



# WORDS OF WISDOM FROM ANDERS VINTHER

INDUSTRY TALK TIME WITH MARTIN LUSH

Martin Lush talks with a veteran pharma professional to get their point of view on the industry and beyond.

## ANDERS' BIO

- > Current Site Head and VP Quality at Intarcia: Work includes preparing the company for its first NDA and launch of a new technology.
- > Chief Quality Officer at Sanofi Pasteur: Work included culture change across multiple sites in multiple countries.
- > VP Quality at Genentech and Roche: Work included developing one quality system across all manufacturing sites worldwide and integration of Roche and Genentech.
- > Cofounder and Chief Quality Officer at CMC Biologics: Work included building and growing a company from scratch including construction, qualification and approval of green field facility. The company was successfully sold a few years back.
- > VP Quality at Novo Nordisk.
- > Very active at PDA including past Chairman of the Board of Directors.



## Anders' Words of Wisdom

- > Work hard to understand the business, not just your job.
- > If you're not operating outside your comfort zone 30% of your time, change jobs. When your day becomes routine, it's time to change.
- > NEVER forget you are in the public health business. If you do, you become part of a very big problem.
- > In every decision focus on doing what's right for the patient.
- > If you have a problem, consult Google/Amazon. Most of the problems we face are not new. Make reading a habit and part of your job.

**ML: Anders, after 30 years in pharma, if you had your time again, would you do anything differently?**

**AV:** I don't think so because I've been fortunate to experience so much, from leading culture change in a multinational company, to integrating two large businesses, to building a business from scratch.

**ML: You make it sound like this was all down to being in the right place at the right time. Did you have a career plan?**

**AV:** To be clear, none of this was down to luck! Although I didn't plan my career, I've always pushed myself outside my comfort zone. One piece of advice I would give is learn as much as you can about the business as soon as possible. Organizations tend to put people into silos and keep them there. If you start in



R&D, you stay there. The same for QA, manufacturing, technical support... the lot, in fact. It's important to understand the world of finance, purchasing, logistics, sales and marketing, not just your job. Become obsessed about learning what others do and build strong networks. As your career progresses, you will need both.

*"Lots of problems I have seen in my career have been due to lack of organizational intelligence where decisions are made without thinking about the impact on others. So, get out of your silo and talk to others to better understand the business and their world."*

This is important for QA professionals who have, in my opinion, become conditioned to be reactive, rather than proactive. When you understand how the business works, you can figure out how you can add value. To do this you need to talk the language of business, not compliance. QA should be focusing on error prevention, simplification, process design and other value-adding activities, not just the reactive stuff.

#### **ML: Any other career advice?**

**AV:** Yes, three things. Firstly: Don't change jobs too soon and don't stay too long! It takes at least two years to understand your job before you can make a real contribution. First you learn and then you give back. If you move too soon, you have not contributed to the business; if you move too late, you are taking up somebody else's job opportunity.

My second piece of advice: If you're not being challenged, if you're not learning something new every day, if you're not operating outside your comfort zone at least 30% of the time, change roles.

My last piece of advice is the most important:

NEVER forget you are in the public health business. If you do, you become part of a very big problem. Remember, every decision you make potentially impacts a patient.

#### **ML: What have been some of your greatest challenges and what did you learn from them?**

**AV:** There's one in particular. During my Genentech days we observed *Leptospira* as a contamination during fermentation, a difficult-to-see, slow-growing spirochaete capable of squeezing through a 0.2-micron filter. The experience was memorable because it forced us to think outside the box and challenge conventional thinking. At the time everyone thought a 0.2-micron filter would stop everything. We decided to share it with the world because it is related to patient safety and no other company knew about this potential issue. From a patient's perspective, it's a shame companies don't share their problems more openly so we can all learn rather than repeat the same problems.

#### **ML: You've faced a lot of high-pressure situations in your career. How did you cope? Any recommendations?**

**AV:** Yes, just keep the patient foremost in your mind and focus on doing the right thing for them. I found this gave me great clarity. My career in pharma has been dominated by grey area decisions where you simply don't have all the facts. Remember, rejecting a batch because you're not quite sure can also have severe consequences – the patient is not getting their medicine.

*"I always imagined justifying my decision to a patient sat opposite me or my products being taken by family members. I have also believed in total transparency with regulators when making the tough decisions. This transparency leads to trust. Being secretive leads to the opposite."*

#### **ML: What do you think the industry will look like in 2030 and how should companies prepare?**

**AV:** Martin, I have heard you describe the pharma industry as one driven by 21st century science, managed by 20th century minds and regulated by 19th century laws and regulations. I totally agree! It will continue to be difficult to implement new technologies because of the global regulatory complexity. Regulatory agencies must understand they are, collectively, slowing down innovation and indirectly causing drug shortages because of this complexity.



However, one of the most progressive people I've ever met is FDA's Janet Woodcock, so who knows. I am also member of a group of QA senior leaders from the top 25 pharma companies working collectively to share problems and generate solutions. We need more collaboration of this type if we're to meet future health care needs.

**ML: Anders, I know you read a lot. What would your top five recommendations be?**

**AV:** I was struggling to get it down to five, but here they are:

- > *The New Economics* by Edward Deming. Although a renowned statistician, all his books focus on the importance of people, not numbers.
- > *Accelerate* by John Kotter. If you want to change culture, this is a must read.
- > *Influencer* by Patterson and others. If you want to influence without authority, this is the book for you.
- > *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath. A great read if you want to change behaviors and culture.
- > *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. No reading list would be complete without it. You can read this classic again and again and still find something new.

*"So many of the challenges facing our industry are not new. The solutions have already been figured out. Just ask Amazon."*

**ML: If you were cast away on a desert island, what piece of music would you take with you and why?**

**AV:** If you let me take an album it would have to be Queen's Greatest Hits. Why? Because I would never tire of listening to it!

**AV: OK, my turn, what would you take?**

**ML:** I would take Vaughan Williams' Lark Ascending. Why? It instantly takes me back to the North York Moors. I can be in a taxi in New York or in a hotel in Shanghai but after the first few chords, I'm instantly transported back home without getting on an aeroplane.

**ML: Anders, in terms of your hobbies and interests, what do you do and why are you passionate about them?**

**AV:** My number one hobby (which is also a business) is wine making. I am a wine maker, and my wife and I have a winery – Flying Suitcase Wines. I love the process from harvesting the grapes at the crack of dawn to running tasting sessions for my customers. Living in California helps!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Martin Lush has over 30 years' experience in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. He has held senior management positions in QA, manufacturing, QC and supply chain auditing and has conducted audits and education programs for many hundreds of companies in over 25 countries.

For more information, contact [pharmamail@nsf.org](mailto:pharmamail@nsf.org) or visit [www.nsfpharma.org](http://www.nsfpharma.org)

Copyright © 2019 NSF International.

This document is the property of NSF International and is for NSF International purposes only. Unless given prior approval from NSF, it shall not be reproduced, circulated or quoted, in whole or in part, outside of NSF, its committees and its members.

Cite as: NSF International. November 2019. Words of Wisdom From Anders Vinther. NSF: York, UK.

## NSF INTERNATIONAL | PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES

The Georgian House, 22/24 West End, Kirkbymoorside, York, UK YO62 6AF

**T** +44 (0) 1751 432 999 | **E** [pharmamail@nsf.org](mailto:pharmamail@nsf.org)

789 N. Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105, USA

**T** +1 (202) 822 1850 | **E** [healthsciences@nsf.org](mailto:healthsciences@nsf.org)

[www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org) | [www.nsfpharma.org](http://www.nsfpharma.org) | Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#)