

Continuing Education

This activity meets Type I criteria for mandatory continuing nursing education requirements toward relicensure as established by the Texas Board of Nursing.



Empowering the Leaders Among Us—Today

The purpose of this course is to recognize the need for nurses in all arenas of healthcare and academia to grow and develop their leadership skills, as well as offer mentoring opportunities to other nurses.



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most recently, Graduate level Nursing Theories and Curriculum Development. Dr. Mintz-Binder's current research interests include exploring the associate degree nursing academic administrative positions in relation to workload and retention concerns.

AT THE COMPLETION OF THE ARTICLE AND THE POST TEST, THE READER SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- Describe three components of the concept of leadership as applied to the field of nursing.
- Delineate two major reasons we avoid becoming a leader and one action to overcome each.
- Give three examples of opportunities that exist today to actively engage in, to support personal leadership growth.

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There is an age old debate that still continues to ask the question: “Is a true leader born that way or is leadership nurtured over time?” There are proponents on both sides of this debate; those who believe that the characteristics of true leaders are innate and those who believe that characteristics are developed and guided over time and expanded through learning experiences. Whether there is a right or wrong answer to this question, one clear fact remains: Consistent, strong, dedicated leadership in the field of nursing is essential, and yet worrisome concerns continue to be raised that the next generation of nurses will not fill these large, soon to be vacated, shoes. The ever-prevalent nursing shortage coupled with nurse faculty shortages is diminishing the number of nurse leaders in both service and academic settings (Morin & Kirschling, 2004).

Leadership is essential in every aspect of nursing, in every specialty area, at every level, in hospitals, outpatient centers, specialty clinics, and within academic institutions to name but a few. Leadership is needed in every nursing organization, policy committee, and specialty group, and within student nursing organizations. With the evolution of evidence-based practice, middle ranged theories, technology and simulation, and the clinically-focused Doctorate in Nursing Practice (DNP), our profession is evolving and growing in exciting and new directions. Leaders are necessary to further these areas of development through research, practice and education.

Definitions and Descriptions

Most leaders and researchers will agree that leadership is the ability or process of influencing others (Whitehead, Weiss & Tappen, 2007; Carroll, 2006). It is the ability to lead others toward a goal or in a focused direction with combined purpose and fortitude. The generated energy that is cultivated assists in achieving the goal as well as to confront and overcome inevitable obstacles that arise. Leaders need followers but that does not imply that followers are passive. It is critical to have competent, team players who support and assist the leader in proceeding with the tasks at hand. Accepting the role of leader does not imply that this person will do all of the work. Conversely, it does not mean that this person delegates all the work either. A successful leader understands the balance of being responsible and completing the overarching tasks and delegating those that team members can accomplish.

There is a distinction between leadership and management that needs to be made. Management is usually defined as the supervision of an area that includes a variety of visible tasks such as planning, organizing, coordinating, decision-making and budgeting (Carroll, 2006). As such, one of the major differences between a leader and a manager is that a leader is considered an informal, achieved role whereas a manager is a salaried designated position with assigned duties (Whitehead, Weiss & Tappen, 2007).

Maxwell (2002) makes a powerful point when he wrote that the way to examine whether a person can lead or manage is to ask the person to create a positive change. Managers sustain and continue a focused direction,

but to move through a change process, a leader is necessary because the power of influence is critical.

It would be outstanding if one exact list of qualities could be generated from the years of research across multiple disciplines that exist today. Unfortunately, the one thing that leadership researchers agree on is that different qualities are necessary for different circumstances or situations. Global or general qualities include: honesty, courage, optimism, tenacity, energy, and balance (Whitehead, Weiss & Tappen, 2007). Other behavioral characteristics include the ability to demonstrate passion for the assignment, operate with a clear and focused vision and present an interpersonal style that exudes motivation and encouragement of the team members (Mason, 2006).

The term “authentic leadership” has been recently adopted by the American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) as one of the six standards for a Healthy Work Environment (AACN, 2005). Authentic leaders portray a sense of realness, sincerity, openness combined with deep honesty and integrity (Goffee & Jones, 2005; Kerfoot, 2006). Authenticity is a perception from members of a team rather than a trait that a leader ascribes to oneself. They inspire, as well as portray caring and commitment toward others and in so doing, attract and maintain a loyal workforce who shares the commitment. Together, the authentic leader and the energized team members accomplish what did not seem possible (Kerfoot, 2006).

