
An Issue of Leadership and Its Styles in Nursing

In society, leaders are often thought to be entrepreneurs, politicians and innovators, but this is far from the truth – leadership can be found everywhere and demonstrated by anyone. Within the past century, nursing has become increasingly autonomous and forth-coming in improving and upholding Canada’s healthcare system, its very nature and preconception of what it is to be a nurse has also transformed. During my undergraduate experience, I have met many leaders in different forms and backgrounds, including nurses and have reshaped what leadership means. In this paper, I reflect on what it means to be a leader, styles that I resonate with and how they impact my nursing views.

What on Earth is Leadership?

Leadership involves the ability to “make a difference in others” by influence and engagement as described by Yukl (2006) (as cited in Evans, 2015). As mentioned before, leadership can be demonstrated in many styles – some may be easy-going, like the laissez-faire style, and some may be strict, like the authoritarian style which use a reward punishment system. Being able to effectively lead a group of people or organization is essential in fulfilling a vision or mission. According to Covey (1992), there are 8 characteristics in being an effective leader: “engage in lifelong learning”, “are service-oriented”, “are concerned with the common good”, “radiate positive energy”, “believe in other people”, “lead balanced lives and see life as an adventure”, “are synergistic that is, they see things as greater than the sum of the parts”, and “engage themselves in self-renewal” (as cited in Evans, 2015). Although these are not meant to be criteria in effective leadership, it is interesting to see connections and representative qualities in each styles that will be discussed. Who am I Now? As a person who likes to explore different creative ways to solve problems, I tend to adapt my leadership style depending on the context. However, regardless of the situation, there will always be reoccurring themes or essences that I incorporate when leading as I believe these are heavily influenced by my personal values and beliefs in which do not change. Upon further reflection and review of all the leadership styles, I believe I share qualities with servant leadership.

To Serve Others

Servant leadership is a philosophical approach where leaders focus on the wellbeing and empowerment of their followers in maximizing their potential. Although it is recognized that Robert Greenleaf modernized this framework in 1970, its essence existed in ancient history and was recorded in multiple places (Gandolfi, Stone & Deno, 2017). This leadership approach, though not as well researched and defined as other styles, may be misinterpreted as too idealistic (Gandolfi, 2017). A key point is that the leader’s primary focus is not the ultimate goals itself, but rather they put their followers as the main priority and goal second as Stone (2004) explained (as cited in Gandolfi, 2017). As such, these leaders put their own needs after their followers. It is not to say that the leader does not prioritize their goal or self-interest as unimportant, the thought process of servant leadership involves, “that if the followers are maximizing their potential, this will directly translate to the potential of the organizations, or in other words, organizational performance” (Gandolfi et al. , 2017). Having mentioned the difference in prioritization compared to most other leadership styles, it is important to highlight

challenges in leaders who practice servanthood. Considering that the leader puts an emphasis on “serving” their followers, leaders are at risk in straying away from their organizational mission or can become too invested in an individual (Gandolfi et al. , 2017). Having said that, this leadership style would be highly effective in a setting with long-term goals rather than short term. Servant leaders, intuitive in empathy and ethical behaviour (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012), are also faced with dilemmas that may conflict each other. For example, if a follower’s values and beliefs do not align with the organizational mission or if the mission itself requires unethical means to be achieved. I serve, therefore I lead. There are characteristics and behaviours in which I have that makes me a servant leader. Although Servant leadership remains broadly operationalized and ill defined, its main focal point is its “leading through serving” approach. Bruce Winston and Dail Fields (2015) attempted to clarify “essential behaviours of servant leadership” by examining previous operationalizations of the style. Some behaviours include “serves people without regard to their nationality, gender, or race”, “genuinely interested in employees as people”, “willing to make sacrifices to help others”, “seeks to instill trust rather than fear or insecurity” as well as “is always honest” (Winston & Fields, 2015). This leadership style also focuses on growth and attempts to empower the team through motivating and supporting each individual. As the co-captain for my high school badminton team, I recognized the potential in each of my teammates and facilitated growth and improvements, whether it was their serves, their smashes, how to better communicate with their partner as well as foot work – each individual had their own strengths and weaknesses that needed to be considered.

Despite the title, I never felt like I was in a higher position than my teammates as we, collectively, make up the team. Our ultimate mission was to compete in the provincial championship, in which we ended up not qualifying. What mattered more for me, was seeing my teammates performances improve and knowing that they did their best. I remember taking time every Wednesdays and staying well after practices to help coach other teammates in their skills. Being passionate and believing that they can maximize their potential through encouragement and guidance was what drove me as a co-captain. As a nursing student, I share similar values and beliefs when practicing servanthood as I practice promoting empathy, healing, active listening as well as committing to client recovery and growth – these servant characteristics can be found in nursing leaders (Fahlberg & Toomey, 2016). Having servant characteristics along with emotional intelligence creates effective nursing practices and optimizes collaboration between the nurse, client and other health professionals (Anderson, 2016). As defined by Smith, Profetto-McGrath and Cummings (2009), emotional intelligence involves the use of interpersonal and social skills, as well as psychological maturity to better understand and be emotionally aware of oneself and others (as cited in MacPhee, 2015). During my time spent with my clients and regular self-reflections, I have become increasingly aware of my own strengths and weaknesses which contributes to my modest demeanor. Although I care for my clients, I am not in a position higher than them as I want them to have a voice to express their concerns, values and priorities.

As a servant leader, I want to support them in regaining their autonomy and empowering them to become active participants in their health, without overstepping my professional boundaries.

