

***Developing Tomorrow's Nurse Leaders:
Bridging the Gap Through Succession Planning and Leadership Development***

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Nursing Leadership: Today and Tomorrow

The spotlight on leadership across industries and around the globe has become intense as the baby boomers begin to reach retirement age. The question of who is ready to take their place is becoming an imperative. Health care organizations are no exception.

The focus of this piece, adapted from a recent webinar conducted by Decision Critical Inc., is on the role of the nurse leader, how the role has evolved and the implications in planning for the next generation of leaders.

The role of the nurse leader has evolved dramatically over the past decade. Yesterday's super clinician and manager of managers has become today's organization executive with responsibility for most of the facility's staff and a majority of the operating budget.

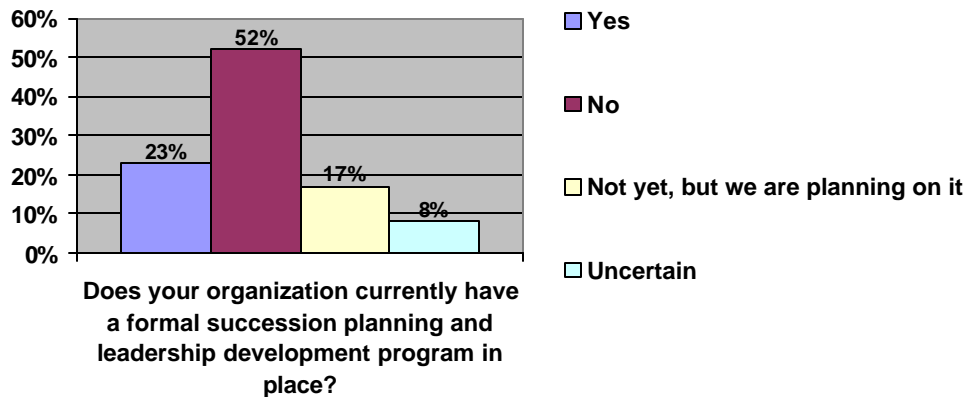
Historically, nurse leaders have come to management by first proving themselves as clinical experts. The most important prerequisite for becoming a manager was being in the right place at the right time. Getting on the management track was by chance, not by choice.

The job prerequisites and on the job requirements of an advanced degree and an emphasis on business and financial acumen are now more in line with other health care executive team members. This two track requirement of clinical and business expertise creates a level of complexity in the clinical executive role that adds to the years of experience necessary in becoming a proven, tested leader.

Adding to the pressure of finding the next generation of leaders is the fact that today's nurse leader is in his or her late 40s to early 60s with an average age of 52. Moreover, that person was 43 when he or she started their first leadership position¹. Given that 29 percent of current nurse executives are retiring in next five years, and knowing it takes at least 10 years to prepare future nurse leaders, we can no longer be satisfied with relying on having someone in the right place at the right time. The job of preparing tomorrow's nurse leader must begin now with proactively attracting new nurses to the management track earlier than previously would have been attempted.

In order to ensure a reliable nurse leader candidate pool, health care organizations must be more strategic than ever in planning for the future of nursing practice and the talents necessary for the organization to survive. However, in a recent informal survey of approximately 309 participants conducted by Decision Critical, only 52 percent of respondents indicated leadership development and succession planning were a priority or were currently being adopted in their organizations.

¹ Jones, Cheryl B. and Havens, Donna S. "Chief Nursing Officer Retention and Turnover: A Crisis Brewing?" Journal of Healthcare Management (March/April 2008).



Bridging the Gap: Getting From Here to There

The first question an organization must ask is, “What are the characteristics and attributes of tomorrow’s nurse leader?” While experts provide multiple perspectives, commonalities are present in the literature about the topic. Gardner’s (2006) *Five Minds for the Future* provides a good summary of the key leadership characteristics needed for the future. Leaders will need to have a disciplined mind, that is, one that appreciates what is most important in terms of the health care discipline. Gardner goes on to say, “Scholarly disciplines allow you to participate knowledgeably in the world, but professional discipline allows you to thrive in the workplace.” Given the explosion of information, the ability to synthesize will also be critical. Possessing creative abilities to make use of synthesized information is another attribute future leaders will need. Finally, future leaders will need to be respectful and ethical. Srikumar S. Rao in *The Leader of the Future 2: Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the New Era* (2006), expands upon the latter two characteristics, stressing that tomorrow’s leader will need to be able to be of service, and not self-aggrandizing. Leaders of the future will need to be, “. . . constantly seeking ways to help all employees become fulfilled at work and as individuals.” Finally, understanding complexity and dealing with constant change will also be key characteristics.

Best Practices: People, Process, Programs and Technology

Successful leadership development begins with strong executive engagement from the top levels of the organization. Once there is organizational understanding of the necessary core leadership competencies, the next step is to identify and develop individuals within the organization who demonstrate those competencies. Program development should focus on best practices in four key areas of the organization: people, process, programs and technology.

People: After identifying those leadership characteristics important to the organization, organizations must identify the necessary future leadership positions with an understanding that these positions may not be the same ones in place today. The organization then directs attention towards personal development of individual talent within the organization, including ongoing talent assessments at all levels of the organization and personalized development plans for the individuals.

