

# Making Leader Shifts

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**W**hat have you changed your mind about in your leadership practice that you once believed to be true? This is a question that I often ask nurse leaders. One changed belief that some leaders have talked about is the relationship between engagement and retention. These leaders once believed that if a nurse is engaged in his/her work, then this would translate into retention. In today's rapidly changing health care environment, this relationship is far weaker than it once was.

In his new book, *Leader Shift: The 11 Essential Changes Every Leader Must Embrace*, John Maxwell<sup>1</sup> discusses the need for leaders to change their leadership to fit new circumstances. He makes the critical point that you cannot be the same, think the same, or act the same if you hope to be successful in a world that does not remain the same. This requires a commitment to learn, unlearn, and relearn continually. Although we might value what has happened in the past, we cannot live there. It also means that although we may live in today, we have to think about tomorrow before it arrives unannounced.

Some nurse leaders feel challenged by having to make these leader shifts. They yearn for simpler days, a more loyal workforce, or a work environment that did not require them to spend so much time focusing on the needs of others. They want to point to past career achievements in a world demanding that we need to prove how we add value every day. They don't take the time to realize that the nursing workforce has changed and so too must they. In health care as in other industries, we are quickly moving to 50% of the workforce being Millennials, so they are in essence the new workforce and will soon be joined by Generation Z with similar ideas about their careers. From a practical standpoint, you need to bend with changing values because you have no choice. If you don't, your positions will sit vacant in this competitive job market.

In his book, Maxwell points out some essential changes that every leader must embrace. Five shifts that seem very pertinent in nursing leadership today include:

1. **From a soloist to a conductor**—this shift requires recognition that the potential of a team is greater than 1 individual. In leadership, you work through others and should make an effort

to understand their needs. You must want your staff members to shine more than you do and put them in a position to win. As a leader, you must focus on how you can add value to the team and give without keeping score.

2. **From goals to growth**—this shift involves an understanding that improving yourself is the first step to improving everything else. Although goals may help you do better, it is growing as a leader that will help you to become better. This means that you adopt a teachable spirit and embrace continuous learning. You are willing to invest in yourself to become a better leader.
3. **From pleasing people to challenging people**—this shift requires a change in mindset and recognition that to grow others, you must value them as much as you value yourself. Insist that others are accountable for their actions. Be willing to ask tough questions and have difficult conversations when they are needed. Coach your high potential staff to help move them from having good intentions to being action and goal oriented. Don't assume that you know what your team is thinking. Be at peace that not everyone will support your efforts but spend time with those who do.
4. **From maintaining to creating**—this shift requires leaders to accept that they don't have the luxury of maintaining the status quo. You must continuously be collecting new ideas, questioning your assumptions, and analyzing your failures. A culture of creativity is one in which there is an abundance mindset. Maxwell advises that leaders should live on the other side of yes—that is where there is abundance and opportunity.
5. **From ladder climbing to ladder building**—at some point, leaders need to make the shift from climbing ladders to holding the ladder for others to advance. It involves assessing how high others go with a little mentoring from you to build their own ladders. It involves asking great questions and carefully explaining the whys to help explain the context of your decisions. Leaders should always look to build value in others and help new leaders to reach their full potential.

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Making leader shifts like those described above in your career will be critical to your career success so embrace them as a necessary part of your journey.

**Read to Lead**

1. Maxwell JC. *Leader Shift: The 11 Essential Changes Every Leader Must Embrace*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins; 2019.

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1541-4612/2019/ \$ See front matter

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.mnl.2019.02.003>