THE ROAD TO
POSITIVE
WORK
CULTURES

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Sigma
GLOBAL NURSING
EXCELLENCE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carol J. Huston, DPA, MSN, RN, FAAN

Carol J. Huston has been a professor in the School of Nursing at California State University, Chico (CSUC) since 1982 and assumed the position of Director of the School of Nursing from 2010–15. She currently teaches classes on leadership, management, health finance, and health systems part time as emerita professor. Huston was named one of seven CSUC Master Teachers in 1999, 2000, and 2001; the CSUC Outstanding Teacher for the 2001–02 academic year; and the CSUC Outstanding Professor for the 2008–09 academic year.

Huston is author or coauthor of seven textbooks on leadership, management, and professional issues in nursing (a total of 22 editions) as well as a children's book, *When Little Girls Dream.* She is author of *The Road to Leadership*, published by Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma) in 2017. The fifth edition of *Professional Issues in Nursing: Challenges and Opportunities* published in 2019. Her coauthored book *Leadership Roles and Management Functions in Nursing* has been translated into four languages and received a 2017 AJN Book of the Year award. The 10th edition of that book will publish in 2020. Huston has also published more than 100 articles and editorials in leading professional journals.

In addition, Huston has given more than 300 presentations at nursing and healthcare conferences worldwide. She is also a successful grant writer and has been the primary investigator or coinvestigator of multiple grants. Huston has served on the Enloe Medical Center (Chico, California) board of trustees since 2012 and as Chair of the board since 2016.

Huston is a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing. In addition, she served as the 2007–09 President of Sigma. As President, she was responsible for strategic planning, program implementation, and fiduciary oversight of approximately 130,000 nurses in more than 470 chapters located in more than 90 countries. Huston also served as Co-chair of the 2010 International Year of the Nurse (IYNurse) Initiative, a global partnership effort of Sigma, the Nightingale Initiative for Global Health, and the Nightingale Museum of London. She served as lead faculty for Sigma's Experienced Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy from 2014 to 2019 and is a consultant for Sigma's Institute for Global Healthcare Leadership, which launched in Washington, DC, in September 2016.

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LEADERSHIP LESSONS

PREFACE

This book was written to foster the development of leadership skills that create and sustain positive work cultures. Cultures are the shared values and beliefs that guide thinking and behavior (Eades, 2018). Current evidence suggests that many nurses work in cultures that at best are not supportive and at worst, toxic. Indeed, the expectation that nurses will receive the same care and kindness in the workplace that they give to their patients is often not the case.

That's because positive work cultures don't happen by accident. They exist because of the hard work of many people, but especially individuals who hold both formal and informal leadership roles in that culture. The fact is, leaders must constantly work to shape positive work cultures because they are often responsible for them.

This book, then, is about strategies leaders can use to actively create and then sustain positive work cultures. It describes what a positive workplace culture looks like, why it is needed, and how to achieve it. Emphasis is placed on the leader's role in making that happen as well as the challenges that arise when values are in conflict or when individual needs and wants supersede those of the team.

"**Culture is everything to a team, and while everyone on the team plays a part in the ongoing development of the culture, it's the leader's responsibility to create and mold it.**"

—John Eades

Many of the chapters include personal insights gained from my own leadership experiences, and I have purposefully shared situations where other people or I encountered frustration or failure as a leader. My hope in sharing these stories is that readers will recognize that leadership is a journey and not a destination—and that although missteps occur, leaders who are authentic and create atmospheres of mutual respect, trust, and appreciation can positively impact the work cultures of others.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion about characteristics of positive work cultures, why leaders matter in creating positive work cultures, and the challenges of creating a shared vision and goals when subcultures are present.

Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of establishing a climate of mutual respect and civility, suggesting that the responsibility for dealing with incivility lies with both frontline staff and the organization because zero tolerance must be the expectation.

Chapter 3 examines why leaders must establish boundaries to separate their responsibility from what belongs to others—and to eliminate as much confusion as possible about their role as "boss" versus that of friend or colleague. This chapter also presents boundaries as a space that allows leaders to separate their beliefs and actions from others—because the leader cannot always control how others feel or behave.

Chapter 4 suggests that avoiding micromanagement is critical to the establishment and maintenance of positive work cultures. Instead of micromanaging, leaders should macromanage and empower workers to be innovative and creative in identifying new ways to solve problems or complete delegated tasks.

Chapter 5 observes that in positive work cultures, managers address organizational problems as soon as they occur. Often, these problems are related to interpersonal or team conflict, but they may include the need for employee disciplinary action or behavior modification.

