

A GATHERING OF STARS
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Sanitarian
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My wife and I were recently guests of honor at a gathering organized by long ago associates and attended by several dozen stars with whom I had been associated in earlier years. Most are now retired. All had achieved, been widely recognized, and made outstanding contributions to improving environmental health and protection in a wide variety of roles, agencies and locations. The roles of these and those of a few others who had already crossed the Great Divide included: City Environmental Health Director, County Environmental Health Director, State Environmental Improvement Director, State Public Health Director, State Scientific Laboratory Director, State Cabinet Secretary for Health, Regional EPA Environmental Services Director, Lovelace Research Foundation Director of Environmental Health, Model Cities Director, Deputy Director of a Public Health Institute, State Environmental Quality Department Director, State Health Planning Director, Coordinator Washington Congressional Delegation, Environmental Health Director for Los Alamos National Laboratories, Urban Renewal Director, top level position in a national environmental health consulting firm, City Housing Department Director, owner of an industrial hygiene consulting firm, Indian Health Service Epidemiologist, Chief of Staff for U.S. Congresswoman, State Air Quality Control Director, State Water Quality Control Director, State OSHA Director, Professor of Public Health, NCEH Consultant, Scientific Laboratory Quality Control Director, owner of a large public relations firm, City Manager, University Vice President, and Deputy Secretary of DOD for Environment.

An instructive note about these outstanding practitioners: all had commenced their careers in entrance grade roles, mostly as Sanitarians. Experience as a Sanitarian is an excellent route to pursue a variety of other managerial and policy roles in the broad and complex field of environmental health and protection, public health, industry, as well as in the broader field of government. Environmental health and protection practitioners not only manage a wide variety of environmental health and protection problems, but should also be involved in epidemiology, risk assessment, risk communication, risk management, public relations, community planning, regulation, inter-personal relations, policy development, technical reports, sampling and surveillance, analyses and interpretation of analyses, developing priorities, program design and evaluation, and administration.

I had been a Sanitarian in various leadership positions for some time before it fully dawned on me that I had been grooming the best staff for eventual stardom. This was a factor in writing the following editorial for the Journal of Environmental Health.

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By Larry Gordon, Assistant Editor

PRIDE IN ACHIEVEMENT

The career heights to which professional environmental health personnel may aspire are as great as the individual's capabilities and desires. While it was once thought there was a career ceiling over professionals in environmental health, time and experience have proved individual capabilities equal those in other professions. There is a solid record of high achievement in government, academia, industry, professional organizations and community service. There are Directors of Health, Directors of Environmental Health agencies, professors, deans, industry and association executives, and various other managerial capacities listed within the ranks of the National Environmental Health Association. Environmental quality is an important goal in our society, and protecting human health is an essential part of that goal. Capable environmental health personnel are necessary in achieving that goal and we need not take a back seat to any other group. Any question of the capabilities, status or professionalism comes from negative attitudes rather than from the lack of expertise or the need for same. Let's realize our value and continue to aspire and achieve, and be proud of our part in providing a better environment as the habitat of "man."

In the Foreword to my manuscript "Environmental Health and Protection Adventures" <http://www.ncleha.org/larrygordon/papers/EHAdventures.pdf> one of these stars wrote:

"There is a perspective, however, which seems to me to be lacking in the story, and that is the more deeply personal and human side of Larry Gordon. It is an aspect which Larry, who is usually a very private person does not often show, but it is as much a part of him and his story as any other. Since I was a member of Larry's staff beginning in October, 1961 in Albuquerque, it may be appropriate for me to fill in some of the gaps.

"Larry notes that his first job out of college was teaching. One might get the impression that was but a short detour on the way to his true career field, but nothing could be further from the truth. A new employee in the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department spent the first six weeks reading and studying with occasional trips to the field in the company of one of the more senior people to observe the solution to problems he had been studying.

"Larry was constantly busy, one of the busiest persons I've ever known, but he always had time during the day to discuss the things I was studying and answer the questions that inevitably arose. At such times, he never gave the impression that my questions were in any way an imposition. He was always careful and thorough in his answers and seemingly willing to devote whatever time I wanted to discussing and explaining. In short, Larry was a private tutor for his new employees, and one of the finest teachers I've ever known.

"Nor did his teaching stop when people progressed to full-time field work. He required people to set aside at least one hour a day for reading various professional journals in order to remain current with progress in our area. I can remember many long and fruitful discussions in the office which arose as a result of something I had read. Again, Larry always seemed to have whatever time one wanted to participate, explain and teach.

“I must confess that it was many years later that I came to a full appreciation of the lessons I had learned over my years of association with Larry. One day in the late seventies, I was reviewing some of the letters of resignation I had gotten from various employees and was suddenly struck by the fact that almost without exception they thanked me for the things I had taught them while I was serving as their supervisor. I realized with one of those rare flashes of insight one sometimes gets that I was only emulating Larry, my own teacher. Although teaching is only mentioned in passing in his book, I will always think of Larry personally as my first and most important teacher in the field of environmental health.”

