



## **Journey into Leadership: CORA Coffee Chat with the COA Presidential Line**

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*The following is a summary from the April 2023 Coffee Chat hosted by 2022-2023 CORA Co-Chairs Dr. Laura Morrison and Dr. Laurel Collings of the University of Calgary. They were joined by 2022-2023 COA President Dr. Laurie Hiemstra (Banff Sport Medicine), 2022-2023 COA President-Elect (current President) Dr. Pierre Guy (University of British Columbia) and 2022-2023 COA 2<sup>nd</sup> President-Elect Dr. Olufemi Ayeni (McMaster University.) As they shared their insights, they illuminated common themes that have shaped their pathways to leadership within the Canadian Orthopedic Association.*

### **Mentorship**

Mentorship took center stage during the conversation. The leaders all underscored the importance of finding mentors who you can look up to and who share some of your interests. Dr. Guy emphasized the value of reaching out to those close to home, such as program directors and faculty members who can provide honest support. Dr. Ayeni stressed the importance of aligning with mentors who share your vision while allowing for independence. He urged individuals not to be intimidated by the star power of potential mentors when reaching out for support. He also raised the idea of “reverse engineering” a career: looking at someone you admire and working backward to identify how they have accomplished what they have. Dr. Hiemstra reminded participants that building mentor-mentee relationships takes time and underlined the distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. A mentor shares knowledge and provides guidance, and there is often a give-and-take. A sponsor actively promotes growth, provides access to opportunities at work, and/or advocates on your behalf. When approaching a mentor, Dr. Hiemstra encouraged a proactive approach of offering an idea versus solely seeking to be involved in ongoing work.

### **Balance**

Balancing research, clinical responsibilities, leadership, and family life is challenging. Dr. Hiemstra admitted disliking the term balance: she sees it as implying a fifty-fifty split that is impossible to achieve. She advocated for a goal-oriented approach, recommending only saying yes to projects that further your progress towards personal goals. Dr. Guy echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of knowing when to decline opportunities and highlighting the value of teamwork, both in one’s career and at home. Maintaining a supportive home environment was underscored by Drs. Hiemstra and Ayeni, too, reinforcing Dr. Guy’s statement that “...at home, it is communication and teamwork.”

Regarding navigating the relationship between work and home life, Dr. Hiemstra and Dr. Ayeni acknowledged that life operates in seasons. Sometimes, work demands more of your time and other times, family takes precedence. All three leaders emphasized the importance of

safeguarding time for family and offered their strategies for achieving this balance. Dr. Guy shared his approach of dedicating one day a week to administrative work and using spare time efficiently to allow himself to be able to protect his time at home. Dr. Hiemstra recommended outsourcing tasks when possible to prioritize family, and Dr. Ayeni emphasized the importance of investing time in family by spending his evenings solely focused on his family.

## **Timing**

All three panellists highlighted a transition to undertaking leadership roles earlier on in a career path than what was previously accepted. They discussed the potential for leadership roles starting at the resident level, such as on residency selection committees, progressing into roles with training committees and beyond, allowing for developing essential leadership skills. Dr. Ayeni described how asking questions about complex patients can lead to developing a research niche, with a gradual progression to leadership to implement changes suggested by this research. This naturally circles back to providing high-level, evidence-based patient care and highlights that leadership roles directly impact clinical practice.

## **Looking Back**

Interestingly, the 2022-2023 presidential line was unanimous in what they would change if they could revisit their journeys. For all of them, seeking out formalized leadership training is something they wished they had done earlier on. They emphasized the significance of such programs in understanding oneself as a leader and enabling the optimization of teamwork. Dr. Guy also mentioned the importance of not fearing failure, while Dr. Ayeni added that orthopedics success encompasses more than surgical skills.

## **Pursuing a Passion**

When discussing the pursuit of their passions within orthopedics, each leader offered valuable insights. Dr. Hiemstra highlighted the importance of taking advantage of opportunities, even when uncertain. Her journey towards achieving her PhD reminds her to be open to luck and happy accidents. Dr. Ayeni suggested that exploring controversial topics can open doors for further research, emphasizing that debates indicate areas with unmet research needs. He encouraged seeking out these debates at conferences to find a unique research niche to pursue. Dr. Guy emphasized the importance of continuing to ask yourself questions to further your learning and understanding, regardless of where you are in your career journey.

*The insights shared during this CORA Coffee Chat with the COA Presidential Line highlighted mentorship, balance, timing, and commitment to pursuing one's passion as guiding principles that have shaped their journeys. We want to thank Drs. Hiemstra, Guy, and Ayeni thank you for generously sharing your experiences with us to inspire the next generation of leaders in orthopedics.*