Professional Development of Nursing Leaders: A Case Study of Canadian Nurses Association Presidents
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ABSTRACT

Nursing leadership is important in every domain of nursing. However, nursing leadership development is not well understood or documented. This study addresses this gap by turning to an overlooked source of leadership knowledge: presidents of the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). The CNA has had exceptional leaders during its 108-year history. Many have influenced nursing practice, changed the perception of nursing, and improved healthcare. Yet, little is known about how they became such outstanding leaders. Using a qualitative design, this study aims to inspire and inform current and future nurses by exploring the experiences and leadership journeys of CNA presidents.

Altogether, seven nurses who have held the title of president of the CNA were interviewed, either face to face or by Skype. These interviews focused on their personal experiences and perspectives about their leadership journey. Their definitions, philosophies, and motivations for pursuing this particular leadership role were also explored. Through interpretive description methodology the following six themes were identified:

- Embracing Opportunities, Relentless Incrementalism, A Service Mindset, Taking the Long View, Enduring Heartbreak, and Taking a Seat at the Table.

By providing a deeper understanding of the motivation and experiences of CNA presidents, the findings of this study not only provide insight into the practice wisdom of those who have gone before, they also provide a resource for the development of nursing leaders today.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can an exploration of the leadership journeys of CNA presidents provide insight into the practice wisdom of those who have gone before and serve as a resource for nursing leadership development across the domains of the profession?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abundance of literature about characteristics of leaders credible, courageous, visible and inspiring
Innovative, develops people focused, impasses trust
Engaging and influencing
Critical thinking, action and advocacy
Limited literature about development of leaders

Inevitably, the researchers discover that effective leaders are highly self-aware, purpose-driven and authentic. But with little insight on how the leaders became that way, the research falls short of providing realistic guidance for our own personal journeys (Ibarra, 2015, p.3)

METHODS

Qualitative Design
Interpretive Description Methodology
Purposeful Sample
Seven CNA Presidents
Semi-structured Interviews
60 to 90 minutes
4 face to face, 2 Skype, 1 telephone
Data Analysis: Immersion

RESULTS

“Embracing Opportunities, Relentless Incrementalism, A Service Mindset, Taking the Long View, Enduring Heartbreak, and Taking a Seat at the Table.”

“You can’t be afraid. Because if I had been afraid to even try it would have been because I was worried about myself. I think that should be another chapter in the book. Don’t just think about yourself, don’t be afraid. You know? Take a risk.” (Participant 2)

“You don’t get added to the culture or the role.” (Participant 5)

“I can’t stress how important it is to love what you do.” (Participant 5)

“Leadership is very simple. It’s about synchronizing with the people we serve. To me that’s leadership. Ensuring we understand their needs very deeply. Putting them in the driver’s seat. Being led by those we serve. So it’s a very kind of servant oriented approach to leadership. I really believe in that concept of servant leadership. It’s in the service of something.” (Participant 2)

“Service as Philosophy, Service as Embodiment”

“I don’t put wind beneath each other’s wings. We all each other; I’ve seen in practice settings, I’ve seen it in academia. And I certainly saw it at CNA and so much of our time at CNA was taken up by people who were wanting to cut out of our knees.” (Participant 5)

“So leadership is very simple. It’s the degree of influence that you have over others. Uh, towards a common goal. And I always say that’s why I say every nurse has leadership, the issue is, is to exercise it.” (Participant 5)

Recommended:
1) Ongoing nursing research on nursing leadership development
2) Promotion of Leadership Development within nursing education
3) Early identification of nursing leaders
4) Continuing education of nursing leaders
5) Address persistent horizontal violence

Conclusion:

“I need to understand that I am only one speck or drop in the big thing that we have to do here so please don’t worry about creating a wave, just worry about creating a ripple. And then I will make a difference and someone else will make their difference and the wave will worry about itself.” (Participant 5)