

# Parting Thoughts

By Barry Hunt, MPA  
Community Health Services

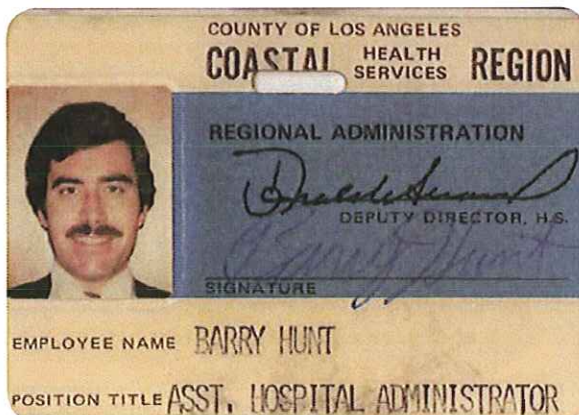
*This month, after more than 40 years of County service, I will be retiring. After working in six different departments for dozens of bosses in a multitude of cities and weathering a plethora of professional and economic highs and lows, I have some words of wisdom, or at least experience, to share at the sunset of my career. So here goes...*

- **Be flexible.** With history as a guide, you can plan on several organizational restructurings during your career. Since joining the Department of Hospitals in 1972, we have been regularly centralized, decentralized, and organizationally reformatted. More specifically, historical records show we were "merged" in 1973 with other departments (e.g., Public Health, Hospitals, Mental Health, and Veterinarian) to become the Department of Health Services. We were then "regionalized" in 1974, then "disentangled" from other departments in 1981, then "realigned" in 1984, then "networked" in 1988, then "clustered" in 1993, then "reengineered" in 1996 then "SPAed out" in 1999. In 2006, we were "de-siloized" and Public Health was "separated" from DHS. All of these adjustments brought us new programs, acronyms, and bosses. These biggest departmental decisions are beyond our control, so the best approach is to be flexible, stay positive, and understand and support the department's mission, and make it your own.
- **Whether or not you get along with a coworker or boss, you still have an important job to do.** Sometimes people click and sometimes they don't. For those of you who know me, it may be difficult to imagine my having issues with a coworker or boss, but it has happened (smile). What I've learned is that regardless of personal feelings,

likes or dislikes, we all have essential jobs to do. After all, that's why we are here. So be a professional and do your job well. If you are emotionally wound up inside, you are wasting your best energy on real or imagined slights and are not focusing on your duties. Control your impulses and take the high road. You'll sleep better at night; which, in turn, will help you do a better job the next day.

- **Be a mentor and a mentee.** I'm fortunate to have had several mentors who have taken me under their wing. They showed me how to see opportunities, simplify arcane budgets and inscrutable policies, master computer systems, generate revenue, and troubleshoot career trajectories through the salary ordinance. After such memorable moments, I take time to write them down and tell others. Knowledge grows as you give it away. Share what you've learned with younger people and you will pay forward your debt of gratitude to future generations.
- **Keep on building your skill set.** In Public Health we are very fortunate to have so many free training courses available to enhance our careers. But it's up to us to make time for them. If you stop learning, you will quickly become antiquated and will have nothing new to offer your program. You will lose your confidence and be supplanted by others who will be more eager and capable than you.

*My authorization for outstanding opportunities to serve the public*



1980



2010



- **Join professional organizations** in your discipline, as well as more global groups, like the American Public Health Association. Besides giving back to the community, you'll learn the newest best practices and find opportunities for broader collaboration and career moves.
- **View setbacks as learning experiences.** Profit from mistakes by asking, "What went wrong and how can I do better next time?" Admit your mistakes and clear the air. Some old-timers will recall the 1980s with its fits and starts of Quality Circles, Reengineering, and the "Productivity Reporting System" (PRS). We always banded together, planned the work and worked the plan, then pulled a rabbit out of a hat and overcame these challenges.
- **Always have a Plan B ready for when things go awry.** We can all use a good escape hatch. New leaders and programs come and go, and you will not always be on the winning team. Activate your network to find a position in another unit. A new environment may be all you need to rebound and flourish.
- **Integrate a healthy lifestyle into your work.** Don't wait until you are off of work to focus on your health. Integrate it into your work day. Most of us spend our best waking hours here so it's important to find creative ways to be healthy on the job. Use a footstool for step aerobics, and climb 15 flights of stairs each work day. I keep a pair of comfortable walking shoes at the office and make it a point to walk outside. Find coworkers who can accompany you, or at least give you a kick in the rear when you get lazy. Besides the exercise, the change of scenery does wonders for overall well-being.
- **Exercise three times a week, drink lots of water, take vitamins, avoid junk food, wear sunblock, and floss every day.** Try different kinds of exercise, join some special interest clubs, and get involved in Public Health's employee wellness activities. Your rewards will be abundant good health, lots of energy, and a renewed sense of adventure.
- **Learn languages and appreciate the many cultures in your office.** Public Health consists of many diverse peoples. You don't have to go to an ethnic fair; you work in one. Appreciate the richness of the cultures at your doorstep. Ask your coworkers about their languages, history, foods and traditions. You will gain a greater appreciation of the world while learning about your colleagues. They, in turn, will enjoy educating you.
- **If you are a manager, nominate exemplary employees for awards.** Through the years, I have had the pleasure of supervising many wonderful staff. Whenever merited, I would take the time to write up nominations for many of my shining stars. This is an inexpensive way to acknowledge those whose work rises above and beyond the expected.



In 1999, I nominated one of my staff, Rosa Pinon, an exemplary facility administrator. From a large field of nominees, Rosa was selected as the Public Health Employee of the Year and then the Los Angeles County Employee of the Month (see photo). Everyone on staff was happy and proud that one of our own won these awards! (Note: Rosa is also retiring this month from CHS Administration after 37 years of County service!)

- **Learn how to handle an aggressive situation; if you don't have the time or interest, make sure an associate does. While not recommended for everyone...**My father, Hal Hunt, REHS, was a chief of Environmental Health in 1962. One day, an angry man came in off the street and began making demands. When my father could not comply, the man pulled a gun on him. My dad was in shock, but luckily, his quick-witted associate, Guinishi Kawamoto, a judo master, came to the rescue. He flipped the guy over, and the gun went flying. Humiliated, the guy ran out, never to be seen again. From that day forward, my father invited Guinishi to every meeting.
- **Maintain a sense of humor.** Whether you think so or not, your days are full of observations worthy of a chuckle. Little humorous incidents are rejuvenating. At the worst of times, there is always something funny, or at least ironic, going on...a word, a phrase, a look, an element of performance, or nonperformance. Remember the West Area Listeria Hysteria (1985)?

As I bid you adieu, I am proud to say I am a "Career County Man." I have been blessed with countless opportunities to serve the public for decades and believe I have made valuable contributions that will endure.

What will I do next? Well, I won't be a couch potato. I've always had a long list of hobbies and goals and will continue pursuing them. And now I'll have more time for dancing; taking self-enrichment classes in sports, arts, music and humanities; pursuing interests in American and world history and genealogy; teaching; volunteering; gardening; and traveling (seen four continents, have three to go). One thing you can bet on is that I'll continue living by the motto that has served me well for decades: "Enjoy life, learn something new, keep on dancing, and have fun while doing good." I hope you'll do the same. 🐉

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**Editor's Note:** The thoughts and opinions expressed in first-person articles are solely those of the author and may not reflect the views of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.