MENTORING: A CALL TO PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) are leaders in the healthcare industry. There is no question about that. As leaders, CRNAs have made great strides in the advancement of patient care. This has been largely due to the exceptional nurse anesthesia educational system that has developed over the years. Students have received the best in anesthesia education and must move into the practice arena. In order to be successful, students will continue to need the support and encouragement of CRNA leaders. Further, sometimes experienced CRNAs want to advance their skills or move into a new position. Even the most experienced CRNA needs guidance and support. This is a call to action for all CRNA leaders. This is a call for CRNAs to mentor!

Defining leadership

It is necessary to begin by looking at CRNAs as leaders. Although there are many definitions and theories of leadership, defining one’s leadership style requires serious, committed reflection. Pointer and Sanchez define leadership as “a process through which an individual attempts to intentionally influence another individual or a group in order to accomplish a goal.” Recognizing that leadership is a conscious process that requires planning, defined goals, effective presentation of goals and strategies, implementation, and evaluation is a significant step forward.

In addition to understanding your leadership potential, it is necessary to envision the type of leader you want to become. Burns defines leaders as either transactional or transformational. Many leaders are transactional in nature and want to maintain the status quo. These individuals offer little in the way of creativity to their protégés. In opposition to the transactional leader is the transformational leader, who seeks to upset and replace the status quo. This type of leader is known to shake things up and offers excitement and vision to employees. This is the type of leadership that CRNAs should promote to their new colleagues.

Is there another level of leadership to which one could aspire? Dow defines the charismatic leader as one who has “…a distinct social relationship between the leader and follower, in which the leader presents a revolutionary idea, a transcendent image…the follower accepts this course of action not because of its rational likelihood of success, but because of an effective belief in the extraordinary qualities of the leader.” The CRNA community has been fortunate to have experienced the leadership of many charismatic individuals. Charismatic leaders have extraordinary self-confidence, they need to influence and hold power, they have high enthusiasm and energy levels, and most important, they are visionary. Charismatic leaders are transformational and revolutionary. Although charismatic leadership is valued, this style is not embraced by all leaders. For example, those who prefer not to be power brokers or who are not overly self-confident are not likely to use the term charismatic to describe their leadership style. The important part of being a charismatic leader is the ability to motivate, excite, and move individuals to reach new goals intentionally.

An effective leader should be aware of complex systems. The individual must be visionary and facilitate learning of others. Most important, leaders must believe in empowering their followers. Pointer and Sanchez suggest that becoming an effective leader requires you to:

• Become a reflective practitioner of leadership;
• Understand personal characteristics that enable your leadership style;
• Solicit feedback from those you lead;
• Strive to advance your own personal knowledge;
• Develop a network that will assist you in advancing yourself and others; and
• Mentor others into the profession.

The leader as mentor

Necessary to development as a leader is the understanding that you have responsibilities to those you lead. Mentoring becomes an expected behavior of those with true leadership abilities. Mentoring is a term derived from Greek mythology, first used in The Odyssey by Homer. Mentor assisted
Odysseus and his son Telemachus. He served as a teacher, guide, protector, advisor, and tutor. The business literature suggests that anyone who does not have a mentor is handicapped. Further, Zey found that those individuals who do not have a mentor have lower positions within organizations, and those with mentors rise to higher status within similar organizations.

Vance wrote that a mentor serves as a career role model and actively advises, guides, and promotes another's career and training. A mentor can be very influential in the training and advancement of a person entering into a profession.

Mentoring is a humanistic, confidential, social relationship between people in which one individual (the mentor) functions as a sponsor, guide, and role model. The other individual functions as the protégé. It is in this deep, personal relationship that mentors and protégés flourish. Mentors serve as an advocate of the protégé's ability, provide inside information or what is called “system savvy,” and provide a referent power source. This last point is most important. Empowering a protégé based upon your faith and trust in the individual is crucial to his or her success in a large organization.

Shea stated that “mentoring is part intuition, part feelings, and part hunch—made up as you go along and composed of whatever ingredients you have available at the moment.” This suggests that the mentor and protégé take advantage of all learning opportunities and use them wisely. The role of the mentor is to be vigilant in the search for opportunities and to select experiences that will help the protégé grow.

A key element of leadership and mentoring experiences is the empowerment of the protégé. Kanter tells us that “powerlessness corrupts…absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely.” Mentoring requires the experienced mentor to give the protégé the authority to set goals, dream, grow, and surpass the achievements of the teacher.

This empowerment often takes the form of pushing protégés ahead and letting them reap the glory, while you stand back and watch them grow. It takes a seasoned, confident leader to be able to share his or her expertise and limelight with another. Hamric et al state “that the reward for the mentor is to step back and enjoy the success of the protégé who has succeeded in reaching the next level of competence. Unfortunately, some advanced practice nurses are reluctant to mentor, perhaps thinking that the protégé will steal expertise or will not work as hard as they did to be successful.”

True mentoring is the sign of an advanced leader and a skill that should be cultivated every day of your professional career. Another valuable lesson on mentoring is that you do not have to be only a mentor at any given point in your career path. At those times of new experiences, there may be growth in being mentored by another. The really strong leader will know when it is time to mentor and when it is time to be mentored.

