PHARMACIST & TECHNICIAN CE:

Strengthening the Leadership Pipeline: Reflective Learning and Connection in Pharmacy Technician Leadership Development

by Sarah Pagenkopf, PharmD

The pharmacy workforce is in a period of critical transition. With rising demand for patient-centered services, increasing workplace complexity, and evolving interprofessional collaboration expectations, the pharmacy profession must invest in nurturing future pharmacy leaders. The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy emerged from a strategic initiative aimed at developing leadership capacity across all levels, roles, and workplaces in pharmacy practice, with a particular focus on elevating pharmacy technician roles, empowering role expansion, and aligning leadership development with long-term profession-wide goals and ensuring professionals who are pharmacy technicians are viewed as careerist and not simply pharmacists in training.

Like many other state pharmacy associations[1], PSW seeks to equip all pharmacy professionals with foundational leadership skills that can be used at their place of work,enable entry into new or advanced roles and foster membership and engagement with society. The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin already has a robust and highly successful leadership training offering focused on pharmacist leaders; the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy shall offer a similar experience for pharmacy technicians in Wisconsin.

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Learning Objectives

- Define at least three components of a high-impact pharmacy technician leadership development program.
- Identify two strategies for promoting connection and peer learning among leadership academy participants.
- Summarize key engagement considerations in hosting a leadership development event.
- Describe the value of follow-up coaching sessions and longitudinal learning for pharmacy technician professionals.
- Recall one method to assess the sustained impact of leadership development experiences on participant performance and growth.

Abstract

This article presents a structured summary and educational analysis of a recent multi-day pharmacy technician leadership academy that combined in-person workshops with planned longitudinal virtual engagement. Designed to build leadership capacity within the pharmacy profession, the Academy used connection-building activities, collaborative learning formats, and coaching strategies to create a sustainable leadership development experience. This article explores the curriculum design, engagement strategies, and reflective practices used and outlines possible best practices for supporting the professional growth of pharmacy technician professionals. Practical tools and structured follow-up sessions are described as means to extend learning beyond a single event and potentially offer a framework for others who might wish to expand their current leadership offerings to include pharmacy technician professionals, and also those who may wish to implement a similar model.

Purpose and Goals of the Leadership Academy

The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy was designed to serve as a launchpad for leadership growth into an area previously not realized within the legacy leadership advancement programs at the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin - pharmacy technician careerists. The Academy's primary goals:

1. Create an environment conducive to building a shared learning space that encourages collaboration and innovation among Academy participants.
2. Support an opportunity for leadership exploration across diverse pharmacy roles, and inspire development of a pathway to empower emerging technician

leaders.

3. Build confidence and capacity for leadership among professionals who may not traditionally see themselves in leadership roles and illuminate the idea across the profession where pharmacy technicians lead in new and innovative ways.
4. Reinforce our organization and profession-wide commitment to inclusive leadership and career advancement.

This initiative, supported and sponsored by the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Board of Directors, was grounded in the belief that leadership is not confined to titles or job descriptions and that supporting pharmacy technician professionals can aid in job retention and job satisfaction, and limit workplace turnover rates.[2,3] The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy sought to empower the emergence of leadership through everyday influence, purpose-driven actions, and the ability to lead oneself and others through change. Expanding technician roles, especially in areas such as medication safety, patient support, billing, and operations management, population health, information technology, and automation, was a major emphasis of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy. In promotion and consideration of these important tenets, the program aligned with strategic workforce development priorities crafted by the 2024 PSW Workforce Summit and addressed a growing need to retain, advance, and professionally support the technician workforce.

Selection of the ideal number of learners to participate in the Academy was based on several models, including recent data and opinion suggesting that dedicated learners in smaller groups more effectively develop critical thinking, listening, and persuasion skills that may be difficult to obtain without the support of a group4. The Temple-Decker Leadership conference, which caters to pharmacists, offers a similar leadership experience to 10 Wisconsin and 10 Iowa pharmacists. Using these values and information, an initial cohort of ten pharmacy technicians was selected for the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy.

