

Opinion

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The Introverted Nurse Leader - Important Questions to Answer



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Opinion

It is well established that the world is changing rapidly and substantially. Competition is intense and global; advances in information technology and access to such are occurring at an amazing pace. In the future, successful organizations - business, governments, non-profits, healthcare - will need employees as well as leaders who relate to one another in different and in effective ways. Of late, there are multiple regions which have a lack of nurses.

Although the largest group of healthcare professionals is nurses, vacancies for RNs are increasing. Reasons for having too few nurses are complex and multifactorial - aging workforce of RNs; inadequate number of qualified and dedicated nursing faculty; salaries - to mention a few. Additionally, it is estimated that approximately 15% of all nurses employed in hospitals leave their positions within 12 months of employment; and 33% report they are ready to change jobs. Likely, one major reason why nurses leave this most respected of professions is poor leadership.

Typically, great leaders are often associated as being extroverts; charismatic; love to be heard; energized by being with others; consider Condoleezza Rice, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Henry Ford, Muhammad Ali, Margaret Thatcher. While extroverts are said to be 25% more likely to land a top position; this brief treatise posits counterintuitively that introverts may be better equipped to be excellent nurse leaders. First, consider what your strengths are. Admittedly, this is sometimes easier said than done for introverts. As Donald Clifton has noted, "become an expert at finding, describing, applying, practicing, and refining" what you are good at. Take a look at these traits:

- a) Listening
- b) Critical Thinking
- c) Abstraction
- d) Preparation
- e) Focus
- f) Empowering Others
- g) Observation

- h) Respect
- i) Responsibility
- j) Value Other Opinions
- k) Remain Calm
- l) Persistence

Nearly anyone will recognize the aforementioned as very valuable and necessary traits in nurse leaders. As an introvert, you likely possess most, if not all, of these strengths - so use them! Quiet leadership is not an oxymoron. What might leadership look like for an introvert? Regardless of personality profile, if a nurse leader does not understand that "good ideas, come from a lot of ideas" she is not likely to remain in a role of leadership for very long. Think first, talk later; introverts have this ability innately.

This affords you the opportunity to consider multiple perspectives on an issue, and concomitantly multiple solutions. When a situation is viewed differently, or uniquely and all opinions are listened to respectfully, the outcome is much more likely to be positive. As an introvert, let your actions do the talking - leadership is nothing more and nothing less than influence. When you need to reenergize (as everyone does), make it a priority to embrace solitude.

Have you ever been told, "No" or possibly, "You can't do that" or "You need to do this" when complying with such was simply wrong? In 1955, Rosa Parks, a quiet and reserved woman refused to give her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She knew the consequences to her would be serious. However, Rosa was, "tired of giving in." She responded based on principle in pursuit of what was right. There are times in leadership when there may be a difference in "doing things right" vs. "doing the right thing." Rosa Parks, an introvert with a great deal of character, knew the difference. Can others sense your character?

Relationships are certainly critical to a nurse leader. Contrary to what many may believe, introverts have a significant advantage in this regard. While it is a challenge for introverts to "network"

and you may have fewer close colleagues; these interpersonal relationships tend to be deeper, and the greater the depth (not breadth) of a relationship, the greater the influence potential. Can you build the right relationships?

Introverts are good thinkers and good learners. Similarly, successful nurse leaders, think critically and are willing to grow in their leadership knowledge. Learning is a (never-ending) process of discovery; and when it comes to leadership, there is always one more thing to do. Are you willing to do the homework required to take the leadership role?

As a nurse leader you will deal with a number of intangibles - visions, dreams, goals, enthusiasm, altruism, personalities. Couple these with the “nuts and bolts” of patient care along with policies, rules, laws, and regulations all make for a very challenging milieu as a leader; yet provides incredible opportunities as well. Can you sense the intangibles of being a nurse leader, and see past cacophony to the rewards; rewards for your colleagues, for you, and most importantly for your patients?

Success as a nurse leader will not come overnight! The more (complex, difficult) issues you face, address, and solve; the more

likely those whom you lead will give you a chance. Experience - where you have been as a leader - only comes with experience. Some of these experiences are going to be painful. After climbing that first great hill, you will only find as a nurse leader there are many more hills to climb! Are you willing (patient) to obtain the necessary experience to lead?

Think about this - you are the only person on Earth who can use your ability; use it! Calvin Coolidge (30th President of the United States - and an introvert) stated, “Nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent; the world is full of educated derelicts; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.” What are your abilities? Nursing leadership is a process; it requires development; it takes a unique maturity; it means change; and it is difficult. To provide optimal patient care; to help educate and retain nurses; we need leaders who are willing to answer challenging questions, address difficult issues, and who will empower future nurses to improve the quality of lives. Are you ready to use your strengths and personality to be a nurse leader?



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