

June 4, 2021

With but a few Departmental Acknowledgements remaining on my watch I thought I would go outside the box on this one. I have given the DAs to individuals, teams, places, and values, but I have yet to give it to a 'thing'. That is why in perhaps a bit of circular reasoning the **Departmental Acknowledgement** (DA) itself is being featured this week.

I started the DA very shortly after starting my first mandate as Chair-Chief. My listening tour of the Divisions and Units comprising the Department before starting had highlighted two recurring themes. The first was that groups were feeling disconnected from each other. The standard word used was 'siloes'. There appeared to be a hunger to know what others were up to and to connect to a greater community. There was a palpable fear that this would be exacerbated by the looming move to the Glen.

Connected to this not surprisingly was an almost existential angst about the 'why' of the organization. While individuals were focused on their sector of activity and were for the most part performing at a high level despite incredible physical and technical limitations, the values and reasons to do so were missing. They were busy but could not provide a ready purpose for their activity beyond the obvious. They were on a road going forward but did so without reflection. In talking to the incredibly intelligent and talented members of the Department, I realized that there was a lot of value remaining unlocked. Providing the 'why' could be a catalyst to unlocking the value and achieving even more.

With these challenges before a (and after 10 years I can openly confess it now) scared and inexperienced leader without financial resources, I came upon the DA as a vehicle. With no equity, other than my own sweat and time, each week I would cast my eye on the Departmental landscape and highlight a value, success, attribute or achievement that would be both inspirational and aspirational to the Departmental community. Humans crave recognition, community and connection. The DA would also serve as a tangible means of breaking down walls and tearing down silos.

While the vast majority of DAs were about individuals, it was never about 'who' but rather 'what'. Each individual chosen was but an example or exemplar of a value or activity that was explicitly mentioned in the DA that was an ingredient in the success of an academic organization. These values or activities could be about clinical service, education, research, innovation or advocacy. Hopefully the DA would motivate others to connect to our community values to more fully realize their own potential. Perhaps the individual celebrated would serve as a model to other. Their narrative would resonate with others to perhaps say; "I can do that".

The DAs also enabled me to connect to members, learn about their narratives and the inter-digitated activities of the Department. After a DA, I would often receive a heartfelt communication of thanks. On more than one occasion in pre-COVID times, a member would drop by my office to talk about it, especially how they shared it with family.

By my estimate over ten years given the academic schedule there were 400 plus DAs, each taking about an hour. A tremendous investment of time for a leader, but as I look back the single best regular investment of my time as a leader over the past decade. The return on investment has been stupendous and beyond calculation.

Thank you for reading and paying attention to the DA over the years. I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have.

Have a great weekend everyone.

Michael

Michael Shevell, MDCM, FRCPC, FCAHS

Chairman, Department of Pediatrics

Professor (with Tenure)

Departments of Pediatrics and Neurology/Neurosurgery

McGill University

Guyda Chair in Pediatrics

Pediatrician-in-Chief

Montreal Children's Hospital/

McGill University Health Centre (MUHC)

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