A Note from PAVIR's New CEO: Elaine Staats

I have been pondering how pervasive "100 percent" has become in today's casual conversation. There is even an emoji for it. It no longer only describes a whole or total, but is now also used to emphasize absolutes of opinion or personal character. For example, "This is 100 percent supportive of research" or "I am 100 percent decisive." Upon first hearing, it caught my attention, but now loses power quickly when used often and glibly. On the other hand, I particularly appreciate its use in reinforcing authenticity as in "Keep it 100" the contemporary of "Keepin' it real." These musings led me to reflect on things I convey and check whether I mean what I say. What about me is "100" and why is it important for you to know? For examples, I am 100% American, born and raised by immigrant parents, and I am 100% Mom. These are immutable things about me that I cannot flippantly overturn based on mood or moment, yet probably do not mean much to you other than perhaps relatability if even that. As PAVIR's new CEO, the singular thing you should know is I am 100% a Research Administrator forged in the enclaves of a robust academic medical center and its affiliated VA. There is no helping it; it shapes how I think about what we all do every day and is the most significant quality I bring to the table.

Why does this matter?

No one grows up saying "I want to be a Research Administrator someday." Research Administration has only recently become a formalized profession further solidified by the availability of postbaccalaureate degree programs near the turn of the century. Its relevance to being the supporting framework and the grease that keeps research moving cannot be overstated. Having served VA/Stanford investigators and their research teams my entire professional career, I learned what was needed so my researchers could do their work unencumbered by administrative burden and to represent their interests with internal and external entities by concerning myself with the details so they would not have to.

My first ten years, I was privileged to learn from and serve a special and passionate unit of Stanford faculty who really cared about each other, their patients, trainees, and staff, and about solving problems. With their trust, empowerment, and example I learned everything about research administration and educating future generations of clinician scientists quite literally from the ground up. I roamed the underground hallways of research facilities or throughout the hospital and trekked across campus for nearly every task imaginable: lab coat dry cleaning, equipment inventory and space planning; processing payroll and reimbursements; scheduling weekly journal clubs, seminars, and securing conference rooms; coordinating MSTP (medical scientist training program) appointments across departments, managing a training grant and fellowships; package preparation for visas, postdoc appointments, and faculty long-forms. Always at my core was overseeing the ever-churning machine of administering grants and industry-sponsored projects, managing PI portfolios, their startup packages, donations, and endowments while supporting a busy clinical unit. Over the last 12 years, I have used the same ground-up and all-over approach to learning about VA and PAVIR. I may never know the microcosms and cultures represented by each Service, Section, Department or Division as I once did, but I do understand many of the goals, motivations/frustrations, and minutia involved in getting things accomplished or problems solved. Research? Education? Yes, I'm all about it. Let's go!

Looking ahead, we still face uncertain times, but now you know that my time on this "block "has prepared me to serve you as PAVIR's CEO 100%. With me are some amazingly talented PAVIR Admin staff who are committed to serving you as a way of honoring our Veterans. Our office has historically been a place where we continually seek efficiencies and have successfully fulfilled our role as the flexible funding mechanism we were established to be. Yet, we have also made mistakes, we have not done as well as we would have liked, and we keep moving onward and upward. I sincerely desire to keep learning, experimenting, and improving with you. Toward this end, I am making my rounds on a circuit reaching out to as many as I can to listen. It is my goal that the PAVIR Admin office be grounded in the principles of research administration that we may facilitate and promote VA research and education activities as effectively and efficiently as possible. If ever you have a question or feedback for us, please reach out at any time.

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