

Maurer's Healthcare Insight (83)

## Count Your Blessings

P. Reed Maurer

The year-end and new year parties are now a distant memory. Your mid-winter holiday was great, but too short. Your 2007 profit plan was approved with higher sales and lower expenses than you recommended. Visitors from the home office are arriving in droves to "help" you make or exceed the plan. You are back on the treadmill of earning a living to plug the hole in your bank account caused by that year-end holiday before it takes a hit from spending already in the planning stage for the spring break and summer family trip.

Yes, it is the new year slump somewhat akin to post-partum blues. Although there is no cure, perhaps it might ease the pain to take a moment and count your blessings. Let me help by making some suggestions.

### **You Don't Work for Pfizer**

Think of the hassle of updating your resume and reestablishing contact with the headhunters you previously shunned. Or, your job is secure but you must find a way to ease out subordinates who will be cut. Tough to be quietly modest after living in another mode.

### **You Don't Work for Tanabe**

Think of waking up in the morning to face news about another merger that may or may not be consummated. You have been down this road before with Taisho in 2001 and since then rumors circulated about other possible trips to the altar. As in all mergers you must now prepare for the inevitable downsizing and jockeying for jobs. Tough to stay optimistic when you must change your identify and group affiliations.

### **You Know You Will Exceed Plan**

Think how easy it was to convince the home office your plan was a stretch. Because of the environment they live in and the preconceptions they have about Japan, they bought into assumptions concerning generics eroding sales, a price revision in 2007, a low reimbursement price for your new product and/or a delay in its approval, and a weak yen. It's so easy to convince people how tough it is to work in Japan.

### **You Work in the Pharma Industry**

Think how tough it is for young people today to make career choices, particularly in Japan where changing companies is viewed as a character flaw. Of course there are many ways to live a significant life, but being



part of an industry that fosters innovation to enhance the quality of life is a pretty good way to spend your working years. I am now in my 43rd year and do not regret any part of it.

### **You Are Raising Children in Japan**

Think how tough it must be for a child to grow up in fear. Fear of terror and terrorists, fear of assault, fear of abduction, and fear of theft. There is a candy store next to my office so I see kids ride up on their bicycles and park outside my window while

they buy a 50 yen or 100 yen treat. Their smiles and laughter in the afternoon after school makes my day.

### **You Will Launch a New Product This Year**

You have gone through all the trials and tribulations of clinical development and regulatory review. You received a reimbursement price that was below your initial request, but the economics are very good. You plan to bring all your MRs together for a launch meeting which is an easy logistics problem in Japan. You will probably be able to cover all the key doctors two weeks post launch. If the doctors decide the drug is useful for their patients their prescriptions will be filled immediately anywhere in Japan. Think how tough it is to deal with formularies, government purchasing bodies, and restrictive budgets.

### **You Have a Great Secretary**

Think how she takes care of everything in a gracious, polite manner, never failing to find what you need when you need it. If you work in a foreign company she must deal with two languages, two cultures, two different sets of expectations. I could go on but you know as well as I do these women are the best human resources in Japan. Without them this economy would grind to a halt. If you work in another country you know how tough it is to find a good secretary who can speak one language effectively.

### **You Have a Great Challenge**

Think how Japan is changing in so many ways. As I am here for 37 years I could give you a long list, but let's just name a few in the pharma sector. Mergers, once shunned as a barbaric Western custom, are now expected. People once considered working for a foreign firm a desperate act; now they actively solicit jobs.

A convoy of companies moving as one has broken up into subgroups with very different objectives and resources. Change brings opportunity if you stay in front of the curve. Think how tough it is to change in an environment that does not welcome change.

### **You Know Things Work**

Think of the streets without potholes, of garbage that is sorted, bagged and picked up at a specified time, public transportation that runs on time all the time, of phones that work anywhere with more information options than you will ever use, of appointments rarely missed. Think how tough it is to live and work in an environment where things may work but frequently do not. This is part of what it means to live in a civil society.

### **You Can Live a Good Life**

Put everything said so far together and live the good life. Add on the delicious food you can generally get within walking distance of your office or home, the ski resorts accessible within a couple of hours, the cultural events of every description available with a bit of advance planning. My wife and I recently started ballroom dance lessons. It is a kick!



So there you have it: 10 good reasons why you should be smiling from ear to ear and eager to enjoy the challenges and opportunities of 2007.

*P. Reed Maurer is in the park every morning at 6:30am for radio-taiso to get each day off to a good start.*