Capitalizing on Past Leadership Opportunities

To move into a leadership opportunity, one must be challenged. It is easy to remain complacent, to stay on the sidelines, to accomplish your tasks of the day and then go home only to return the next shift and start again. But is this truly fulfilling? Have views, ways of thinking, perhaps even the vision been challenged in that one day of work? From the Reciprocal Interaction World View (Roy & Andrews, 1999), humans only grow and evolve through meeting and overcoming challenges. Without challenge, humans stagnate and become too comfortable and complacent. Although comfort and complacency can be soothing for a time, if it is all that one subscribes to, then instead of living life one will find that life passes by.

Leadership development is about continuing the process of growth and change that all nurses have already begun and embracing the challenge to rise as the next generation of nursing leaders. Promoting growth and accepting change is what leads to new ideas and the birth of new leaders. The process can however initially seem like being caught up in a whirlwind as it can be energizing, forceful and invigorating. It may even be overwhelming with new conceptualizations, the process of uncovering new knowledge; yet it can also pass by if one chooses to not join in but rather remain complacent and comfortable. But after the storm passes, hopefully it has paved the way for what we as a profession, are in great need of today, the re-birth, the nurturance and ultimately the maturation of our future leadership in nursing.

This can be daunting, to stand alone, offering a new perspective or new insights as we declare ourselves a potential new leader. But beyond the initial fear and intimidation, we then feel the empowerment of becoming a leader which includes the excitement from the realization of our own potential. The question then is, having felt that, what do we do with it? Do we embrace it and continue to look for new opportunities to further mature as a leader or do we turn and walk or in some cases run the other way back to the comfort zone?

Every nursing school graduate at every level has had a moment as I just described. For associate degree or baccalaureate degree nurses, it may have been giving a class presentation or representing your nursing program through a student nursing organization. For the master's degree and advanced practice nurses, it may have been properly diagnosing a client's complex symptoms and sharing this with the treatment team. For the doctorally prepared graduates, it was probably during the research defense, standing alone in front of the committee members, defending their research and its conclusions and implications.

Whenever that moment was, whether it felt comfortable or not, whether it was invigorating or terrifying, we must reach for another moment such as this and try again. And with every step, continue developing the confidence needed to take our rightful place as a future leader in nursing.

The Time Is Now

And while we contemplate the enormity of the task ahead, we share the confidence that we can and will rise to the occasion. We know that while we have a world-wide nursing shortage, few are inspired to go into academia or take on academic leadership roles. Thousands of prospective nursing students are turned away every semester because existing schools cannot enroll all of the qualified candidates (Powers, 2007). Job satisfaction research is demonstrating that many staff nurses are not satisfied and are planning on leaving the bedside (Andrews & Dziegielewski, 2005). We acknowledge that we live with the threat of terrorism. Suicide rates remain high in our adolescent population. We are living at a time where once again there is an ongoing war with groups of physically and emotionally wounded soldiers returning. We live in an era where even young children are presenting with early onset diabetes and increasing weight problems. We have epidemic proportions of HIV-AIDS in Africa among other international concerns and threats. The effects of continuing global warming could have catastrophic consequences in changing the geography of the world as we now know it and displacing millions of people across the world.

We face these complex and difficult problems that have no simple or easy solutions. Solutions can only be generated by thinking in new and creative ways and encouraging new leaders with new visions and ideas to come forward. We must collectively and conscientiously participate to find these solutions in creating new interdisciplinary work teams with participants from varying states and countries. The time is now. Let's join forces together and create a new whirlwind of energy, excitement, and commitment and generate a new intensity and passion called leadership.

Fear of Failure

But what does it take to inspire us to step up and assume the great responsibilities placed before us? Think about students who were in your classes as well as your co-workers. Who are the rising stars amongst us? Who aspires to become a leader? Why is it that the majority of us decline opportunities to become nursing leaders? Is the problem that we are afraid of trying and failing, so we don't try at all? Is it because we believe that

anything less than perfection is unacceptable in a leader? What leaders do we know who are perfect?

If one takes the time to look through history, it is fairly obvious that leaders don't have to be perfect as many have survived major mistakes in their presidencies or other leadership roles. Why did some survive and others fail? Only some who survived were charismatic, often innovative in their thinking as well as being profound

communicators. Yet many presidents were not charismatic. All had human strengths and weaknesses and the beauty of being human is, as the English poet Alexander Pope said "to err is human, to forgive, divine" (Pope, 1711). It is the essence of being human, that we do make errors in thought, judgment, even trust, but that we continue to learn, grow, challenge and take risks. If we do in fact make a mistake, provided we handle the situation well, through delicate and honest communication combined with humility, we will often find we have another opportunity to try again. People will overlook an occasional error based on ability if they can see that we are still growing and maturing as a leader (Maxwell, 2002).

