

Personal Leadership Analysis

Bora Durrsi

New York City College of Technology

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Professor Linda Paradiso

ABSTRACT / INTRODUCTION

Becoming a nurse leader, and building leadership skills, is an ongoing and lifelong process. To be an effective nurse leader and nurse manager, there are several competencies that help to establish a foundation for success, as outlined by The American Organization of Nurse Executives. When nurse leaders build on their competencies over time and with experience, they have the knowledge and power to actively manage any and all kinds of situation that occurs. As a nursing student in Leadership and Management, I have witnessed several managing styles and have analyzed different techniques that make nurse managers accomplish their goals. With the opportunity to shadow a nurse manager, I have been able to identify within myself the capabilities and competencies that I hold and can bring forth as a future nurse leader, as well as competencies that need to be strengthened. Leadership skills as a nurse are important because our role is very dynamic and we are part of an interdisciplinary team composed of different backgrounds and without leadership skills nurses could not be as effective otherwise.

HOLDING THE TRUTH

The American Organization of Nurse Executives defines “holding the truth” competency as the presence of integrity as a key value of leadership. Integrity as a leader is vital to building an environment of respect and dignity. A key component of developing integrity as a value of leadership is by first building trust with staff members, as well as the patients you serve. A study published in the *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* outlined the need for building trust in a psychiatry unit. When leaders are able to build trust, it helps to “inspire hope in patients. Patients who trusted nurses and assistant nurses would ‘open up’ and allow them to ‘understand the real problem’” (Gabrielsson, 2016). Leaders who are able to build trust are involved and present within their unit because building trust requires time, open communication,

and connection with others. I personally have observed nurse managers who do rounds within their respective units, and talk to all of the patients and family members in every room. On several occasions, I have witnessed family members complain about patient care and the nurse managers were very responsive and communicated the patient's complaints to the appropriate parties immediately. It was very clear that during this interaction, both the patient and family members were grateful for the nurse manager taking action as well as their genuine concern. Leaders who are able to build trust are the backbone of any unit because with trust comes group strength and cohesiveness.

APPRECIATION OF AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity is a part of the healthcare world. Health changes occur often, and citizens and nurses alike have to confront the changes head-on. While shadowing a nurse manager, I have often noticed that they are not only dealing with changes on their unit constantly, but with ambiguous changes in hospital. I recall speaking to my nurse manager and their supervisor during a budget meeting about changes that need to be made concerning new hires, staffing, floating nurses and many more topics. This meeting was one of many to come, as changes within the budget are continuous, and based on numerous factors including ones that are not within the manager's power to control. During this time, I also noticed a lack of communication between senior leadership positions, and that surprised me the most. Sometimes managers have been left out of necessary conversations about things that impact their unit, and I was not expecting to find that because we have always learned communication as a "basic" skill but it is not always evident in hospitals. An ambiguous environment is scary and uncomfortable, but a leader who is able to maintain their responsibilities is key. Learning to appreciate ambiguity goes hand in hand with holding the truth, because ambiguity needs to be acknowledged in order to be accepted by

leaders, staff members, and patients alike. Ambiguity can get complicated, and I personally am still learning how to be in that kind of environment- as my confidence grows as a nurse I feel that I will find my place better and understand my role clearer. Until I've developed my leadership skills more, ambiguity will be a concern of mine.

DIVERSITY AS A VEHICLE TO WHOLENESS

Diversity in the healthcare field is an ongoing issue, and the need to expand representation in all forms, including race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation is necessary for providing a culture of acceptance. Diversity in the workforce is the foundation that will help “lead to decreased health disparities among racial/ethnic minority populations” and more advanced patient care that is grounded in better understanding and empathy. Increasing diversity begins with a nurse leader who takes initiative in hiring staff members of different backgrounds who can better advocate for patients, while also keeping in mind that that “racial/ethnic nurses should not bear the responsibility of addressing health disparities in isolation, or alone” (Phillips, 2014). Ultimately, increasing diversity is about improving patient and quality care. Increasing diversity begins with accepting diverse students and being supportive. In a study published by Nursing Education Perspective, minority students were asked about their experience during clinicals and working with registered nurses and it was noted that “the ability of RNs to enhance the minority students’ sense of belonging extended beyond simply being friendly. Nurses perceived as being judgmental and treating minority students differently than Caucasian students negatively impacted learning and the sense of belonging” (Oosterbroek, 2014). It is foundational for minority students to have a welcoming and supportive experience as a student in order to continue pursuing a career as a nurse. Minority students who feel discriminated against may not have the chance to improve quality care in minority patients, and a culture of diversity needs to

