

# Professional Development of Nursing Leaders: A Case Study of Canadian Nurses Association Presidents

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# **ABSTRACT**

Nursing leadership is important in every domain of nursing. However, nursing leadership development is not well understood or documented. This study addresses this gap by turning to an overlooked source of leadership knowledge: presidents of the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). The CNA has had exceptional leaders during its 108-year history. Many have influenced nursing practice, changed the perception of nursing, and improved healthcare. Yet, little is known about how they became such outstanding leaders. Using a qualitative design, this study aims to inspire and inform current and future nurses by exploring the experiences and leadership journeys of CNA presidents.

Altogether, seven nurses who have held the title of president of the CNA were interviewed, either face to face or by Skype. These interviews focused on their personal experiences and perspectives about their leadership journey. Their definitions, philosophies, and motivations for pursuing this particular leadership role were also explored. Through interpretive description methodology the following six themes were identified:

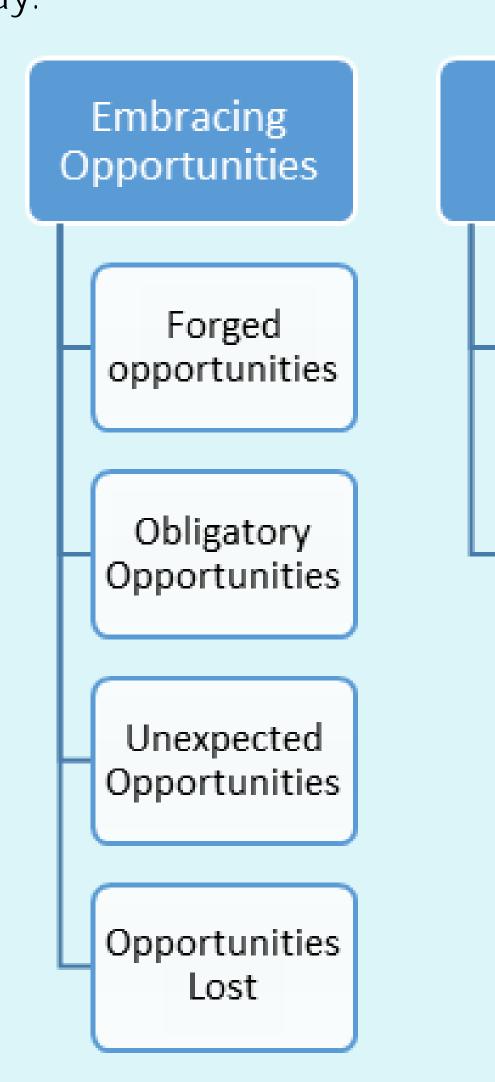
Embracing Opportunities, Relentless Incrementalism, A Service Mindset, Taking the Long View, Enduring Heartbreak, and Taking a Seat at the Table.

By providing a deeper understanding of the motivation and experiences of CNA presidents, the findings of this study not only provide insight into the practice wisdom of those who have gone before, they also provide a resource for the development of

nursing leaders today.

Relentless

Incrementalism



It is about synchronizing with the people we serve. To me that's leadership. Ensuring we understand their needs very deeply. Putting them in the driver's seat. Being led by those we serve. So it's a very kind of servant oriented approach to leadership. I really believe in that concept of servant leadership. It's in the service of something." (Participant 2)

"We don't put wind beneath each other's wings. We kill each other. I've seen it in practice settings. I've seen it in academia. And I certainly saw it at CNA and so much of our time at CNA was taken up by people who were wanting to cut us off at our knees." (Participant 5)

How can an exploration of the leadership journeys of CNA presidents provide insight into the practice wisdom of those who have gone before and serve as a resource for nursing leadership development across the domains of the profession?

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Abundance of literature about characteristics of leaders

- credible, courageous, visible and inspiring
- Innovative, develops, people focused, inspires trust
- Engaging and influencing
- Critical thinking, action and advocacy
- Limited literature about development of leaders

# **METHODS**

Qualitative Design Interpretive Description Methodology

- Seven CNA Presidents
- Semi-structured Interviews;
- 60 to 90 minutes

Purposive Sample

- 4 face to face, 2 Skype, 1 telephone
- Data Analysis: Immersion



Inevitably, the researchers discover that effective leaders are highly self-aware, purposedriven and authentic. But with little insight on how the leaders became that way, the research falls short of providing realistic guidance for our own personal journeys

(Ibarra, 2015, p.3)

# RESULTS

A Service

Mindset

Service as

Philosophy

Service as

Embodiment

Taking the Long View

Receiving

Mentorship

Exending

Mentorship

Promoting

Nursing

Promoting

Nurses

Enduring Heartache Taking a Seat at the Table

"You can't be afraid. Because if I had been afraid to even try it would have been because I was worried about myself. I think that should be another chapter in the book. Don't just think about yourself. Don't be afraid. You know? Take a risk." (Participant 2)

Unexpected: "Number one: when people believe in you it is pretty powerful. When they see something in you that you don't see, because I will be the first to say, I thought I would be a, I never dreamed of this journey when I was a young, a younger person." (Participant 4)

> "So leadership is very simple. It's the degree of influence you have over others, uh, toward a common goal. And, I always, that's why I say every nurse has leadership, the issue is, is to exercise it." (Participant 6)

"The minister had invited the CNA and me to join her delegation to the WHA (World Health Assembly). The CNA has never been invited in the past. So it was our first. I've never been to the United Nations. So we went and I was part of a 20 person delegation with the minister. So, four of those people sit on the floor of the United Nations and the others sit in the level above. So I was supposed to be in the level above until the night before when the minister sends a note to us saying, 'I've changed my mind. Instead of this person, I'd like you to be on the floor with us.' And I'm sitting on the floor of the United Nations with, like, so many delegates on the floor. It's exactly how we see it on TV. With the Canadian flag in front. With the minister and I'm thinking, how did I get here? And my home country is in the room. It was a magical moment like that where you feel, where did I come from and how did I get to this place?" (Participant 5)

# Recommendations:

- 1) Ongoing nursing research on nursing leadership development
- 2) Promotion of Leadership Development within nursing education
- 3) Early identification of nursing leaders.
- 4) Continuing education of nursing leaders
- 5) Address persistent horizontal violence

# Conclusion:

"I need to understand that I am only one speck or drop in the big thing that we have to do here so please don't worry about creating a wave, just worry about creating a ripple. And then I will make a difference and someone else will make their difference and the wave will worry about itself." (Participant 5)