclude my list of key recommendations for success in orthopedic surgery, last but certainly not least is a healthy lifestyle. As you all know, the body is the most fascinating machine ever created. Remember you are not “bulletproof.”

Also, as you establish your careers, use self-analysis and self-criticism to guide you. That should be tempered by nature, but remember the old saying “Be patient but do it in a hurry”!

Finally, for you young orthopedic doctors, remember what Yogi Berra said: “If you get to a fork in the road, sometimes you just have to take it!” In other words, have fun along the way. Thank you for allowing me to present this information to you.

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