TABLE 1. Example of PSW Technician Leadership Academy Agenda

Time	*Description*	*Activities and Curriculum Topics*
Day 1	Welcome Reception	Team Building Meal Overnight Hotel Stay
Day 2	In-Person Workshop	Leadership I - Building Trust in the Workplace Leadership II - Emotional Intelligence Leadership III - Giving & Receiving Feedback Leadership IV - Critical Conversations
Day 30	Computer-Based Learning + Virtual Coaching Circles	Leadership V - Time Management & Prioritization
Day 60	Computer-Based Learning + Virtual Coaching Circles	Leadership VI - Navigating Conflict Resolution
Day 90	Computer-Based Learning + Virtual Coaching Circles	Leadership VII - Supporting a Culture of Safety (Harassment and Bullying)
Day 120	Resume Prep Session + Virtual Coaching Circles	Leadership VIII - Professional Practice and Resume Building
Day 120+	Graduation!	

Curriculum Themes and Educational Strategies

Selecting a curriculum aligned with the goals of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy also needed to offer flexible access to attend. Workforce restraints currently facing pharmacy technicians may limit the ability of attendees to join in person; therefore, a hybrid curriculum model was sought. The PSW Director of Professional and Educational Services sought to collaborate with experienced professionals who offered group teaching activities and who could provide additional educational experiences beyond the Academy, should the participants seek ongoing professional development. Madison College, a member of the Wisconsin Technical College group, was selected to oversee the didactic portions of the Academy.

Partnering with Madison College ensured that attendees received unbiased, rigorously developed education in both lecture and self-guided, computer-based module formats. Special consideration to select faculty who were not direct or indirect leaders at the participants' place of work was also an intentional element of the collaboration with Madison College. Ensuring that participants felt comfortable expressing their concerns, felt safe to share their voices, and were introduced to leadership-based learning activities without the oversight of workplace leaders, was intentionally considered to rapidly build rapport within the cohort and remind participants that leadership is not restricted only to pharmacists.

When planning the curriculum, great focus was placed on offering a flexible plan to deliver the educational content that allowed for personal connection and in-person collaboration, while balancing the busy workload, increasing staff needs within the participants' practice areas, and the various geographic travel requirements for the selected participants. Based on feedback from the PSW Pharmacy Technician Section Board, a hybrid format was selected, with both in-person and virtual opportunities to connect and join the discussion.

Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy participants engaged in a series of interactive workshops aligned with core leadership competencies, including emotional intelligence, systems thinking, adaptive communication, and change management. Through peer discussion, self-assessments, and real-world scenarios, attendees were encouraged to reflect on their leadership journeys and identify actionable strategies to implement in their workplaces.

Importantly, the educational content emphasized the evolving landscape of pharmacy and the various and increasing number of leadership opportunities