Once a mistake is recognized, is the leader willing to admit the error and make a change or not? (Malone, 2006). Whether a leader overcomes a mistake depends heavily on whether trust has been damaged. Developing and sustaining trust as a leader is based on personal character and earning and maintaining respect from those you lead. When trust is breached, the ability to lead dissolves and the ability to influence disappears.



The Mentorship Connection

So if we don't have to be perfect but rather human, what is it going to take to inspire or empower us to be the next leaders? Maybe the time isn't now for some of us but rather a goal for the future. Maybe we need mentorship or role modeling. The encouragement of mentorship opportunities in academia as well as other areas of nursing has been receiving much notoriety in the last few years (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Halcomb, Gregg & Roberts, 2007; NLN, 2006; Sullivan, 2004). Some of the greatest leaders that we know had strong mentors.

The book *The Guiding Lights: The People Who Lead us Toward our Purpose in Life* by Eric Liu (2005) is about his quest to meet and interview leaders and mentors across the US. Twelve amazing people from diverse backgrounds were selected, from a baseball pitching coach to a Julliard piano teacher to a mural painter from southern California. Initially Liu asked everyone he spoke with two simple questions:

1) Who influenced you? And 2) How do you pass it on?

The answers were just as diverse and unique as the people he interviewed; yet a common thread that Liu emphasized was that when one engages in a strong mentorship experience, it is a two-way street of learning. In a true mentorship, both people are transformed. While the student is encouraged to grow and learn, the leader often finds renewed purpose and focus too. In every role especially in nursing, we are both teacher and student and both mentor and mentee. It is the essence of reciprocity in action as we shape one another.

But in order for that to truly occur, we have to be open and willing to allow for transformation, to trust and not fear growth and evolution, even if it isn't predictable or initially comfortable. But if we are open and willing, the mentoring relationship can be a profound experience that is unique and powerful...one that is ultimately life changing for both parties. The energy and thinking that is generated through this transformational process will create not only paths of new research and new knowledge, but also new leaders.

Leadership and Influence

One reason we choose to develop leadership skills is to use influence for positive change. We may see something in the work setting, or politically, or in the environment that we feel strongly about and want to initiate change. To enact change at a local, state or national level takes determination, vision, commitment but also the power and ability to influence others. Sullivan (2004) details the process of becoming influential. Her book describes steps to take that include: using power, understanding the importance of image, communicating clearly, setting clear goals, networking, and negotiating. Sullivan ends each chapter with tools to build and use: watch successful people, keep an eye out for opportunities for growth, use

a variety of strategies to see what works, and write about how the process is going. She advocates entering the political environment and proceeding with educational opportunities to further growth.

Ways to Begin

The time is now for those among us who desire to emerge as potential leaders. Those who have been groomed to do so, who have had an experience with a mentor or a life circumstance that has made them strong, must step up now. I encourage each of you, regardless of your current academic level or nursing position, to seek one leadership opportunity and in doing so, welcome growth and learning.

What opportunities are out there? Here are five relatively easy steps to take:

1. Join a taskforce or committee in your work setting. Within our hospitals, and all healthcare organizations, there are opportunities to join taskforces and committees and work with nurses and administrators employed in higher management positions. When on a taskforce or a committee, listen, learn, participate and see characteristics in motion that exhibit strong leadership and also strong management.

2. Join a committee outside your work setting. There are a vast number of opportunities at the local, state, national, and international levels. Meet and participate with others who are moving up the ladder within the profession. Examples might include volunteering to be on a committee of your specialty organization, or assisting with

the planning of a conference.

3. Author or co-author an article and submit it to a journal that you read or to which you subscribe. You may want to start with a nursing magazine such as this one or a journal representative of your specialty area. Learn and grow from the peer reviews and begin to develop strong professional writing skills. Write about what you know best since you have the knowledge and experience to share with others who are not in your specialty practice or who would benefit from your experiences. You may also wish to volunteer to be a reviewer for the journal.

4. Attend professional nursing conferences as a presenter by submitting an abstract for a poster or oral presentation as a primary or co-author. Explore projects that you have implemented at your place of work and share the experiences and knowledge gained with your colleagues. Push yourself to network with other nurses at these conferences.

