

Leadership and Mentoring

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In today's working environment a leader has to demonstrate qualities of honesty, integrity, loyalty, trustworthiness, principled behaviour and understanding).¹ Leadership begins with practicing personal accountability; identifying how you can make a difference; and never under-estimating the power of one person to make a difference. A means to do this is by being a mentor and being mentored.

Mentoring is a facet of leadership in nursing that, since it has occurred since the time of Florence Nightingale, we too often take for granted.² Mentoring is not only practicing personal but also professional accountability. It also offers a chance for growth and development within the practice of nursing. Mentoring can offer professional replenishment to expert nurses, thus contributing to the retention of experienced nurses and producing

nursing leaders with the skill and passion to make a lifelong commitment to professional development and nursing growth.

A leader needs to have a strong sense of self and awareness of his/her own leadership style. A leader needs to understand the personal characteristics that impact on their leadership method. It is important to seek feedback from those they guide, to endeavor to advance their own personal knowledge, and to develop a network that will help advance both themselves and others. A leader who mentors is a leader who understands and respects these complex systems. The mentor believes in empowering his or her followers and facilitating learning in others. The mentor is a role model, and actively advises, guides, and promotes other careers. Mentors use open communication, inspirational motivation and celebrate the accomplishments of the individuals they encourage in the development of their role. The relationships they develop encourage and support life-long learning.¹

Mentors provide insider information on how the system they work in operates. They support, encourage and develop the protégé's confidence so that they are able to establish goals that might even surpass the mentor's own achievements!

Leaders and mentors give the glory up for their protégé and allow the protégé to share the limelight. It is a selfless act that can only be accomplished by an experienced and confident leader.³

Support from within the workplace is necessary for mentorship to flourish and succeed. While mentorship is essential for recruitment and retention, it should not be mandated as a work requirement. Mentoring relationships can best be encouraged providing an environment of openness and interpersonal support and where continuing education is supported.

When nurses support mentor/protégé relationships they become part of our everyday practice and a natural part of our career process. Whether it is part of a formal or a casual relationship, the connection is a shared contract with both parties experiencing reciprocity through trust and shared experiences.⁴ Mentorship lets protégés develop leadership skills that can only enhance the nursing profession.

Strategies that professional nurses may use to become effective mentors include:

- recognize what you can do to make a difference;
- always work for individual growth;
- perform in ways that affirm your professional identity;
- take a chance on another person;
- seize new learning opportunities; and
- engage, engage, engage⁵ – connect emotionally, intellectually, and professionally with other nurses.

Mentoring is a facet of leadership that is too often overlooked – to the detriment of our profession and everyone practicing it. Fostering mentoring relationships is a powerful strategy that can enhance productivity, increase retention, and improve recruitment. It offers



Photo by L. Socha

Marla Ewen precepting a student

experienced nurses the chance to engage in a professional relationship that helps develop new learning opportunities. Take the opportunity to become a mentor and you will not be disappointed. You will become a professional role model, you will make a difference... and you will be better for the experience.

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