

Embracing Empowerment in the Healthcare of the United States

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The United States experiences an economic and healthcare crisis that calls for change. Transformational leadership model by Kouzes and Posner (2003) defines traits that are important to embrace by today's healthcare leaders in promoting organizational change. To promote growth, engaging and empowering all members in the organization opens the door for collaborative work intentionally establishing sustainable healthcare outcomes. Since nurses play a significant role in US and global healthcare systems, healthcare organizations demand empowered nursing leaders that have an equal voice. The significance of this review to the future is to awaken nursing leaders to step away from a dependent mode and to step forward to an empowered mode.

Keywords: Nursing Leadership; Empowering Nursing Leaders; Kouzes and Posner Transformational Leadership; Collaborative Healthcare

Introduction

The United States experiences an economic and healthcare crisis that calls for change. The healthcare system in the United States needs leaders that influence an organization's capacity to change dedicated to "get involved in something that you care so much about that you want to make it the greatest it can possibly be, not because of what you will get, but just because it can be done" (Collins, 2001: p. 209). Transformational leadership model by Kouzes and Posner (2003) defines traits that are important to embrace by today's healthcare leaders in promoting organizational change.

Kouzes and Posner-Transformational Leadership

Kouzes and Posner's (2003) transformational leadership model focuses on establishing a caring relationship between the leader with his followers. This form of professional relationship promotes leadership that "will be wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain those human relationships that enable people to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003: p. 3). In their model, Kouzes and Posner (2003) introduced 5 fundamental practices of exemplary leadership that motivate extraordinary performance. These 5 practices require leaders to: "1) *challenge the process*; 2) *inspire a shared vision*; 3) *model the way*; 4) *enable others to act*; [and] 5) *encourage the heart*" (p. 3).

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To *challenge the process*, leaders seek and explore "opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003: p. 6). Based on their knowledge and expertise, they investigate new ideas and consider applying the initiative in practice. To *inspire a shared vision*, leaders envision clearly what they plan to accomplish and reach acceptance of this vision with followers. To *model the way*, leaders develop their own individual voice after clarifying personal and professional values. This independent voice represents their distinct beliefs that they need to stand for and express. To *enable others to act*, leaders establish trust that promotes collaboration and engagement. These essential components further create an enabling environment that embraces choice, accountability, and interest to share and eliminate "hoarding the power ... by giving it away" (p. 8). Lastly, to *encourage the heart*, all constituents need to feel that their contributions are appreciated and valued; and they are motivated to dedicate time and energy to work on common goals.

The leaders are like captains on a ship accountable to sail with the wind and anchor the future of the organization on the paradise island. Everything starts with the leader, who he is and where his heart is. The leader according to Kouzes and Posner, needs to model the way, challenge the process, and inspire shared vision. To model the way, the leader needs to start with individual self-awareness; who he is representing professionally and personally. To challenge the process, the leader's knowledge contributes to how much he will be able to invest in transforming opportunities. Once the leader is confident in selected opportunities, the ideas and possibilities need to be inspired in followers.

Kouzes and Posner, in the practice of enabling others to act, focus on creating an environment where trust, collaboration and accountability are valued and acknowledge the significance of encouraging the heart. When followers gain a sense of appreciation, they establish full dedication to common goals of the organization. Kouzes and Posner reinforce the value of relationships with followers as the primary source of creating prosperous future for the organization.

Value of Empowerment

According to Kouzes and Posner (2003), one of the characteristics of exemplary leaders is to empower others to act. Many organizations support this vision but the healthcare system, nationally and globally requires significant improvement in empowerment of others to act (Coonan, 2008; Dossey & Keegan, 2013; Hurley & Linsley, 2007; Neera, Anjane, & Shoma, 2010; Patrick, Spence, Wong, & Finegan, 2011; Thomas, 2005; Thompson, 2012).

The healthcare system, nationally and globally, undergoes many changes to meet the needs of every community. Nurses play significant roles as healthcare providers globally (Dossey & Keegan, 2013). The role of nurses shifted drastically in the last 10 years however, “historically, nursing culture is grounded in dependent role delineated attitudes” (Hurley & Linsley, 2007: p. 751). As reminded by Hurley and Linsley, based on the bureaucratic management structure in healthcare organizations, nurses still are not taking active participation in organizational decisions and report being a *victims* of managerial hierarchy. Globally, nurses in the twenty first century envision functioning in the empowered collaborative role with other members of healthcare organizations. Nurses are self-determined to build partnership with “equitable power manifested through shared decision-making, effective senior leadership and interpersonal constructs of mutual respect, trust and authenticity toward shared goals and visions” (p. 751). This sense of victimization is present when nursing leaders are considered irrelevant by other medical professionals. Inclusion of nursing leaders with medical professionals creates the initial step forward for nurses to build an equal voice in the decision making process. As suggested by Hurley and Linsley, nursing leaders are challenged to “empower staff, fuse enthusiasm, and instill confidence” (p. 752).

The authors Hurley and Linsley (2007) highlight four factors that contribute to improving the value of nursing leaders in the hierarchy of healthcare organizations: 1) self-awareness with courage to know individual strengths & weaknesses; 2) humanistic principles-autonomy, empathy, creativity, social skills; 3) open to collaborate with different disciplines; and 4) flexibility. When nursing leaders embrace these principles in building a reputation for themselves in healthcare organizations, they create an opportunity to advocate and thus empower every nurse to gain their own voice in the profession.

Hurley and Linsley (2007) remind that “nursing leadership remains caged in a multiplicity of boundaries, many self-imposed” and the above concepts are the cornerstone to align nurses toward a collaborative role. The authors conclude, that it is the responsibility of nursing leadership to support “fluidity and an increasing realization that each nurse is, leader” (p. 754).

Conclusion

To thrive in the 21st century, each organization must continuously be open to change and growth. To promote growth, engaging and empowering all members in the organization opens the door for collaborative work intentionally establishing sustainable healthcare outcomes. Since nurses play a significant role in US and global healthcare systems, healthcare organizations demand empowered nursing leaders that have an equal voice.

The significance of this review to the future is to awaken nursing leaders to step away from a dependent mode (Hurley & Linsley, 2007) and to step forward to an empowered mode (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Further, this new empowered voice in nursing leaders invites nurses to collaborative work opportunities with other healthcare members.

In agreement with Kouzes and Posner (2003), transformational leaders who create a compelling relationship with followers capture their interest and motivate them to work toward a common vision. Hurley and Linsley (2007) describe nursing leaders with self-awareness model personal humanistic qualities and attributes such as creativity and flexibility and inspire others to the same. When leaders align with leadership attributes according to Kouzes and Posner, they inspire and empower followers to engage in collaborative work.

In conclusion, the fundamental purpose of this paper is to introduce the value of the transformational leadership model by Kouzes and Posner (2003) to healthcare leaders. These leaders influence an organization’s capacity to change and ability to thrive amid the demands of our changing world. Therefore in order to create a sustainable future in every organization, “we need leaders who can unite us and ignite us” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003: p. xiii).

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