5. Find a local mentor either from your nursing program or within your employment setting and have consistent meetings. Define goals for yourself and timeframes to accomplish the goals. It helps to have clear goals and timeframes and to be accountable to meet them.

“The time is now for those among us who desire to emerge as potential leaders.”

Conclusion

We have no excuse to stay passive and expect others to continue to lead. We are the next generation of leaders and it is time to act as such. Let us start today and not delay. It is with great hope that you take from this reading, the following three summary statements to think about and motivate you to move toward leadership in the near future: 1) we all have the potential to be nursing leaders now and in the future; 2) we are all teachers and students and when we are open to engaging in a deep and meaningful mentorship relationship, a mutually positive transformation occurs; and 3) we are all human and sometimes we succeed and sometimes we stumble but unless we try, challenge, and confront, we will not grow and learn. **NL**

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Program Evaluation

The purpose of this course is to recognize the need for nurses in all arenas of healthcare and academia to grow and develop their leadership skills, as well as offer mentoring opportunities to other nurses.

Objectives

At the completion of the article and the posttest, the reader should be able to:

1. Describe three components of the concept of leadership as applied to the field of nursing.
2. Delineate two major reasons we avoid becoming a leader and one action to overcome each.
3. Give three examples of opportunities that exist today to actively engage in, to support personal leadership growth.

Please rate how well the above objectives were met by circling the appropriate number:	
1 = Strongly Disagree	5 = Strongly Agree
Objective 1 from above was met.	
1 2 3 4 5	
Objective 2 from above was met.	
1 2 3 4 5	
Objective 3 from above was met.	
1 2 3 4 5	
The article was effective as a learning resource/tool.	
1 2 3 4 5	
The objectives were relevant to the overall purpose.	
1 2 3 4 5	
The author's competence and effectiveness.	
1 2 3 4 5	
The activity met your expectations.	
1 2 3 4 5	
Freedom from commercial bias due to conflict of interest, commercial support, product endorsement or unannounced off-label use.	
1 2 3 4 5	

State the number of minutes it took you to read the article and complete the test and evaluation _____ min.

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HOW TO EARN ONE CONTACT HOUR

1. Read the article.
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CE Questions: *Please circle your response on the answer sheet.*

Continuing Education Credit:
1.0 contact hours.

1. Why is it important to discuss leadership development today?

- a. leadership is a part of all aspects of nursing
- b. there is widespread concern that the future generation of nursing is not interested in leadership opportunities
- c. the nursing shortage is taking its toll on potential leaders of the future
- d. all of the above

2. A definition of leadership includes:

- a. the ability to influence others
- b. the strong ability to manage others
- c. the strong ability to direct others
- d. charismatic and powerful presence

3. A primary difference between leadership and management is:

- a. a leader manages people just as a manager influences people
- b. a manager manages people while a leader influences people
- c. a leader is appointed whereas a manager achieves the position
- d. a manager is an informal position whereby a leader is a selected position

4. Characteristics of an authentic leader include all of the following except:

- a. a sense of realness
- b. sincerity
- c. self centered view of leadership
- d. honesty

5. The primary international concern in nursing today is

- a. a massive nursing shortage coupled with too few nurse educators
- b. global warming
- c. rising rates of HIV-AIDS across the world
- d. increases in adolescent suicide

6. Which statement best reflects this article's view on mistakes by leaders?

- a. true leaders never makes mistakes
- b. leaders can make mistakes but it is how it is handled as to whether a leader remains a leader or not
- c. an organization must expect leaders to not be perfect and as such accept an occasional error
- d. if trust is damaged, a strong leader can repair it and proceed with leading

7. Mentorship is:

- a. only valuable for new leaders
- b. most essential at a change in position in one's life
- c. a life long learning process for both mentor and mentee
- d. time limited opportunity to assist the mentee in learning new skills

8. Ways to become influential (Sullivan, 2004) include:

- a. activate personal power
- b. present a strong image
- c. negotiate successfully
- d. all of the above

9. The best way to begin asserting leadership is to:

- a. take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself
- b. choose one opportunity and explore, watch and grow through it
- c. focus only on situations that present in your work setting
- d. run for president of a national professional organization

10. A key point in this article is that:

- a. we are all potential leaders, teachers as well as students and as humans, constantly grow and learn
- b. only a few of us have the true potential to be powerful leaders
- c. in a successful mentorship relationship the focus is on the mentor assisting and supporting the mentee
- d. we must do our best to avoid mistakes at all costs as they can be career ending situations