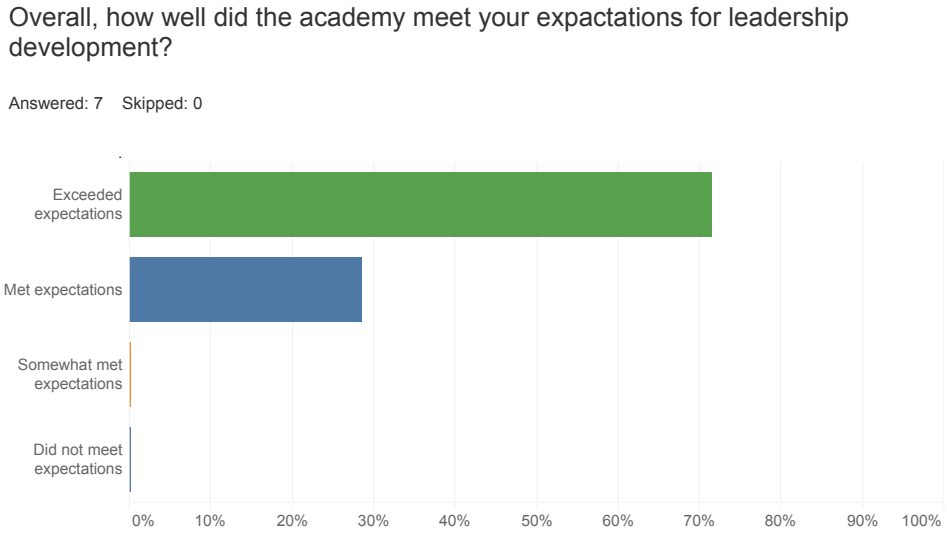
embedded within daily practice. Technician participants were challenged to reimagine their professional potential beyond current traditional job boundaries. Additionally, participants, upon graduation from the Academy, were encouraged to see themselves as mentors and role models to team members at their work sites and, potentially, to future cohorts of the Academy. Throughout the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy, team-building and discussion/coaching sessions highlighted the interdependence of pharmacy roles and the shared responsibility for shaping a resilient and innovative workforce.

The Academy agenda was designed to promote engagement from the onset. Attendees were welcomed at an informal evening gathering at a local venue, where they had the opportunity to meet, eat, and connect in a casual environment. The next morning, participants gathered for breakfast, fostering early networking before the in-person workshops began. Attendees were welcomed at the PSW Offices, a comfortable, well-equipped setting with ample parking and access to a learning-ready location with audiovisual equipment, seating for all 10 selected Academy participants and education faculty, and internet access.

The in-person workshops focused on identity, purpose, and defining personal leadership styles, followed by reflective discussions. Lunch was catered in, offering the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy participants ample time to connect, reconnect, network, and collaborate. The afternoon included additional leadership and person-centered team development and inspired several scenario-based discussions that challenged participants to consider their impact as team members and future leaders. As the day closed, participants reflected on their learning and the momentum created, setting the stage for longitudinal engagement.

In the four months following the initial in-person workshop, Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy participants were assigned a computer-based learning module to complete before a 90-minute virtual meeting. During the virtual meeting, the topic of computer-based learning was reviewed in more detail, and two to three Academy members were placed into coaching circles. In these coaching circles, participants could explore challenges they were currently facing, celebrate wins, and receive feedback from peers navigating similar experiences. This format encouraged accountability, normalized the ups and downs of leadership, and allowed for the practical application of new tools in real-time contexts. Staff from Madison College facilitated the education and curriculum elements and led the group-based virtual meetings and breakout sessions.

FIGURE 1. Post In-Person Workshop Participant Responses and Feedback



Application Process and Evaluation

PSW sought to identify enthusiastic pharmacy technicians across Wisconsin who demonstrated a commitment to leadership, professional growth, and the advancement of the pharmacy technician role to participate in the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy. The application process was designed to be equitable, accessible, and aligned with the Academy's goals of fostering connection, skill development, and career empowerment.

Applicants completed an online application via a portal system that enabled the de-identification of submissions. Pharmacy technicians responded to a series of questions exploring their motivation for applying and empowered the applicant to share more about their current engagement in the profession, leadership potential, and desire to contribute to a supportive professional community. In addition to demographic and employment information, applicants also shared personal insights, including their career journeys, aspirations, collaboration, and team roles.

Each application was evaluated by a team of peer reviewers using a standardized scoring rubric. The rubric considered clarity and depth of responses, alignment with the Academy's goals, leadership readiness, and the potential impact of the Academy experience on the applicant's professional trajectory.

