

Are nurse leaders showing the way?

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Globally the healthcare landscape is changing at a rapid rate due to a variety of regulatory, policy, and workforce trends, which requires differently skilled work forces.^{1,2} This creates a significant need to prepare healthcare practitioners with a different skill set to meet the changing needs of healthcare. To this end the SA Nursing Council (SANC) has developed a revised qualifications framework for nurses with an accompanying revision of the scope of practice and education and training programmes. While implementation of these changes has been slow, it will require a collective effort by all nurse leaders to ensure the success of implementation. It was Jim Collins³ who said “*We cannot predict the future. But we can create it.*” The question arises: what does this require from us? There is no doubt that we must do things differently to make sure that these changes work to strengthen the nursing profession to meet the varied and constantly changing demands of healthcare.

Communication

What is not new is that good communication is essential. Never underestimate the power of words! Select words carefully for use. What we say and how we say things make quite an impact. Communication allows us to connect with others.⁴ However, connecting goes beyond words. Real connection requires more skill than talent, but it does not mean that one must mimic the style of others. Firstly, you should be yourself and consider other essential components of communication. *Visual communication* includes what we see, but it is more than our appearance, for example facial expression, moving with a sense of purpose and maintaining an open posture. Thus, not standing behind a podium or a desk decreases the distance between yourself and the person with whom you are communicating. Living in an era where everyone sits with a mobile phone at a table in a restaurant, makes one realise how important eye contact and

paying attention to people and your surroundings become. *Intellectually* people must understand your message. In nursing, we know all too well that there is a credibility gap when speaking about something without having lived it. *Emotionally* people must not only hear your words, but also feel your attitude. One way that we connect in healthcare is through therapeutic touch, taking cultural and other boundaries in consideration.

Leaders should speak up about nursing issues – from an informed position. Be sure to remain updated on professional issues. And leaders must live what they communicate.

Networking

One of the many ways in which leaders remain updated is through networking. Networkers see the tremendous possibilities that come from linking different and unrelated people and organisations together in networks. Leaders keep their networks primed through regular contact and/or communication which allow one to receive information from a variety of origins. Because of their diversity, networks change or disappear based on the reasons for getting together, but then all of its participants move on to become part of other networks and groups. At its core, networkers are good at maintaining relationships because they connect well at the heart and emotional level.

Triad of core behaviours

Acknowledging that we all face continuous uncertainty that we cannot control, Collins³ identifies a triad of core behaviours that could be applied to determine our own fate in chaotic and uncertain environments.

Fanatical discipline represents a relentless and unbending focus of leaders on their goals and objectives. At its core,

discipline is consistence of action in everything that we do, now and in the future. It's not hierarchical obedience or adherence to bureaucratic rules. True discipline requires independence of mind to reject pressures to conform in ways incompatible with values, performance standards and long term aspirations. Leaders don't overreact to events or succumb to the herd or jump for alluring but irrelevant opportunities. It is about immense perseverance and no overreach.

Empirical creativity means that, when facing uncertainty, leaders rely on direct observation and engaging with empirical evidence rather than relying on opinions, a whim, conventional wisdom, authority or untested ideas. In healthcare, we always rely on best evidence available to inform our actions in practice and education.

Productive paranoia reflects the hypervigilance leaders apply in good and bad times, especially when things are going well. We have to constantly consider the possibility that events could turn against us at any moment in time, when we least expect it, and we have to be prepared. Leaders distinguish themselves not by their paranoia per se, but by the effective action they take as a result and thus it is a productive paranoia as we create and build something truly bigger than ourselves. So, as leaders, we face forces beyond ourselves that we cannot predict, but reject that luck, chaos or other external factor will determine our success or failure.

This triad of core behaviours ignites the ambition of leadership³. Their ambition is first and foremost for the cause – nursing and the nursing profession. Leaders should be incredibly ambitious, but their energy and intensity must be channelled into something larger and more enduring than themselves – not their own egos.

True greatness

Leaders should define themselves by impact, contribution and purpose. True greatness depends on discipline and choice. It lies in the hands of people – it becomes a matter of what they create, what they do, and how well they do it. As stated earlier, leaders have to live what they communicate, or as we always say: walk the talk!

So how does this apply to us today?

Change is no longer imminent or on our doorstep – it's here. The new nursing education and training programmes are ambitious. Keeping our focus on a cause greater than each of us, we therefore have no choice but to work together in a greater network to produce a cadre of nurses with a different skill set to ensure the provision of safe, quality care. Competence of practitioners, founded in knowledge with an empirical foundation, informs decisions and action. Competence also reflects skills where knowledge is applied creatively as the science and art of nursing in clinical and other areas. It requires fanatic discipline from everyone in nursing to continue to make this happen.

As a collective of professionals, we therefore have to behave in such a way that we ensure that what you see is what you get at all times. Leaders must become more vocal to advocate for professional issues and quality healthcare. This must be done always from a well-informed position with the same core message expressed by everyone. Emotionally we have to change the culture of eating our young – we have to nurture our young entrants into nursing to ensure that we grow the profession in numbers, strength and quality to reclaim our power in healthcare to make our own decisions on professional issues.

Let's become leaders that inspire others to dream more, to do more, to be more and to achieve more.

References

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