With the nursing profession in a state of "nursing shortage fatigue and frustration," what do nursing leaders have to say about the future of the workforce? What can we learn about our past that will help us be present in planning the future? How do we become an inspiring leader of others, when operating in "overwhelm" mode? Nurse leaders are asking these questions and more in an attempt to find practical solutions for creating productive work-cultures.
Successful nursing teams, now more than ever, hinge on our ability to grow good leaders at all levels of the organization. Given the increasingly complex and unpredictable world we live in, our understanding of what makes for good leadership has changed. Good leadership depends on more than the talent of individuals; it also requires positive relationships among people and on organizational practices that encourage the enactment of leadership.

Our role as nurses has changed too. No longer can we be content to invest in disjointed leadership development programs that fail to result in quality leadership. We all know the kinds of programs that I am referring to--high-powered one-day training sessions where you'll spend eight hours immersed in the critical skills and techniques that'll make all the difference to your success as a leader. I have never met a nurse leader who ever experienced a paradigm shift, an epiphany or a miraculous change in leadership style having attended one of these seminars. Furthermore, how often have nurses returned from leadership development programs only to be frustrated by lack of opportunity, time or resources available to translate that learning into action? Yet the pressure remains constant and unrelenting to recruit and retain nurses for high-performance work teams. Integrating and aligning leadership development to build sustainable leadership capacity is critical to nursing team survival and success. The key is to create cultural norms, values and common management and leadership practices to build a work environment that supports employee retention and cultural integration. Establishing common practices to guide nurse leaders through repeated periods of cultural upheaval is critical for both individual and organizational success.

Effective nursing leadership, like beauty, may lie in the eye of the beholder or, in this case, the follower. However, there are some qualities that have withstood the test of time in a variety of circumstances. No one leader has all of these qualities, certainly not at the same time. And the best leaders are not static. They model the changes and growth they try to develop in their team members.

Nurses need to realize the process of building a high-performance team is not linear. It has its ups and downs. Reaching decisions may take longer. You can do your part to construct a high-performance team by keeping track of where you are and where you are going. Are you helping to create a climate of trust, commitment, cooperation, and flexibility? When you assume leadership, is it empowering or conforming? Finally, do you really believe in the value of diversity and what each member brings to the group?

Qualities of Effective Nursing Leadership

1. Self-esteem and confidence, which creates a non-defensive, open environment
2. A vision that generates enthusiasm and commitment
3. Knowledge and awareness of culture and its influence, as well as other diversity-related issues
4. Catalyze support for the collective common good, not just parochial self-interest
5. Maintain a sense of humor and perspective
6. Are trustworthy and dependable
7. Have an internal standard of excellence
8. Are responsive and empathetic toward others
9. Match their words with their deeds
10. Are aware of their own feelings and reactions to interpersonal experiences and try to maintain objectivity

Once able to identify their qualities, style and model for leadership, nurses need tools, processes, methods, and maps to search out, explore and blaze their own pathways to ever higher performance in building teams in the 21st century. High-performance teams do not just happen. They evolve over time and require people who possess certain talents, a wide range of diversity skills, and a common vision.

9 Proven Strategies for Building 21st Century High-Performance Nursing Teams

* Get to know each other first

* Make sure that you understand your role and the team's goal(s)

* Respect the ideas and feelings of other team members

* Keep your word

* Continue to build relations with other members of the team

* Think and act like a team

* Decenter and recenter (techniques for achieving synergy in a diverse team)

* Avoid groupthink

* Be flexible

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