Chapter 6 examines the importance of effective teams in building positive work cultures. Building trust by establishing genuine relationships with workers, exhibiting integrity, being transparent, and demonstrating competence also further team-building efforts. In addition, leaders must be effective communicators and role-model excellent communication skills for teams to flourish.

Chapter 7 focuses on the importance of leaders addressing and reducing workload stress for employees whenever possible. Dynamic change is a significant part of most contemporary organizational cultures. Thus, leaders must first assure that change is happening for a good reason and then help

workers understand how changes will impact their lives. Leaders must also support employees during these changes and give them as much control as possible over working conditions. Finally, leaders must always assure that the workload is reasonable.

Chapter 8 suggests that showing appreciation and rewarding desired behavior are critical in building positive work cultures. Often, this is as simple as leaders recognizing workers for a job well done, but it also may include providing other types of incentives or rewards that have value to those they are leading.

Chapter 9 addresses the importance of authentic leadership in creating positive work cultures. This requires leaders to be transparent, to demonstrate consistency between stated values and actions, and to be self-aware about the values that are driving their actions.

Finally, **Chapter 10** speaks to the importance of vision, passion, and purpose as tools leaders can use to promote positive work cultures. When leaders continually look to the future, embrace change, create an action plan to achieve their vision, and inspire followers with passion, organizations become ever-renewing.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

—Will Durant

"Boundaries are a part of self-care. They are healthy, normal, and necessary."

—Doreen Virtue

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MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES

Another strategy that leaders can use to create a positive work culture is to maintain appropriate *boundaries*. Boundaries are the limits we set to protect ourselves. They can be fairly rigid or loose. Martin (2018b) suggests that boundaries are imaginary lines that separate your physical space, feelings, needs, and responsibilities from others. Your boundaries also tell other people how they can treat you—what's acceptable and what isn't. Without boundaries, people may take advantage of you because you haven't set limits on how you expect to be treated.

For example, I have created a boundary on social media between my personal and professional relationships. While I accept connections on my LinkedIn account from almost all healthcare-related, interdisciplinary colleagues, I limit my Facebook connections to close friends and family. This differentiates what I post on each site and what information each group can access.

Implementing boundaries, however, can sometimes be confusing to others. It might be helpful to remember that boundaries are intended to foster a healthy connection, not lead to relational disconnect or cutoff. "Boundaries communicate safety—and figuratively demarcate where I end, and you begin. Thus, boundaries allow us to make clear what is our responsibility and what is not. Much emotional turmoil and distress comes from taking on what is not ours, or letting others take responsibility for what is actually ours" (Chun, 2018, para. 10).

Another boundary is physical. All of us have some degree of personal distance that we consider to be a "safe space" between ourselves and others. This distance can vary by individual, though, particularly in relation to cultural differences. For example, I remember a former student who frequently attempted to put his arm around or touch his peers and, sometimes, even the faculty. He did not pick up the subtle clues most people are attuned to—that his behavior was making them feel uncomfortable. In fact, direct and repeated confrontation was required for his behavior to stop. Similarly, I am a "hugger," and I must be vigilant that my desire or propensity to hug someone to provide support or encouragement might be crossing their personal space boundary or be misinterpreted in some way.

Indeed, boundaries are essential to healthy relationships—and, really, a healthy life. Setting and sustaining boundaries are skills, however, that many people don't have. With people who have similar communication styles, views, personalities, and general approach to life, it may be easy (Tartakovsky, 2018). However, with others, communication about boundaries must be more direct. In all cases, when a boundary is crossed, feedback must be given that it's not OK, or anger and resentment will occur. A boundary is worthless if it is not enforced by feedback and consequences (Martin, 2018b).

"When you feel yourself becoming angry, resentful, or exhausted, pay attention to where you haven't set a healthy boundary."

—Crystal Andrus

For example, one professional boundary might be to avoid sharing your work-related frustrations-with coworkers. Every person in authority needs to vent and talk to someone safe about the challenges of the job—and get an outsider's take on some of the human resource issues that are a part of any management position. But this person should not be a subordinate. Preferably, it wouldn't even be someone who works in the same organization.

Social media is also not a safe place for venting, even though it may feel safer than talking directly to colleagues at work. Privacy on the internet is an illusion, even if you have been careful not to initiate or accept a friend request from an employee. I'm always amazed what colleagues post on the internet about their job, their boss, or troubles they're experiencing at work. I don't care how private you think your post is, once someone shares it, the whole world has access to what you said.

In addition, it may be necessary to create a boundary in terms of allowing others to have opinions different from yours, even if you believe their views are wrong. Martin (2018b) notes that healthy emotional boundaries mean you value your own feelings and needs, and you're not responsible for how others feel or behave. Boundaries allow you to let go of worrying about how others feel and place accountability squarely with the individual.

