

The Reluctant Leader



It never fails. When I teach aspiring nurse leaders about leadership and coaching, no matter what the setting, there are charge nurses and managers who say they don't want their supervisors' positions.

What about you? Does anyone want your job?

Of course, leadership roles are not for everyone. Still, there are too many qualified nurses who are reluctant to pursue leadership roles. How do we address this issue? I know you share concern about developing future nurse leaders because of the many queries you submitted to the Coaching Forum after our last issue. Here are just a few examples:

- How do we ensure competency as we bring people forward?
- How do we encourage aspiring nurse leaders to challenge physicians when it is in the best interest of patient care?
- How do we prepare staff for leadership positions? What are some strategies to help them with the transition? What if they do not want these roles?

Succession planning is clearly on your minds. You face the nursing shortage and the broader demographic challenges of today's workforce. You are keenly aware of the important task of replacing yourselves. You know one of your central challenges is to equip tomorrow's leaders with the skills they need to succeed, prosper, and lead satisfying professional lives.

In this column we will focus on just one element of this challenge: how you can best fulfill your responsibility to develop future nursing leaders. *Formally*, you and other readers occupy all types of positions that support succession planning. Yet, there is one element of succession that every reader has in common: you occupy the most important seat in the house when it comes to the *informal* aspects of developing leaders.

By definition, you possess an enormous capacity to influence whether the talent and contribution of your nursing colleagues come to fruition through leadership. By

definition, you are a *role model*. You may not want that job, but it is yours anyway! Because you are a leader, you are watched at every turn. By definition, you positively or negatively influence those around you through the example you set.

You are also in a position to guide, mentor, coach, and facilitate the growth of others, no matter what your formal role in the hierarchy. *You* are the most important part of your organization's succession strategy. *You* have the greatest impact on those who are thinking about whether leadership is in their future.

The nurses who report to you don't just look to you for answers and supervision. They also look to you for the truth about leadership. They look to you for a daily example of what leadership is really like. They learn about leadership through what you say, what you do not say, and the tone you set. They learn about leadership by observing and interacting with who you are *being* as a leader.

There is a great deal of power in this role. You have the opportunity to shape the future of your organization and the fields of nursing and health care leadership through your actions.

Here are some questions to consider as you reflect on this responsibility and your chance to bring engaged, prepared leaders into the world:

- How are you caring for yourself as a leader? What do you do to inspire, renew, and replenish yourself? Do you seek the support you need to attend to your own professional and personal needs?
- How can you encourage, support, and provide appropriate resources for those who will succeed you?
- How can you assist staff to accurately assess their leadership learning needs? Do you tell your staff about the talent and potential you see in them? Do you give them guidance about how to increase their leadership effectiveness?
- How can you provide sufficient safety so that potential leaders will speak honestly

with you about their concerns? Do you really listen when they raise questions about their future quality of life, compensation, or ability to participate in direct patient care?

- How can you help your organization create a culture that future leaders will want to embrace?
- If you work with nurses who are new to leadership roles, do you give them what they most need in the early stages of their leadership journey? Do you provide them with opportunities to learn the skills and competencies they must have to succeed? Do you offer them support so they can experiment and practice their new behaviors?

Indeed, you are in the driver's seat when it comes to leadership succession. How can you prepare and nurture yourself so that you bring your best spirit and talent to the task?

Please share your thoughts. We are eager to listen.

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