be established even in clinicals and extend into organizations. Diversity and representation begins with opportunity, and nurse leaders in a managerial position should voice their support efforts such as “systemic review examining the impact of nursing workforce diversity outcomes of care within institutions...and call for more funding to support nursing careers are the entry level” (Phillips, 2014). As a white, heterosexual, cis-gender woman, my personal and future leadership style will reflect openness and welcomeness, and inclusion. I hope to be a leader that recognizes that hiring practices can be flawed and biased, and implement new practices that are inclusive and non-judgmental.

HOLDING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

The ability to create a space so that multiple perspectives are entertained is a competency that is rooted in fairness, safe space, and shared governance. Just as a diverse staff is helpful in representing a diverse patient population, and nurse leader should represent their staff by listening to each one fairly. When there is an issue, it is important not to maintain a professional composure in which respect and dignity are upheld. A study in Ghana titled “The nature of leadership style in nursing management” found that 11/20 nurses, 55% expressed “worry at how leadership [fails] to make thorough investigations into allegations and may jump into concluding certain matters...it was not uncommon to see nursing leaders deal with staff angrily” (Azaare, 2011). This quote highlights the reality that leaders will encounter situations that may upset or anger them, but it is important not to make rash assumptions. I find it personally difficult not to react to situations as they occur- I internalize situations and should make more of an effort to look at different perspectives without getting upset. I’ve noticed while shadowing nurse managers that staff routinely come up to discuss a range of issues. In addition, managers have also been extremely open and welcoming to the complaints and realize that it is not solely their

fault for any issues but rather part of a larger system issue that needs to be recognized. Systemic issues are only resolved when members of a team are able to come forth and voice issues openly and without fear of repercussions. Building a unit that is responsive and progressive, shared governance is key to “provide consistency, open communication channels, problem solving, shared decision making” (Bamford-Wade, 2010). Leaders that are able to hold multiple perspectives have strong relationships with other staff members and are able to communicate problems effectively and problem solve together.

DISCOVERY OF POTENTIAL

Discovering potential is an ideology that is based on a simple principle- that everyone is capable of learning and has within them the ability to achieve whatever they set out for. It is only when we have faith in ourselves, and in others, that one can discover their true potential. Being a leader extends beyond oneself, and involves recognizing that others are just as capable of being a leader as well. A nurse leader is central to providing motivation, training, and opportunities for advancement. For several decades now, there has been a push for nurses to continue their education beyond an entry-level Associate’s Degree to continue and pursue a Bachelor’s degree and beyond if possible. This push to continue education is beneficial for students to acquire new skills and knowledge that will help them advance their practice as a nurse (Watts, 2016). Certain skills that are enhanced with a Bachelor's degree include enhanced leadership skills, computer literacy skills, communication and organizational skills. Learning should continue beyond the classroom and into practice- leaders should take initiative to provide more trainings on the unit with real case studies and opportunity to practice with equipment. Potential may also extend beyond nursing- potential also includes motivating others to pursue their own personal goals and challenge themselves.

QUEST FOR ADVENTURE TOWARDS KNOWING

In a nursing world, I find the quest for adventure to be a little bit unsettling but exciting at the same time. I have often wondered about being a float nurse and getting to experience working on new units with different kinds of patients. Though I would prefer to work in units such as NICU, PICU, or L&D, I would also like to experience working in other units such as MedSurg units, Ambulatory Care, and Emergency room. Learning to care for different patients, and learning new skills in a new environment is helpful in becoming a well-rounded nurse. I think little changes such as changes in shift or scheduled days also makes a big difference because you may have different types of traumas or emergencies that you would have otherwise missed. Keeping an open mind and being curious is an important quality to have- it prevents stagnation and it helps acquire new experiences. When and if a nurse has experienced working in different units, they begin to build a knowledge on how to improve quality of care and care practices, and should be able to provide feedback to managers, and managers should in turn relay that feedback to appropriate parties. Beyond floating to different units, I think it is a duty for all citizens to be involved in their communities and give back and volunteer their time whenever they can, especially people in medical profession who can provide support for others in needs. Becoming involved helps to build a sense of unity and connection that can be eye opening and ultimately very rewarding. Volunteering your time helps you get a better understanding of different people, cultures, backgrounds and ways of life that are important to bring back to your practice.