Process: Key process elements include: integration of a leadership competency model; rigorous and repeated leadership candidate assessments to ensure effective candidate development; and ongoing dialogue between today’s leaders and the future leaders of the organization to help them in their development. It is important that evaluations be continuous and no less than annual. Finally, transparency, flexibility and the mindset that the process of leadership development is a journey, not an end, will ensure successful program development.

Programs: Successful programs are multilayered and multifaceted; linked directly to organizational priorities; include a comprehensive learning approach that uses various activities, including coaching, training and development; and utilize well-established tracking metrics to be able to measure how well individuals are developing.

Technology: Technology is an enabling factor in program success; however, many organizations look to their learning management system (LMS) alone to measure organizational competency. Organizations should instead look instead to a comprehensive competency management approach that may include a LMS, professional portfolios and the integration of this information into a performance management system.

A Case Study: Succession Planning for Leadership Positions

A case example of an organization that has successfully taken on succession planning for leadership development can be found at Clarian Health in Indianapolis, Ind. This process is currently utilized in Clarian’s three tertiary care hospitals’ teaching academic programs: Methodist Hospital, Indiana University Hospital and Riley Hospital for Children.

In developing their process, Clarian developed a formal, consistent program that was in line with the organization’s strategic plan, mission, vision and values. Program development began with the organization asking themselves, “What is a potential successor?” to which the organization answered, “A current organization employee who may be a candidate to fill another leadership position; or, a current leader looking for, or have the opportunity to, fill a new leadership position.”

Program objectives include: identifying “high potential” employees, development plans and opportunities for development of high potential candidates and potential successors for future openings in leadership ; and incorporating core behaviors, leadership, job, family behavior and essential functions as criteria .

Clarian develops their staff for tomorrow’s leadership positions through a program that includes several key strategies: traditional formal education and advanced degrees, internal and external continuing education opportunities, continuous feedback on strengths and weaknesses, 360-degree annual reviews that include staff member input, executive coaching and mentoring.

The tool that Clarian uses to measure the success of their program is the 9-Block Matrix. A 9-Block Matrix is a comprehensive, systematic approach that Clarian adapted from industry. This tool helps leadership identify strengths and weaknesses within the staff – from the clinical manager to the VP level – by ranking and then categorizing each individual into one of nine levels. Candidates are gauged both by level of contribution and potential ability.

9-Block Matrix		
<p>High Potential, Low Contribution Too new in roll/can't tell -new to position so currently low contributor however, demonstrates high potential. Expect individual to demonstrate effectiveness in short period of time.</p> <p>Too new to evaluate, No evaluation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A3</p>	<p>High Potential, Solid Contribution Strong leadership competencies but need more technical/results-oriented development (6-18 mos.). Expect this individual to advance to positions of greater responsibility over a period of time.</p> <p>Demonstrates Solid or Key Achiever performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A2</p>	<p>High Potential, High Contribution Viable Candidate is ready now for posting to new position. Employee is highly effective in current role (Key Achiever or Mastery Performance) and has high potential. Individual has what it takes to either advance to greater management responsibilities or positions demanding greater technical knowledge.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A1</p>
<p>Hold in Position, Low Contribution Not effective in current role, documented formal action plan in place.</p> <p>Demonstrates unsatisfactory performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B3</p>	<p>Solid Potential, Solid Contribution Continue to develop in current role. Individual could increase potential or contribution over time.</p> <p>Demonstrates Solid or Key Achiever performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B2</p>	<p>Solid Potential, High Contribution Strong technical and results-oriented skills but need more leadership development (6-18 mos.). Expect individual to move to new positions over a period of time.</p> <p>Demonstrates Key Achiever or Mastery Performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">B1</p>
<p>Low Potential, Low Contribution Action plan in place. Re-align, or see immediate improvement in performance or outplace.</p> <p>Demonstrates unsatisfactory performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C3</p>	<p>Continue in Position, Solid Contribution Contributes in current role, but needs coaching in technical or leadership areas to develop into resident expert.</p> <p>Demonstrates Solid or Key Achiever performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C2</p>	<p>Optimally Placed, High Contribution Resident expert/hold in position. Exceptional contributor. Continue development in current role. Individual may not want to move to another role.</p> <p>Demonstrates Mastery Performance in current role.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C1</p>

Once the 9-Block Matrix is completed then an individualized Leadership Development Plan is created for those individuals who fall within the A1, A2 or B1 categories.

An additional step in the process is that each director or vice president completes a recommendation form for potential successor for their position. All forms are then returned to human resources for tracking and monitoring.

There are two keys to the success of the leadership development and succession planning program at Clarian. First, incorporation by the board of directors into the strategic plan for the health care system, and second, the process has been rolled out across the organization - from senior leadership level through the clinical manager level of the organization.

This process has shown some very dramatic results over time including:

- Of the sitting vice presidents and above, 46 percent were promoted internally;
- Of the sitting directors and above, 50 percent were promoted internally; and,
- Of the sitting clinical directors and above in nursing, 76 percent were promoted internally.

The next generation of leaders is already working for you. The challenge is to find them, get them on the leadership track and groom them today for the healthcare and business challenges they will face in the future. After all, the real job of the leader is to prepare the next generation.