The question that most often as I reflect on my nursing practices is, how can I better serve my clients? Each client has their own potential in their health and by building a trusting relationship to foster and help them become engaged in achieving their health goals is what drives me as a nurse. Who do I want to Be? Personally, I am a strong believer in self-reflection, improvement and learning – there is no such thing as being perfect or an expert. Solutions or methods that

were used to solve one problem may not work for another; likewise, a problem may be solved by many ways. As a person who recognizes her inner discomfort of the unexpected, I strive to expose myself to many experiences to mitigate the discomfort – this is why I apply my creative strength in creating solutions as mentioned earlier. Similarly, the practice of self-reflection, improvement and learning also coincides with nursing practices. Although servant leadership can be found in nursing, I believe in order to become a better leader and nurse, adopting authentic attributes would be able to support areas in which servant leadership lacks. To reiterate, the issues with servant leaders is the tricky balancing act of maintaining boundaries, self-care and burn out prevention. Authentic leadership captures similar results without these weaknesses and may encourage healthy work-life coping mechanisms (Van Bogaert, 2016). Let's Be "Real" The foundational concepts in Authentic Leadership has been present since Ancient Greece but has since recently experienced a resurgence in popularity (Waite, McKinney, Smith-Glasgow & Meloy, 2014). Unlike Servant leadership, there are defined underlying components in Authentic leadership: self-awareness, unbiased balance information processing, authentic behaviour/action and relational transparency (Waite et al. , 2014). "Leaders are made, not born.

Effective leadership requires deep passion, an unwavering commitment to serving others, a bold vision of future possibilities and a conscious commitment to life-long learning" as stated by King, Altman and Lee (2011) (as cited in Waite, McKinney, Smith-Glasgow & Meloy, 2014). Authentic leadership may have striking similarities with servant leadership as both values their followers, built on ethical foundation, as well as the importance in honesty, self-discipline and humility. However, a difference between these two styles is that Authentic leadership emphasizes legitimacy via honest communication between leader and followers. Unlike the servant leader where they have a "your problem is my problem" attitude, these leaders are more assertive in that they can differentiate their own interests and priorities from others. One of the challenges as an authentic leader is being able to work through challenges that involve differences in values and beliefs within the organization.

Steps in Transitioning into Another Style

Considering that authentic leadership can be learned and its similar core concepts with servant leadership, I believe I can amalgamate more authentic strategies and skills into my leadership practices. Upon reflection of my experiences as a servant leader, I started to recognize the downfalls and challenges despite my positive recollection. The main differences between servant and authentic, I would like to focus on self-awareness and self-regulation in addition to communication. Self-regulation & self-awareness. Although I am aware of my values, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, I feel I am unable to fully express that to my followers which in a way is ingenuine – failing to show my "true self" and in a way, conforming to others. As a servant leader, the focus is not on me, but rather the follower and their values and beliefs. As often, challenges where I might not be able to differentiate emotions I am experiencing, whether they are mine or the followers can also be problematic. This puts crossing boundaries a risk and neglecting the overall organizational mission.

The inability to self-regulate and prevent being overly involved may lead to detrimental consequences including compassion fatigue, failure to fulfill team goals as well as conflict between the leader and the follower. Self-awareness "refers to an individual's capacity to show an understanding of personal strengths, weaknesses and impact on others" (Shirey, 2015). To adopt a more authentic approach, I need to be able to learn the "impact on others" in order to

be an effective authentic leader. Shirey (2015) recommends “individuals pursue a journey of self-discovery, self-improvement, reflection and renewal” which would facilitate self-awareness. A strategy would be to plan time out of the day for reflection as Shirey (2015) suggested. Reorienting myself through daily meditation without distractions would help “clear the mind and provide balanced perspective” (Shirey, 2015). Rather than feeling stuck “being in one’s shoes”, giving myself at least 30 minutes daily with out external distractions will enable me to revisit my “true self” as I carry out activities that I enjoy. Some activities will include yoga, a stroll in the neighbourhood, playing sudoku and using a meditation application called “Stop, Breathe & Think: Meditation & Mindfulness” which was recommended by my counselor. The main focus in these activities is to temporarily disengage from external stimulus and stresses including social media, academic and non-academic responsibilities so I can take my time to self-reflect. Communication is key. As a person who recognizes communication as one of her weaknesses, I strive to make it my life-long goal to improve. Being able to accurately express how I feel and think has been a challenge since I was a child, though I am proud as I came a long way. Communication in authentic leadership enables followers to relate with the leader more and feel more comfortable. To coherently present my ideas, I tend to have frequent pauses and word my sentences carefully which may come off suspicious, stiff as well as inauthentic.

A strategy to address this is to improve on my verbal communication skills in more fast pace situations. I am proud to say that I will be joining Queen’s Improv Club that runs every Sunday and Wednesday evenings in the John Deutsch University Centre. Recognizing my packed schedule, I plan to attend every Sunday evenings which involves improv activities and games with other people. Being able to simply communicate and meet with new people in a safe setting will enable me to try different communication techniques as well as help practice thinking and speaking on the spot. As an authentic leader, feedback and reflection always go hand in hand. By participating in this club, I would be able to receive constructive feedback on my progress as well as help in further improving.

CONCLUSION

Overall, leadership exists in many different styles and approaches depending on the individual’s values and beliefs. This is not to say that servant and authentic are the only effective styles – these are the styles that speak to me as an individual and a nursing student. Ultimately, these styles are what shapes my behaviour, personality and nursing practices. There are different methods in which problems or goals can be addressed and likewise, every person has their own styles and ways in achieving them.