"Boundaries let people know that you respect yourself."
—Beate Chelette

"For better or for worse, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have broken down a lot of professional boundaries. Before social media, you probably didn't know much about your employees' social lives. Now, however, if you're friends with them on Facebook, you can see updates about everything from what they ate for dinner last night to the adorable things their kids did over the weekend."

—Robert Half

Similarly, Reilly (2017) asserts that sometimes we want and expect those close to us to act in a specific way and to support us. When they don't, we feel hurt. But when we let go of those expectations by respecting that everyone needs boundaries, relationships cannot only be salvaged but also strengthened.

Lancer (2016) concurs, noting that healthy boundaries prevent you from giving advice and blaming or accepting blame. They also protect you from feeling guilty for someone else's negative feelings or problems and taking other people's comments personally. When you overreact to or personalize the feelings or actions of others, you are demonstrating weak emotional boundaries. Healthy emotional boundaries require clear internal boundaries—knowing how you feel and what responsibilities you have to yourself and others.

Another professional boundary is separating work time from family or personal time. Perfectly balancing life's components is impossible. Instead, we should try to be flexible about what we need to focus on at a specific point in time.

For example, far too many people run themselves into the ground—mentally and physically—to meet other people's needs. Being afraid to say no to others can lead to a "spiral of shame," Chun (2018) says, because your inner voice may tell you that you are missing out, you are not good enough, or you are letting others or yourself down. But the truth is, saying no simply

means that what you've been asked to do doesn't align with your priorities or that something else is more important to do at the time. There is no need to overexplain or apologize for saying no. We all have the right to determine what we want to do and what we don't want to do.

In fact, self-care is an often-neglected priority for leaders. It is OK to put yourself first at times. Leaders should seek time off on a regular basis to meet personal needs, seek recreation, form relationships outside the work setting, and have fun. For example, I am an avid duplicate bridge player. My friends at the bridge club know little about my professional life, and that is an intentional boundary I have created.

Leaders should also seek out friends and family for emotional support, guidance, and renewal. In addition, a proper diet and exercise are important to maintain both physical and emotional health. Spirituality may also be important in self-care. Leaders should remember that there is life outside of work, and that time should be relished and protected.

Creating space between personal and professional relationships is an important boundary for managers. Without that space, a manager's formal authority to direct others may be questioned or lost. Half (2015) notes that even just a decade ago, many managers avoided get-togethers outside of work, and friendships at work were considered off-limits. Today, more casual relationships between bosses and employees have become part of a larger

"Boundaries aren't about trying to control someone or make them change. Boundaries are about establishing how you want to be treated, self-preservation in a chaotic or dangerous environment, and a path to healthy relationships."

—Sharon Martin (2018a)

transformation of the workplace. Most experts now believe that socializing outside the workplace can help leaders build trust with their team and improve morale. Indeed, most employees enjoy getting to know their boss a little bit better on a personal level, and employees with a strong connection to their managers are more likely to work longer hours and be loyal to the company (All Business, 2019).

In addition, as a boss, having friendships with your employees allows you to have a strong, positive relationship with them. It also helps you understand what motivates them because you learn about their families, interests, and goals in life (All Business, 2019).

The reality is, friendships and social relationships are very common between leaders and employees because we spend so much time at work. The problem is that people can become confused about their relationship with their boss. In addition, workers pay attention to whom their leader has lunch with or interacts with socially. And no matter how hard you try to be impartial, some will always believe that the individuals you have a personal friendship with receive special favors or consideration.

I found this to be the case when I was Director of a School of Nursing. When faculty received teaching assignments they wanted, they perceived the assignment process to be fair. When the same faculty were asked to teach courses they didn't prefer, they often suggested that assignments had been based on friendship.

Ironically, a recent study showed that employers are more likely to skip over their friends to reward employees they're not close to in an effort to avoid appearing biased (Jones, 2018). That was the case even if the manager's friend was slightly more deserving. Thus, perceptions of bias can occur both ways, and the only way to avoid this risk is to avoid the conflict of interest entirely.

If you decide to cross the friendship line, make sure to clarify the boundaries of the relationship. For example, as the boss, you will still be tasked with their performance reviews and performance problems. Your friends should know that, if their behavior is not up to par or is negatively impacting employee morale, work schedules, or work culture, you will be their employer first and their friend second (All Business, 2019). This does not mean that putting on your "boss hat" when it is needed will be appreciated at the time—or that your forewarning will be remembered. In addition, some lines should never be crossed, such as sharing information about one employee with another if there is no official need to know.

Surprisingly, leadership and management can be lonely enterprises at times. Having appropriate personal and professional boundaries, however, allows the leader to consistently do the right thing. This comes only from clarity about personal values and what the leadership role should be.

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