Executive Profile

Stephen Klasko: Continues to practice at Tampa hospital

Premium content from Tampa Bay Business Journal
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WHO AM I?

NAME: Dr. Stephen Kent Klasko

TITLE AND COMPANY: Chief executive officer, USF Health; dean, University of South Florida College of Medicine

YEARS WITH THE COMPANY: Seven

YEARS IN TAMPA BAY: Seven

NATURE OF BUSINESS: Health care, education, research

EDUCATION: Degree in chemistry and journalism, Lehigh University; M.D., Drexel University College of Medicine, OB-GYN residency, HealthEast Teaching Hospitals; M.B.A., Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania

WHERE YOU GREW UP AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE: I grew up in Philadelphia and was a rabid Eagles, Phillies and Flyers fan. I was not, however, one of the fans who threw snowballs at Santa Claus.

Tips of the trade

What do you get paid to do? Create a new generation of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, public health professionals and physical therapists that do a better job at advancing health care than we have done.

How do you keep yourself current in your field? I still practice OB-GYN at Tampa General Hospital so I make sure that I read all I can to ensure that I still know more than the students. As to the business and future of health care, I have an opportunity to talk to more than a hundred health care CEOs a year as a speaker for the Governance Institute and I am a trustee on two hospital boards in Chicago and Pennsylvania so I maintain a national view of health care.

How do you generate new ideas? I take a “history of the future approach” and try to envison health care 10 years from now. The things that seem obvious in the future, we start working on today.

Who is your mentor and why? Dr. Elliot Sussman was the CEO of a good community hospital in Pennsylvania and gave me my first chair job. He could have easily continued to run a “good hospital” for the rest of his career, but he decided that his community deserved the “best community academic medical center” in the nation. That acceptance of nothing less than excellence has driven my desire to make Tampa Bay the national center for transformative health care ideas.

Background check

What was your first paid job? Graveyard shift DJ (midnight to 5 a.m.) at a rock station in Philadelphia under the name of “Stevie Kent.”

How did you get started in your current career? I was in private practice and was listening to a professor talk to students about hysterectomy, the most performed procedure in the U.S. He described it as an easy decision with few complications for patients. That night, I saw that four nonfiction bestsellers were from women about “complications of hysterectomy” and the devastating effects it had on them. Clearly doctors weren’t listening to their patients. I decided then to go into academic medicine and devoted my research career to changes in how we select and educate physicians so that we are more empathetic to how patients really feel.

If you could have dinner with one person you’ve never met, who would it be and why? George Lucas. He defines creativity and innovation.

What’s a fact about you that few people know? I ran for township executive in Pennsylvania when I was an OB-GYN resident. I won the primary, lost the general election and found out later that if I had won, that I might have been fired.

Words to the wise

What advice would you give to someone starting out in your field? Dream big, don’t let anyone tell you that changing health care is too difficult, and above all don’t ever believe that good is good enough in health care. Strive to make your organization different and better.

How could Tampa Bay change to be more business friendly? In health care, we need to be less fragmented. The cities that have best leveraged health care for economic development are ones where there have been innovative partnerships and co-branding between hospitals, academic medical centers, cancer centers and industry.