Top-scoring candidates were selected to form a cohort of 10 participants, with attention given to ensuring inclusion in geographic location, practice setting, and background. All applicants were notified of their status following the review process, and selected participants received a confirmation letter to share with their employer or supervisor. This transparent, intentional approach was developed to ensure the Academy reached those most ready to grow as leaders and to positively influence the future of pharmacy practice.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Throughout the development and execution of the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy, a continuous quality

improvement approach was implemented to ensure program excellence, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability. The application process will also be evaluated for accessibility, clarity, and fairness, with feedback from reviewers that will be used to refine the evaluation rubric and streamline use of the online application platform. Participants shall also complete a survey to assess their experience with the process and to inform future improvements in training, scoring consistency, and communication.

Application trends to be collected in the future will include the number of applicants, demographic data, and practice settings. These trends will be used to identify outreach gaps and guide future recruitment efforts.

Participant feedback was collected after the in-person workshop and virtual sessions, and through a final academy evaluation to assess satisfaction, learning outcomes, and suggestions for improvement. The feedback collected has already been useful in informing event planners on content updates, speaker selection, and program delivery methods for future cohorts. Additionally, survey data were reported to the PSW Board of Directors in an effort to maintain ongoing support and reinforce the value of the generous funding made possible by the Board of Directors for the Academy.

It is the hope of the PSW event planners and PSW Technician Section Board that these continuous quality improvement efforts support a responsive, learner-centered approach that will help the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy to evolve based on stakeholder input and ensure the program continues to meet the needs of pharmacy technician leaders across Wisconsin long into the future.

Ongoing Efforts, Barriers, Risks, and Future Plans

The inaugural PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy faced several potential barriers, including limited awareness among Wisconsin pharmacy technicians of the opportunity, variability in employer support for participation, and challenges related to scheduling time away from work. Additionally, ensuring statewide representation and equitable access, especially for technicians in rural or underserved areas, remains an ongoing challenge.

Future risks may include fluctuating application numbers, lack of diversity in applicant backgrounds, and the potential for attrition during the six-month program. There was also a need to continually assess the balance between educational rigor and participant bandwidth, particularly given varying levels of leadership experience among applicants.

Looking ahead, the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy's future may include expanding outreach efforts to increase awareness and improve applicant diversity, building employer partnerships to support technician attendance, and exploring mentorship or alums ambassador roles for past participants.

A hybrid or fully virtual model may be considered and offered in the future to reduce travel barriers and broaden accessibility. Continuous evaluation data will inform curriculum enhancements, improve facilitator/faculty training, and help scale the program to meet growing interest in pharmacy technician leadership across Wisconsin.

TABLE 2. Words of Wisdom Themes from Attendees, Provided in the Post In-Person Workshop Feedback Survey

Maintain an Open Mind:	Arrive ready to learn, regardless of your current role or experience level. The content is applicable to everyone on their growth journey.
Stay Curious and Engaged:	Active participation in discussions and activities deepens learning and connection.
Build Connections:	Take the opportunity to connect with fellow technicians in new and meaningful ways, professionally and personally.
Ask Questions and Reflect:	The academy encourages curiosity and supports personal growth through honest self-assessment and skill-building in areas like communication and emotional intelligence.

Connection as a Foundation for Growth

A cornerstone of the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy's goals and potential for success was its emphasis on cultivating meaningful connections among participants. Recognizing that leadership development is deeply intertwined with a sense of community and belonging, the curriculum of the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy intentionally wove in opportunities for relationship-building from the outset.

Informal settings allowed participants to get to know one another as individuals, beyond job titles or roles, encouraging early trust and peer support. Shared meals, overnight accommodations, and structured moments of reflection throughout the months of connection were created to offer participants a sense of psychological safety, with a hope to encourage more open engagement during leadership discussions and when giving and receiving feedback.

It is the hope of the PSW event planners and PSW Technician Section Board that this emphasis on connection lays the groundwork for lasting peer mentorship and collaboration, helping participants feel less isolated in their roles and more inspired to lead with purpose in their own workplaces.