I was fortunate to be mentored by a number of visionary professionals. Some were sanitarians, but most were engineers. I recall fruitful discussions with National Sanitation Foundation Executive Director Walter Snyder and Philadelphia Environmental Health Director Walt Purdom who provoked many of my emerging concepts. Public Health Service Sanitarian Director Dick Clapp imparted memorable wit and wisdom as I participated with him in teaching CDC environmental health courses in at least a dozen states over the course of several years. University Of North Carolina School Of Public Health Sanitary Engineer Professor Emil Chanlett impressed me with observations such as *“environmental health being left half way between leprosy and the quarantine station.”* I profited immensely from discussions with Sanitarian icon Walter Mangold. I had numerous interchanges with University of Californian Professor Harry Bliss who designated me to succeed him as Editor of the Journal of Environmental Health. I was privileged to communicate frequently with Los Angeles Sanitary Engineer Director and subsequently UCLA Professor Charlie Senn.

Each the foregoing leaders had one invaluable characteristic in common: **vision**. Walter Snyder, Walt Purdom, Emil Chanlett, Dick Clapp, Harry Bliss, Walter Mangold, and Charlie Senn were visionaries and mentors for countless practitioners throughout our Nation.



Through such mentors:

- I learned that those who look only to the past or the present will most certainly miss the future.
- I learned that most environmental health and protection practitioners tend to resist rather than lead changes in programs, organizations and policy development, thus abdicating responsibility for untended environmental health and protection problems for others to claim.
- I learned that environmental health and protection is easily marketed and is demanded by the public and public policy leaders.
- I learned of the importance of embracing a broad definition of environmental health and protection.
- I learned that practitioners need not have legal authorization in order to lead in advocating for environmental health and protection problem solutions.

- I learned that environmental health and protection professionals should seek key leadership roles in all environmental health and protection agencies at all levels, whatever the organizational titles.
- I learned that most practitioners have limited vision regarding the scope and benefits of the field of practice. Many feel it begins and ends in health departments, and definitions are disturbingly narrow. Practitioners should expand their horizons, stretch their imaginations, and develop comprehensive visions.
- I learned that environmental health and protection services are dependent on public and political support, and that practitioners must consistently communicate with the media and policy makers to ensure understanding and support for environmental health and protection.
- I learned that there should not be a standard model for the organization and delivery of environmental health and protection services. There are no data to indicate that one organizational or service delivery model is more effective than another in protecting public health and the environment.
- I learned to strive for excellence by developing new organizations and other public policy to better serve the public, and learned that environmental health and protection practitioners must lead in striving for changes in policies, programs, priorities, organizational patterns and laws rather than waiting for someone else to lead.
- I learned that most environmental health and protection practitioners do not visualize and pursue their potentials, due primarily to inadequate competency in the **art** of environmental health and protection practice.
- I learned that is appropriate to question all requirements and proposals to ensure their scientific validity.
- I learned that marketing environmental health and protection should include all the various benefits, not just public health protection.
- And finally, I learned there is virtue in being able to change your mind. Experience, education, initiative, vision and the courage to question the status quo and think and practice outside the establishment box bring novel perspectives that generate constructive ideas.

Over several decades, I attempted to inculcate associates with such concepts by precept and example. They learned on the job, and I successfully encouraged/supported many of them to earn masters or doctoral degrees to further their star potentials. A number of them succeeded me in various positions (institutional DNA) as I was repotted to new positions and avoided becoming root bound.

The joy of developing stars  has been my most rewarding contribution

to the field of environmental health and protection.

"The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and will to carry on. ~ Walter J. Lippmann"

Larry Gordon, M.S., M.P.H., D.E.A.A.S., D.H.L., has devoted almost 60 years to environmental health including roles as a county sanitarian, district sanitarian, state sanitarian, chief sanitarian in a municipal health department, founding director of a city-county environmental health department, PHS consultant, PHS Commissioned Officer, frequent lecturer for CDC training courses, founding director

of a state environmental agency, founding director of a state scientific laboratory system, president of the American Public Health Association, state cabinet secretary for health and environment, chair of the national Committee on the Future of Environmental Health, visiting professor of public administration, senior fellow of a university institute for public policy, and adjunct professor of political science.

He was one of the 12 Founders and is one of five Diplomates Laureate of the American Academy of Sanitarians, one of five Diplomates Emeritus, and is a recipient of numerous state and national professional awards, as well as an Honorary Doctorate in 2007.

He was a founder of the Council on Education for Public Health, as well as a long time member of the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council.

He developed and gained enactment of numerous state and local environmental health measures, testified before the Presidential Committee on Executive Reorganization regarding the creation and scope of EPA, and testified before Congressional Committees regarding key environmental health issues.

He has over 240 publications and policy papers, many of which may be accessed at:

<http://hsc.unm.edu/library/development/endowment/Gordon/index.shtml>

and

http://www.sanitarrians.org/sanitarian_resources.htm