

# 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.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

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?

## METHODS

Qualitative Design  
Interpretive Description Methodology  
Purposive Sample  
Seven CNA Presidents  
Semi-structured Interviews;  
60 to 90 minutes  
4 face to face, 2 Skype, 1 telephone  
Data Analysis: Immersion

## LITERATURE REVIEW

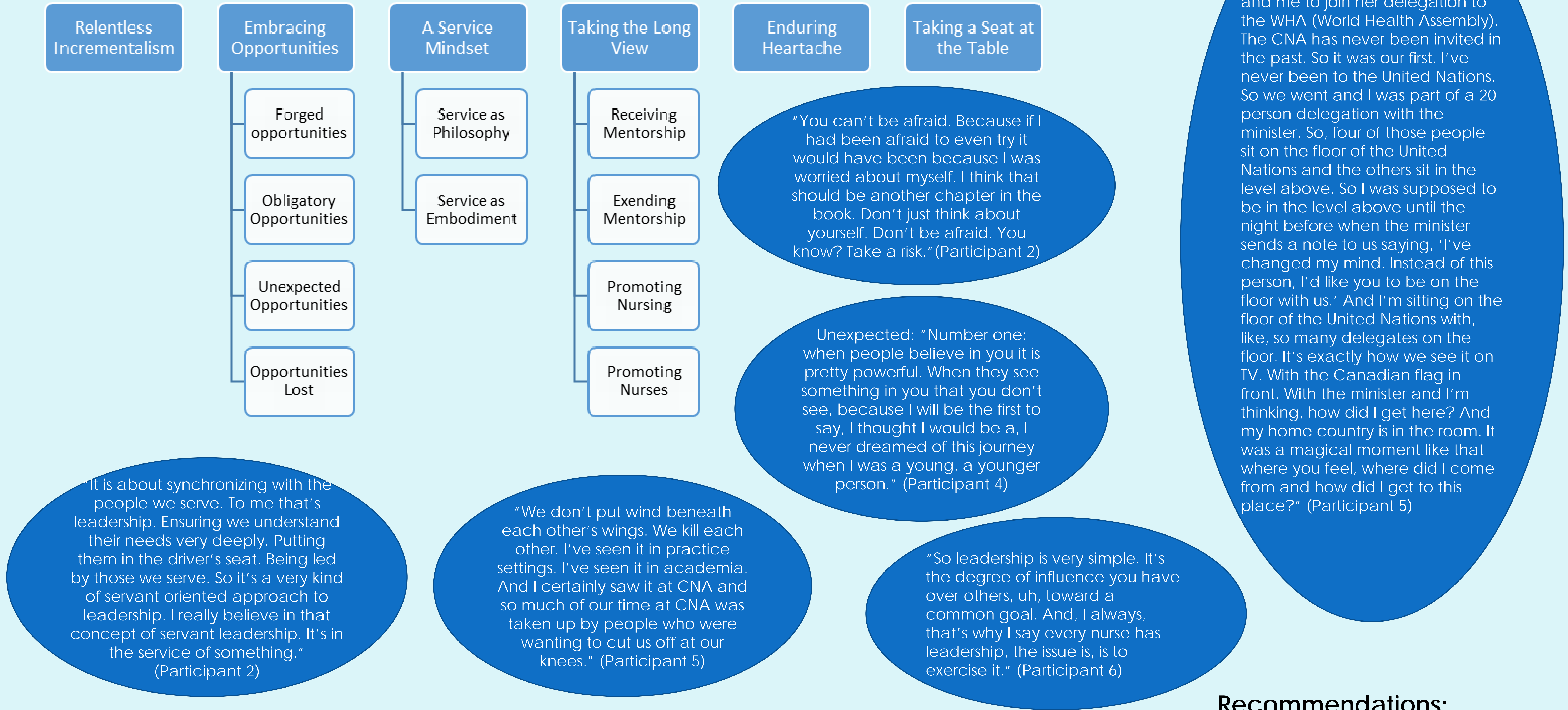
Abundance of literature about characteristics of leaders  
credible, courageous, visible and inspiring  
Innovative, develops, people focused, inspires trust  
Engaging and influencing  
Critical thinking, action and advocacy  
Limited literature about development of leaders



***Inevitably, the researchers discover that effective leaders are highly self-aware, purpose-driven 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



## 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)

## 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