In the world in which we live, it seems impossible to go through a day without hearing the term leadership. The concept of leadership is mentioned so often in meetings, articles, performance appraisals, curriculum plans, courses, conversations, and the media that the true essence and meaning of leadership is frequently lost. We know it when we see it, but do we really see it often enough?

Even in the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) 2010 report The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, the first action verb in the title is “leading.” Two of the 8 recommendations are specifically focused upon leadership: Recommendation 2—Expand opportunities for nurses to lead and diffuse collaborative improvement efforts, and Recommendation 8—Prepare and enable nurses to lead change to advance health. This report is a call to action, not a conceptual paper. On the large scale, Regional Action Committees have been established to gather a collective of nurse leaders with colleagues from other professions to discuss and create strategies for acting upon these recommendations.

Fundamental to both creating these strategies and acting upon them is the need for large numbers of nurse leaders with the abilities, capacity, and strength of character in nursing education, scholarship, practice, and research. We must develop a new generation of accomplished nurse leaders in all of these areas to be able to lead the interprofessional changes necessary for the future of our health care systems. To perpetuate and sustain the development of nurses as leaders, nursing education must be at the forefront of the movement to apply evidence-based leadership development models in faculty development as well as the education of their students. A clear distinction needs to be made between the preparation of nurses for management, administration, and leadership.

Nurse educators are the keystone to the future of leadership within nursing, and therefore faculty development is the critical element in the preparation of faculty to role model leadership behaviors throughout every educational activity. It is time to purposefully move from teaching about leadership to developing leaders. This must occur through behavioral and developmental experiences in addition to the cognitive and knowledge gains. This in itself will require a transformation of our paradigms about leadership in nursing education.

An exciting opportunity is now available for nurse faculty to engage in an intentional leadership development experience within the context of nursing education. The Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy (NFLA) is an intense and challenging leadership development experience specifically designed for junior nurse faculty. Funded through the Elsevier Foundation and administered by Sigma Theta Tau International, the purpose of the NFLA is to develop the leadership knowledge and skills of nurses early in their faculty careers to: foster academic career success; promote nurse faculty retention and satisfaction; promulgate personal leadership development; and cultivate high-performing, supportive work environments in academe. The learning framework for the NFLA is built upon a “tripart” of relationships for the Academy experience: The Scholar (the junior faculty member participant), a chosen Leadership Mentor, and an Expert Leadership Faculty Consultant. Working together during the 2 in-person workshops, regular phone calls and meetings, monthly learning activities related to the 3 domains of the academy, and virtual site visits, the “tripart” creates the balanced learning unit for the 20-month experience.

The NFLA curriculum is designed to provide a variety of learning opportunities for an international cohort of Scholars. These modalities are aligned within 3 domains: Individual Leadership Development, Advancing Nursing Education through the Leadership of a Team Project, and Increasing the Scope of Influence within the Home School of Nursing. Thus, the NFLA addresses both of the IOM’s Future of Nursing report’s recommendations regarding leadership.

Currently, the pilot “Nurse Faculty Mentored Leadership Development” (NFMLD) Program, which has
a cohort of 15 Scholars is past the mid-point of the experience. The progress that these Scholars have made in the three domains has created the platform for the expansion grant under which the NFLA will embark in 2012. Each of the current Scholars is dedicated to her/his intentional leadership development and is engaged in the triad relationships to achieve their personal goals as well as the goals of the program. Each Scholar identifies a problem or opportunity at her/his college of nursing, forms a project team of faculty, conducts a stakeholder analysis, designs a strategic plan for the project, implements the project, evaluates the process and outcomes of the initiative, and disseminates the results through a variety of methods. The current cohort of Scholars in the pilot NFMLD Program have implemented projects focused on curriculum redesign, learning in simulation environments, interactive learning module design, community health partnerships, integrating gerontology content into APN curriculum, quality indicators for capstone projects, Quality and Safety Education for Nurses competencies, the relationship between experiential learning and a faculty career path, and the ICN Education Network Expansion Project.

Mentors for the current cohort include nursing research and program directors, leaders of national nursing academic professional organizations, a dean of a nursing college, and a cadre of authors of nursing books and articles. During the NFMLD mid-program impact assessments from the Leadership Mentors, it was reported that considerable progress had been made toward meeting the individual leadership development goals of the Scholars as well as with the nursing education projects. Many of the Scholars have made professional presentations and published articles in professional journals and have been appointed to school of nursing committees since their participation in the NFMLD. Several Scholars have received new positions within their school and have accepted leadership appointments for task forces, special projects, and faculty teams. During the mid-program teleconferences, the Scholars stated emphatically that they believe these opportunities would not have been afforded to them if not for their participation in the NFMLD program. Expressing intention to engage in a long-term intensive individual leadership development experience takes courage and commitment. The dedication and promise of the future leadership of the Scholars in the cohort of the pilot NFMLD Program has resulted in the funding for the expanded NFLA.

The NFMLD and the upcoming NFLA provide an evidence-based leadership development experience that will prepare nursing leaders in schools of nursing who can both lead and diffuse collaborative improvement efforts and prepare and enable nurses to lead change to advance health care. Powerful learning opportunities such as these are necessary to create the next generation of nurse leaders. It is a privilege and an honor to serve as the international leadership consultant to these initiatives.

The implementation of faculty leadership development efforts that are personally initiated, behaviorally focused, and fully supported by schools of nursing will be beneficial not only to the participants but also for their students, the patient populations cared for by the students, and the interprofessional teams in which both the faculty and the students interact. The substantial investment in faculty leadership development is critically important to the future of the entire nursing profession.

REFERENCES


Deborah Cleeter, MSN, EdD
Sawgrass Leadership Institute
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

Corresponding author: Dr. Deborah Cleeter, MSN, EdD
Sawgrass Leadership Institute
213 Sea Island Drive
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082
E-mail address: DebCleeterSLI@comcast.net

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