Confusion sometimes exists when using the term mentor. Often it is confused with orientation or precepting. Orientation is generally defined as a passive role used to acquaint an individual with an organization, while precepting involves more one-on-one teaching through examples. Mentoring is quite different. Mentors exude qualities of wisdom, teaching, reliability, and caring within a strong personal and emotional relationship.

Mentoring relationships are often filled with fiery emotions. As Hagenow and McCrea suggest, successful mentoring requires us to listen more than talk and to share values. Sharing of intense personal feelings and values forms the foundation for deep interpersonal relationships. That is what makes a mentoring relationship different from a routine boss-employee relationship. It is not possible to mentor all employees. But it should be viewed as professional responsibility to bring along young, bright professionals on our visionary path.

Mentoring relationships, as an integral part of leadership, should never be left to chance. They should be intentional relationships built with mutual consent of both parties. Mentors should never be assigned. Just as in this society we would never assign 2 people to marry and expect a solid personal relationship to develop, the same concept applies to mentoring. When one hears of a leader who says he or she is going to implement a mentoring program with the staff and that every senior person will mentor a junior person, one should assume that the individual does not truly understand the principle of mentoring. Mentor matching usually is not as successful as relationships that grow out of commitment and belief in each other. However, the opposing view of this issue is supported by research that suggests that when senior physicians were matched with junior physicians, successful outcomes were obtained.

Mentoring in nursing and other professions

In a study of women in medicine,
Nonnemaker\textsuperscript{[13]} found that women's careers advanced more slowly than their male counterparts and that women were less likely to achieve tenured faculty positions. DeAngelis\textsuperscript{[7]} noted the needs of junior faculty for a mentor. She suggested that women need to seek out mentors, either male or female, who are interested in furthering the protégé's career.

Frohlich\textsuperscript{[15]} wrote in an editorial about his concern over the lack of appropriate mentors to assist young, developing physician scientists. He called on the physician community to actively address this issue, suggesting that retired scientists could serve the profession by stepping into the role of mentor.

Nurses have written about mentoring for decades. Campbell-Hein\textsuperscript{[16]} wrote that "nurses who aspire to administrative or academic positions seem to have needs that are more compatible with traditional mentorship models." Another nurse author wrote that "mentoring is the cultivation of young talent and the promotion of career development through the lending of organizational, role, or interpersonal support and teaching." Gordon\textsuperscript{[17]} says that "our present nursing leaders must consider it their responsibility to mentor the novice leader of the future, just as they may have been mentored." Nursing and specialty nursing groups have devoted many journal articles, convention presentations, and round-table discussions to the lack of mentoring in the discipline. Now it is to make this role a responsibility of all advanced practice nurses.

In studies of military personnel, mentoring was found to be a key factor in the advancement of the protégé.\textsuperscript{[19,20]} Not only did mentored individuals advance to higher levels, but mentoring was responsible for increasing satisfaction and intent to stay in the service as well.

Peluchette and Jeanquart\textsuperscript{[21]} studied the significance of mentors in the growth, development, and advancement of university faculty. They found that not only was the presence of a mentor important, but also that having multiple mentors was correlated with greater career success. They also noted that often individuals had different mentors at different times during their career.

**Mastering mentoring skills**

Mentoring requires experienced professionals to foster the growth and development of new professionals. Koerner\textsuperscript{[22]} writes that "the learning curve [to leadership] is vastly facilitated by exposure to those who display mastery, those who have wisdom." CRNAs have much wisdom to share within our profession. Our skills as leaders will be judged on our ability to effectively do this. Being a committed leader and mentor requires continuous assessments of personal strengths and resources necessary to shepherd new members into this profession.

So you want to become a mentor? What is the next step? Borges\textsuperscript{[23]} writes that you must:

- Determine what you have to offer.
- Identify needs and characteristics of your ideal protégé.
- Spread the word that you are interested in mentoring.
- Interview and qualify potential protégés.

Ask the following questions:

1. Why did you choose this career?
2. What are your career goals?
3. What have you accomplished so far in your career?
4. What do you hope to gain from this mentoring partnership?
5. What are you willing to invest in this partnership in order to reach your goals?
6. How open are you to receiving direction, advice, and feedback?
7. Why do you think I should mentor you?

**Select your protégé**

Borges\textsuperscript{[23]} has advice for those who are interested in being mentored as well.

- Research background of your potential mentor.
- Make contact through a colleague if possible.
- Make a specific (yet simple) request stating why you want to work with the individual.
- Consider what you can offer in exchange.
- Set up a first meeting and prepare for the encounter.
- Follow up and be sure to try out your mentor's suggestions. Be sure to say thank you.
- Ask to meet on an ongoing basis.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps Hamric et al\textsuperscript{[24,25]} say it best when they write that "visionary leaders who empower their followers greatly increase the influence of advanced nursing practice both within nursing and beyond nursing's boundaries." It is time for CRNAs to assume their professional responsibility and to demonstrate their leadership roles in mentoring those who are the future of this profession. So let us begin!

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHOR**

Margaret Faut-Callahan, CRNA, DNSc, FAAN, is professor and chair, Department of Adult Health Nursing, and director, Nurse Anesthesia Program, Rush University, College of Nursing, Chicago, Ill.