Authentic Leaders Creating Healthy Work Environments for Nursing Practice

Maria R. Shirey, MS, MBA, RN, CNAA, BC

Abstract

Implementation of authentic leadership can affect not only the nursing workforce and the profession but the healthcare delivery system and society as a whole. Creating a healthy work environment for nursing practice is crucial to maintain an adequate nursing workforce; the stressful nature of the profession often leads to burnout, disability, and high absenteeism and ultimately contributes to the escalating shortage of nurses. Leaders play a pivotal role in retention of nurses by shaping the healthcare practice environment to produce quality outcomes for staff nurses and patients. Few guidelines are available, however, for creating and sustaining the critical elements of a healthy work environment.

In 2005, the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses released a landmark publication specifying 6 standards (skilled communication, true collaboration, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition, and authentic leadership) necessary to establish and sustain healthy work environments in healthcare. Authentic leadership was described as the “glue” needed to hold together a healthy work environment. Now, the roles and relationships of authentic leaders in the healthy work environment are clarified as follows: An expanded definition of authentic leadership and its attributes (eg, genuineness, trustworthiness, reliability, compassion, and believability) is presented. Mechanisms by which authentic leaders can create healthy work environments for practice (eg, engaging employees in the work environment to promote positive behaviors) are described. A practical guide on how to become an authentic leader is advanced. A research agenda to advance the study of authentic leadership in nursing practice through collaboration between nursing and business is proposed.

Notice to CE enrollees:
A closed-book, multiple-choice examination following this article tests your understanding of the following objectives:

1. Discuss the current literature related to creating healthy work environments.
2. Discuss current literature related to authentic leadership.
3. Identify key components of authentic leadership for further research.

Copyright © 2006 by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses
Ten Strategies Nurse Leaders Can Use to Create Healthy Work Environments

#1. Create a Culture of Civility and Mutual Respect and Guard It Judiciously

A recent survey of 2,100 nurses found that bad blood: doctor-nurse behavior problems impact patient care. In 2005, the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses released a landmark publication identifying authentic leadership as one of the six standards necessary to establish and sustain healthy work environments in healthcare.

- Becoming an authentic leader is a process that occurs over time and requires self-discovery, self-improvement, reflection, and renewal. Leadership traits can either work as a magnet or as a force that repels. Authentic leaders creating healthy work environments.

Adapted from George.45 Reprinted with permission from John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Authentic leader... an understanding of compassionate practice and nursing theory and to develop this understanding through working in partnership with patients (Royal College of Nursing, 2008). According to Henderson (2011), learning in practice settings is invaluable for pre-registration student nurses, which is why placements account for 50% of the nursing curriculum. Students undertake various placements and have to adjust as they move from one environment to the next. Creating a healthy work environment for nursing practice is crucial to maintain an adequate nursing workforce; the stressful nature of the profession often leads to burnout, disability, and high absenteeism and ultimately contributes to the escalating shortage of nurses. Leaders play a pivotal role in retention of nurses by shaping the healthcare practice environment to produce quality outcomes for staff nurses and patients. Few guidelines are available, however, for creating and sustaining the critical elements of a healthy work environment. A practical guide on how to become an authentic leader is advanced. A research agenda to advance the study of authentic leadership in nursing practice through collaboration between nursing and business is proposed. May 2006.