“Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to great places. You’re off and away!” These words by Dr. Seuss (1990) framed the fresh trajectories of the many new practice scholars that schools of nursing across the United States are producing via doctorate of nursing practice (DNP) programs. By late 2008, there were over 80 schools of nursing offering DNP programs and another 50 programs expected to begin shortly (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008). Undoubtedly, this new breed of nursing practice scholar will make a difference in the profession of nursing, but how will anyone ever know about the great accomplishment of DNPs? The answer is both simple and complex: Our new doctorally prepared nursing colleagues will labor in anonymity unless they record and publish their findings. The term newly minted DNP, as used in this context, is intended to mean a DNP graduate in his or her first year after graduation from a doctoral program. The first year of doctoral program completion should be a joyous celebration whereby the accomplishment of having received the doctorate is recognized and cheered. Once the accolades and self-congratulations end, much work still lies ahead. The skills and expertise of DNP nurses are urgently needed in the health care workforce. “Nurses prepared at the DNP level will be in an ideal position to initiate efforts to improve the health of the nation at local clinical levels and within the health policy arena” (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 138).

All DNPs should have a common goal: the publication of findings from their scholarly projects. The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2006) is quite explicit: A DNP project should be a practice application demonstrating a synthesis of a student's work, creating a basis for future scholarship. Stated simply, the DNP project reflects mastery of an advanced specialty within nursing practice. Whether the project is a program evaluation, a quality improvement project, an evaluation of a new practice model, or a pilot study, the theme should link this scholarly knowledge to improve practice or patient outcomes. Ideally, the DNP project will serve as a basis for an informed nursing practice.

As a profession, we should use our writing skills to advance the nursing discipline. Indeed, positions in academic nursing and/or advanced clinical practice demand that we write, publish, and present to achieve promotions. Further, as nurses, we are knowledge workers with an important societal mandate to improve the health of our citizens. If our noble efforts are left unwritten, DNP projects will remain lovely, small-scale endeavors which undoubtedly have done some local good but are well-kept secrets. Our profession will suffer, as will our patients.

Therefore, here are three suggestions for newly minted DNPs in the hope that their important work will be shared with the rest of the world:

1. Rest and renew. Your last few semesters have been demanding on you and your family. Give yourself a well-deserved break after completing your doctoral program. Read the nonrequired book you have meaning to read, take a vacation, or refresh yourself in the best way that suits you. However, do not let your DNP project get away. After a period of rest and renewal, you can gaze upon your topic with fresh eyes.

2. Start your first manuscript. Do not be scared. Put words down on paper (or pixels to hard drive) to get your creative juices flowing. However, you do not protest, “I don’t have a creative bone in my body.” This type of negative automatic thought must be challenged whenever it arises. In addition, you may feel comforted to know that you are not alone in feeling like a scholar-impostor. Many new docs experience self-doubt and lament, “It was just a fluke that I finished my doctorate!” This phenomenon is so common that it even has a name, scholar-impostor syndrome, and it is the great crippler of aspiring nurse authors. How-
ever, be reassured, Heinrich (2008) stated that not only newly minted DNPs, but also experienced nursing “faculty members feel like scholar-imposters, too” (p. xxii). Treatment of the scholar impostor syndrome involves finding your voice through the writing process; the specific prescription for the syndrome is to develop the habit of writing (McGuinness, 2008). Do not be intimidated by writing; avoid telling yourself that you are going to write for an extended period (such as a whole day). Instead, commit to 20 minutes of writing each day. New DNPs will find themselves spending more time writing and less time avoiding it if they use the 20-minute a day rule. Write daily.

3. Find a mentor. You may need more than one. Colleagues may become your mentors or you may need to form your own support group. Choose to associate with like-minded colleagues and avoid anti-intellectuals at all costs. Find at least one writing mentor who is willing to tell you the truth and challenge you to produce the best manuscript possible. When your writing emerges from this process, you will have a publishable manuscript. If you fail to publish, the hundreds of hours spent on your DNP project will not advance the art and science of nursing. Rather, it will stay locked in your own obscure cupboard. “Lock them [your findings] up, and you may end up wondering why no one has come looking for you” (Smaglik, 2005, p. 241).

Your ultimate professional destination will depend on you and your willingness (more so than your ability) to write. Writing is learned through practice, and there is no better way to learn than by sharing your DNP project with your colleagues via the written word.

So, let the words of Dr. Seuss inspire newly minted DNPs:

Will you succeed? Yes, you will indeed (98¼% guaranteed).
Kid, you'll move mountains! So be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea, you're off to great places! Today is your day. Your mountain is waiting. So get on your way!

References


