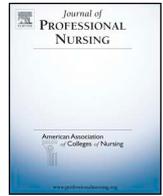




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Guest Editorial

AACN LEADS: What's in Your Leadership Tool Box for Volatile, Complex Times?



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Many seasoned leaders read this journal and so many of you are exemplars of success. Yet we continue to seek the best algorithm for leadership in our unprecedented, volatile, and urgent era of change. As I reflect on my own leadership career, I am amazed and challenged today at the rapid pace of change requiring bold, courageous, and nimble leadership in organizations, as we are called to lead within an unstable space moving underneath us. The boldness of our leadership comes from constantly analyzing the environment and listening to divergent views and scenarios of our reality and future state. Leadership courage demands we take calculated risks of change in the midst of the human propensity to resist the unknown and relinquish the known, and/or redefine the shifting moral values notably leaking within our culture today. Leadership ensures we experience a personal and professional journey of vulnerability and challenge to self-identity and the risk of failure for self, others, and the organization. Leadership creates a vulnerability of self to others as a “naked leader” forging in the wilderness while nimbly attempting to make sense of possibilities, challenges, and opportunities with those around us. Because I consider myself a student of leadership, let me humbly share a few (among many) learned lessons.

Leadership requires disrupting the known in organizations, policy, and in others' expectations. It also challenges the leader to constantly disrupt one's self. Aligning our communication, thinking, planning, action, and adjustment with focus, goal orientation, and others' reactions means critically examining our ways of knowing and being in order to lead through the necessary chaos of adjusting to change. The examination of our “deep change” (Quinn, 2008) requirements to lead others can be confusing and humbling. We can benefit from further learning from those around us, mentors, coaches, and professional development.

Leadership is not generationally specific. Bennis and Thomas (2003) discovered that a common denominator between outstanding leaders within Geek (below age 35) and Geezer (mature leaders) generations was the experience of *crucible event(s)* that challenged their core values, actions, and beliefs of who they were and who they needed to become. Crucible events force us to catalogue personal inventories of strengths, correction of values, and the refocus of our direction.

Leadership is a team sport and process. This assertion is based on the leader's understanding the implications of not instituting a new direction and understanding how an emergent vision will more likely place the organization in a position of flourishing. Illuminating the “burning” platform from which escape is necessary for survival or flourishing, demands constant communication, and the incorporation of organizational members to create solutions executed in a timely manner. These approaches are more likely recipes for success as a leadership strategy (Kotter, 2011)

Leadership is adaptable to possibilities and requires plan A, plan B, plan C, etc. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) define leadership as adaptive work that addresses conflict in the values people hold or narrows the gap between the values people hold and the reality they are experiencing. Leaders help others to identify the internal conflicts within individuals, organizations, and other stakeholders for values, beliefs, and behaviors in order to mobilize learning for new ways of operating.

Hesse (2011) reminds us that this mobilization of learning is up against a grand challenge of human behavior: “He who travels far will often see things far removed from what he believed was Truth. When he talks about it in the fields at home, he is often accused of lying, for the obdurate people will not believe what they do not see and distinctly feel. Inexperience, I believe, will give little credence to my song” (p. 7–8).

Thus, the adaptive work of leadership is to narrow the disparity of values and reality toward the vision and situation at hand.

One last relevant lesson of leadership—especially in today's era—is to voice our concerns in a manner that furthers dialogue and action as opposed to shutting down conversations in our path to resolution. Detert (2018) posits that workplace courage in leadership—especially in speaking truth to power—can be conveyed in a manner less likely to result in the leader being ostracized or experiencing job loss. By creating the right conditions for success, the leader more skillfully and competently exhibits courageous acts by laying the groundwork: establish your reputation for truth seeking and keeping fallback options open in case the actions are not well received; select the battlegrounds that make sense to the timing, mission, and values of themselves and the organization; manage the messaging and emotions of self and others that may erupt in the exchange; and convey your commitment to the relationship as well as to support the commitment to change. He

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reminds us that moral and workplace leadership courage can be learned by starting with simple everyday acts as a prelude testing out your own behaviors and impact.

Why is being a student of leadership so important to you as a leader in higher education? Because without the constant ability to adapt and grow as a leader, our leadership impact can quickly become obsolete.

Leadership within the “academy” related to the development, acquisition, and incorporation of effective learning strategies is turning higher education pedagogical practices upside down with the rapid development of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) approaches. New technologies are demonstrating the ability to improve teaching by assisting faculty to create personalized learning materials for students. Students can define what they need to know and then use the technology to customize their textbooks and supporting materials to target learning goals. Virtual reality, augmented reality, and hologram technology is revolutionizing the simulation industry to provide 3D-learning for concepts, skills, and fail-safe practices in the learning process. Administrators and faculty will be called to lead the application of this sea change in learning aids to ensure adequate learning resources are available. Rather than viewing AI and technology as replacing faculty in the learning equation, it actually supplements the work being done by faculty and students by adding the “peripheral brain” to the learning process (Aoun, 2017).

Leadership within academic nursing is challenged to prepare the nurse graduate, practitioner, and scientist for care that is yet to be discovered. The emergent care includes the use of robots as assist providers and predictive analytics for care design. This paradox of known and unknown requires that leadership convey the reality of the vanishing “now” while managing the unknown of the future with faculty who can walk with the vision for what can be and will be in some form. With unparalleled technological progress guiding new care and delivery options (Kalis, Collier, & Fu, 2018), academic leaders are called to lead the institutional ethos for continual learning and change (Susskind & Susskind, 2017). Leading into the unknown taxes our anticipation of success and failure and demands grit in our person, goals, and sense of self.

AACN data indicates that the overall average tenure of a nursing dean/director/chair is between 4-5 years, while in smaller schools it is less than 3 years. Turnover happens for many reasons and the higher education industry is fraught with fiscal challenges, merged programs,

faculty shortage, increasing competition for among smaller pipelines of students, and rapid technologies which challenge our pedagogical assumptions based on the neuroscience of learning. Professional lifelong learning is essential to leadership in higher education, with so much to learn and so little time between current and looming realities requiring adaptation.

AACN LEADS is one solution in the development of leadership products to offer more leadership development opportunities to the volatile higher education “academy.” Regardless of your leadership path and the “WHY” of your leadership, consider how you will develop your personal ethos for leadership enhancement for the sake of your organization and the future of nursing!

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