

Well congratulations. You've achieved a difficult goal most probably in the face of adversity. My bet is most of you kept your day job...or maybe your night job...as a registered nurse, kept your job as the chief of the household, as chief gardener, as chief cook, and don't forget soccer mom. But you made it!!

It's hard for me to believe that it has been almost 5 years ago when I learned UH was contemplating a BSN program. At that time I was the Chief Nursing Executive for a hospital system here in Victoria, and I simply could not contain my excitement. In my career I have had the privilege of knowing so many wonderful nurses who have made such differences in the lives of people. But in Victoria we had a shortage of nurses who were educated to the role of providing positive nursing leadership. As all nurses know, if you don't have everything you need, you improvise and do with what you have. The result is there are many wonderful nurses who have not achieved a BSN who are nurse managers in hospitals, home health agencies, long term care facilities, and all of those places that nursing care is needed. They are doing great work, but in the absence of higher formal education it is harder and requires more energy. The employment agency must invest more in their development, and the individual nurse also works harder to learn those things that make a effective leader—and sometimes their lessons occurred when different approaches not work well—what we call the school of hard knocks.

The fact that you are here today is a testament that you have been in a program that promotes leadership success. Because of this educational program you are now practiced at doing the research, working in teams, and building a background for success. You will now routinely search the evidence before developing a policy or seek collaboration from all players before making a decision that will effect many—you innately know how to plan, research, and prepare yourself to make decisions that bring the best outcomes.

I hope many of you are already in leadership positions, and that you pursued this degree to become even stronger and more influential. If so, How many times have you learned something in that classroom and thought --Hey I'm going to try that approach at work? You've expanded your knowledge and techniques that will make you even more effective.

I would like to thank each of you for what you've done to qualify to be at this pinning. All of you have supported my dream of increasing our pool of nursing leaders. And as a nursing leader I would like to recommend that you do 4 things to make a difference.

First

Show your enthusiasm and energy. As you walk through your work place, your community, your church—anywhere and everywhere show your energy about nursing. You are in a field where we only do good—where we advance humanity. Brag about it, inspire others to want to become a nurse or advance their nursing degree, be willing to coach and develop other nurses, be a role model whose behavior screams I'm a nurse and I love it!! When you are enthusiastic the people you lead will catch that enthusiasm. Instead of saying we can't because of this barrier or that situation, you will inspire them to problem solve and have ownership in what you do. Don't get me wrong. Before you are in a leadership role you make a difference—but only to one patient or one client at a time. Now all those you lead are the people touching patients—so instead of only a few you are

making a difference to hundreds of patients. You don't want these clients, these vulnerable patients being cared for by a lackluster team. You want them changed by the enthusiastic care-giver who is knowledgeable, competent, and pour their whole heart into what they do. Remember for them to have enthusiasm, you must have enthusiasm.

### Second

Keep on keepin' up. Have you heard that a degree in Information Systems is outdated before the student graduates? This is because the technology is growing so rapidly that in a four year period, what was developed in the first year is now on its third iteration. I believe health care advances, health care regulations, health care expectations are changing even more rapidly than this. Since Crossing the Quality Chasm declared 90,000 people were dying each year because of mistakes made in healthcare, regulatory agencies everywhere are trying to close the quality gap. The number of regulations and expectations we operate under haven't just mushroomed—they are almost out of control. We have evidence based protocols, universal safety protocols, nursing sensitive core measures that prescribe not just what is to be done but at exactly what time it will be done, national patient safety goals, clinical practice guidelines – and soooo many other expectations. Truly there is something new published every day. Once the rules are down pat—the requirements change. Certainly if you don't keep up you can fail. Outcomes are now all over the internet—you don't keep up you may be excluded as a healthcare provider by insurance companies. For me keeping up is a great challenge. I believe it takes the advisors around you, journals, professional organizations, being on every list serve that applies to what you do and your time – probably 8-12 hours a week to keep up. But without it you can't lead others to the correct place at the correct time and all of you will be lost. Remember we are transparent—our results are published on the internet and the literature. No one supports the one in last place—despite all your work you will have failed if you don't keep up.

### Third

Please know you are only as good as the people you lead. Don't dictate, don't pontificate, don't exclude someone who doesn't espouse your ideas. Create a culture of collaboration—even your enemies need to be in that circle. Hold them close so they can't surprise and destroy you, and recognize people with divergent ideas prevent groupthink and stagnation. Put your ears on. Don't always be the one who talks, who directs—listen. Surround yourself with good people and then empower them, learn from them, respect them, mentor and support them. Address others with respect for their culture, age, and levels of experience. If you serve your people well, you will be paid back by incredible teamwork and awesome goal achievement.

Finally I ask that as a nursing leader you influence health policy and nursing practice...to be the voice of professional nursing. You need to be supportive of our nursing organizations that advocate for nurses and patients. As an individual voice we may make a difference, but as one of many our voices are much louder. I have witnessed our nursing organization advocate and win so much for us—safe harbor, staffing effectiveness, safe lifting policies, nurse friendly certification and so much more. These organizations have helped organize us to be ready for events like Hurricane Ike or a Swine Flue outbreak. This is because of nurses just like you who are willing to participate and make a difference.

My excitement that I had in 2005 when I learned there would be so many more nurse leaders is intensified because of you and what you have done. To quote Winston Churchill he said, We make

a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. I'll close with a personal experience about giving and receiving. About 3 months ago a nurse came to see me, and as we talked she told me she was celebrating her 20<sup>th</sup> year in nursing. I congratulated her, and she told me you know you are the reason why I am in this job, why I am even a nurse. She told me in school she had some tough times and I was there for her. In her perception I provided encouragement, gave her ideas, and had my ears on. I really didn't know that I had done anything to help her, but to her it was life changing. She's an outstanding leader today, and she told me she tries every day to pass it on to others. I was humbled and stayed on Cloud 9 knowing the difference I made—not just to her, but to the thousands of nurses she has influenced over the past 20 years!!!

May your journey into the leadership of other nurses bring you the same joy and reward. Again I congratulate you and thank you.