KNOWING SOMETHING OF LIFE

Knowing “something of life” comes with many challenges, adventures, and commitment to growth. The only way to learn about life is by acquiring new experiences and taking chances in life, no matter how daunting it may seem. My first reflective experiences, or first

acknowledgment of my growth, was when I started working at a non-profit community based organization called Red Hook Initiative. I started this position as an intern during the same time I entered the nursing program. Even though this job was for academic work and completely out of the healthcare field, I knew that I wanted to learn new skills and step out of my comfort zone. This job opportunity was a chance to work new people, in a new environment and neighborhood, and for a good cause. In the end, I knew somehow the work I would be doing in Red Hook would help to expand my knowledge of life. Even though I wanted to be a nurse, I also knew that “Nurses [need] the confidence to take some risks and look at what is within their individual “gift”; going outside the comfort zone with the team is where the success of our projects lies” (Jones-Berry, 2014). I recall multiple times when work and school life were becoming overwhelming and I kept telling myself that “life is not going to slow down in the future” and that there will always be more work to do. In a way, I was trying to prepare myself for the hectic life of a nurse, because I knew that it was going to be even more challenging and overwhelming than my current life. I am very grateful that I took the opportunity to work in a community setting because it helped transform my view of nursing, and where nursing can take me in the future.

NURTURING THE INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL SELF

Emotional development and emotional intelligence have no limits. Development of a strong emotional self is an infinite continuous process that takes a considerable amount of time and effort to nurture. The path of emotional learning can be quite difficult, and at times challenges you to the edge of your comfort zone. As difficult as the journey may be, it is very valuable to have a strong sense of emotional intelligence as a leader. Recognizing that there are emotional conflicts are a part of being a nurse is important because “health care leaders who are

emotionally intelligent can improve the health of the institutions at many levels, beginning with their own employees. Leaders who are successful are also experts at analyzing the emotional side of issues in anticipation of individual reactions. They also work at assisting their staff with the emotional side of the work-related issues through individual and group educational programmes” (Feather, 2009). I know that emotional self and intelligence is something that I struggle with, and find hard to identify and speak about. I find it difficult to put emotions into words, and even more difficult (and necessary) to identify where they came from or what has caused them. I know that this quality is important to build and work on as a leader, and it is something that I am constantly trying to devote time to.

KEEPING COMMITMENT TO ONESELF

I think keeping commitment to oneself means not to get carried away in the hectic life of a nurse, and the healthcare field. Finding time to manage stress is important, and keeping your energy and motivation high will help to prevent burnout. Managing a heavy workload is about embracing success, while also learning how to grow from mistakes and not be defeated. The only way to overcome challenges is to accept when something does not go as planned, and find where the error occurred and try to fix it and be honest about it. Not every challenge has to be challenging- I think by keeping an open mind, working with others, communicating clearly, everyone has the potential to work to the best of their ability. Self-care and finding time to step-back from work and take a break is vital for one's body and spirit because “work-life conflict is reported to be a major contributing factor to work stress...over the past few decades increased work demand, working hours, and staff shortages have been associated with an imbalance between work and personal life” (Munir, 2012). Self-care is also about continuing to do what make you happy outside of work, exercising, eating healthy, and even therapy. Self-care is

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different for everyone and “commitment to oneself” doesn’t look the same for everyone, but it's equally important to keep in mind.

CONCLUSION

Competencies for becoming a nursing leader and building nursing leadership skills are quite complex. Being a leader is easy for some, and difficult for other, but ultimately we all possess the potential to be a great leader if we are dedicated and passionate enough. Being a good leader is an important part of being a good and effective nurse, and leadership will continue to be a part of our responsibility within the healthcare field. I am fortunate to have witnessed effective nurse leaders during clinicals who were so committed to their patients and staff, and who had a deep passion for their work. I think leadership skills are enhanced in an environment with lots of support and opportunities for growth.

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