



Perspective/Opinion

Family

By Joseph E. Kerschner, MD

Dr. Kerschner shares excerpts of his 2023 graduation address, offering his reflections on MCW (Medical College of Wisconsin) as a “family,” and some reasons why he is optimistic for the future ...

“Family” was a common theme about which faculty and staff wanted to talk when I interviewed to be Dean of the School of Medicine at MCW. I often heard MCW was characterized by having a “family atmosphere.” As I progressed in my leadership journey, it has become abundantly clear to me that two things matter far more than any other in the success of an organization: *its **PEOPLE** (family) and its **PRACTICES** (culture).*

With outstanding people and practices, organizations can overcome almost any obstacle.

It is with utmost confidence that I know our graduating students will bring their excellence to many organizations across the globe—to become the *people* of each of those organizations. It is my profound hope that you will also carry the culture and practices that MCW strives to embody—the **PRACTICES**—which reflect the best parts of being a *family*.

These **PRACTICES** include:

- Striving to understand the wonder and potential of individuals—*family members*—instead of the opposite, which I fear we see far too often in today’s world.
- Truly seeing our colleagues—*family members*—and including all as equals and endeavoring to lift their ideals and hopes along with our own.
- Working with purpose and values with those around you—*family members*—to build a better planet and world as you also accomplish the task at hand for your own professional careers.
- Perhaps, most importantly, gathering at the table with those around you—*your family members*—in the spirit of listening and understanding rather than simply expounding upon a viewpoint.
 - Coming with a sense of optimism and curiosity—assuming best intent
 - Truly being grateful for that person—*family member*—even if our viewpoints as on differing sides of the aisle
 - Providing a space for respect, dialogue, and understanding of their journey

- And finally, creating space for love wherever your journey takes you.
 - *Families* have love at their core.
 - Love that allows transcendence of differences.
 - Love of purpose and people that binds them together.

I exhort you to create love in the world and in your worlds. Create relationships and cultures that allow positivity and connectivity to bloom and be pollinated, propagating everywhere. While it is true that organizations will not love you back, that does not mean that you cannot create *the culture and practices* in organizations that enable and embody the best aspects of human nature with respect, inclusion, caring and love.

Some of you may know that, quite literally, I have a piece of my own family amongst the MCW family of graduates this year. I have watched you all endure much throughout your education, not the least being the challenges of the pandemic. I have personally witnessed your courage, compassion, and excellence; you have embodied the best aspects of family under pressure. You have supported each other in incredible ways.

Having a family member as one of this year's graduates has provided me with the gift of proximity to this year's graduating class, a proximity that is much closer than is usually afforded to the Dean of the School of Medicine and Provost of MCW. The gift of proximity has allowed me an even greater appreciation of the unique and special characteristics, and talent of our graduates. It has provided me with the greatest sense of hope, wonder and optimism for the future of medicine and our health professions and the pursuit of knowledge through scientific discovery.

Joseph E. Kerschner MD is the Provost, Executive Vice President, and Julia A. Uihlein, MA, Dean of the School of Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin. In addition to his leadership roles, he remains active in research and developing innovative treatments in the field of otolaryngology.