Sustained Support and Longitudinal Learning

Leadership development is a journey, not a destination reached in a single event. Understanding this, the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy was intentionally designed as a longitudinal experience that provided sustained support beyond the initial in-person workshop. Rather than framing leadership as a skill set acquired in one day, the Academy embraced a developmental approach that acknowledged the complexity and evolution of leadership growth over time.

By spacing sessions across several months, the Academy created opportunities for participants to integrate their learning into their day-to-day roles and revisit the material with fresh insights. The intent of this longitudinal leadership offering was to foster greater retention, deeper reflection, and a stronger connection to the cohort. Most importantly, the intention of this format was to help participants shift from

passive learners to active leaders, appl their new skills, influence their teams, and sustain momentum long after the PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy's formal sessions concluded.

Conclusion

The Leadership Academy represents a meaningful step toward a more connected, empowered, and forward-looking pharmacy workforce. By prioritizing relationship-centered learning, role advancement, and longitudinal development, this program offers a replicable model for organizations seeking to invest in the leadership potential of both pharmacists and technicians. The profession's future depends on bold, inclusive leadership, and this Academy helps light the path forward.

Interested in applying, or know a technician who would be a great candidate?

The application for the 2026 PSW Pharmacy Technician Leadership Academy will open on December 1, 2025, and close February 1, 2026. Nominees will be notified of the status of their application by March 1, 2026.

PR *This article has been peer-reviewed. The contribution in reviewing is greatly appreciated!*

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Assessment Questions

1. True or False: Pharmacy leadership topics should always be taught by pharmacists who already exhibit leadership characteristics.
   a. True
   b. False
2. What is one benefit of offering an overnight stay, covered by the organization, before a full day of leadership training?
   a. Saves money on catering
   b. Ensures participants eat quickly
   c. Fosters informal connection and readiness to learn
   d. Reduces afternoon fatigue
3. Which of the following is a key feature of sustaining leadership development post-event?
   a. Providing final exams
   b. Offering follow-up coaching and virtual

sessions
   c. Assigning additional clinical tasks
   d. Reducing participant responsibilities

4. True or False: Leadership growth only occurs during formal workshop sessions.
   a. True
   b. False

5. Which of the following are NOT key considerations when scheduling a leadership event or workshop?
   a. Curriculum and goals of the leadership event
   b. Support of the organizations leadership and/or alignment with organization goals
   c. The types of food offered during the event
   d. Availability of the audience/ participants to attend, considering work and life obligations

6. Why was a mid-day break intentionally structured during the Academy?
   a. To maximize work output
   b. To provide rest and time to reflect with peers
   c. To review medical literature
   d. To introduce new guest speakers

7. True or False: Computer-Based Learning modules offer a flexible method to learn content that allows remote attendees to learn at a pace that makes the most sense for them.
   a. True
   b. False

8. 8. Which strategy is recommended to evaluate the impact of leadership training? (Select all that Apply)
   a. Collecting peer feedback six months after completion
   b. Offering optional webinars
   c. Collecting feedback from applicants after nomination submissions
   d. Distributing promotional materials
   e. Collecting feedback from learners shortly after a learning event
   f. Sending annual pharmacy updates

9. What is one reason to begin leadership development with casual events?
   a. They are less expensive
   b. They introduce content early
   c. They reduce participant anxiety and foster connection
   d. They ensure higher test scores

10. True or False: A successful leadership development program should include ongoing learning and connection opportunities.
   a. True
   b. False

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Continuing Education Credit Information

The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education as a provider of continuing pharmacy education. Continuing education credit can be earned by completing the self assessment questions. Questions may be completed online. Participants receiving a score of 70% or better will be granted 1 hour (0.1 CEU) credit through CPE Monitor. Accurate birth date (MMDD) and CPE Monitor ID must be provided in order to receive this credit as required by ACPE. This CE offering is offered free-of-charge to all PSW members. Nonmembers are charged $25.

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