

STARTING THE JOURNEY: TIPS TO DEVELOP INTO A STRONG NURSING LEADER

As health care continues to grow more complex, nursing leaders must face challenges with knowledge and poise. That level of confidence occurs when nurses are familiar with trends, best practices, and quality metrics in the field of nursing. Confident nursing leaders rely on trusted resources to advance professional growth, nursing practice, education, and leadership.

10 TIPS TO PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS

1. Become a member of nursing organization at the state and national levels

Joining a professional nursing organization is a great launching pad toward becoming a strong nursing leader. Such organizations allow you to connect with a larger community of nurses and provide you with a platform to interact with others in your field and area of specialty. Aspiring nursing leaders should consider the value of belonging to nursing organizations both on the state and national levels. Doing so will allow you to keep up to date on healthcare issues and trends. In particular, state nursing organizations provide opportunities to engage with colleagues closer to home, impacting the quality of nursing care within your region and state. National nursing organizations act as a catalyst for promoting standards of care and nursing practice for all nurses and for those working within a specialty area. Some nursing organizations to consider:

- American Nurses Association: <https://www.nursingworld.org/>
- American Organization for Nursing Leadership: <https://www.aonl.org/>
- Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association: <https://advancingexpertcare.org/>
- National League for Nursing: <http://www.nln.org/>

2. Join a mentorship program

Mentorship programs are essential to nursing leadership. Experienced nursing leaders serve as mentors to new nursing leaders (mentees) and provide guidance, perspective, and advice. There are various mentorship programs within schools of nursing, nursing organizations, and specialty areas of work. Mentorship integrates socialization, well-being, and education while empowering participants to advance within the nursing profession. Additional benefits of participating in a mentorship

program include the development of strong working relationships, professional growth, and valuable feedback to improve self-confidence in leading a team. If a nurse leader specializes in a certain field, he or she can seek a mentor within that discipline. Some mentorship programs to consider:

- American Organization for Nursing Leadership: <https://www.aonl.org/resources/mentor>
- Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association: <https://community.advancingexpertcare.org/mentoring>
- Johns Hopkins School of Nursing: <https://nursing.jhu.edu/academics/programs/doctoral/dnp/executive-mentorship.html>

3. Read or listen to books

Over the course of your nursing career, you have been exposed to many books, but some may have impacted you more than others. It's important to seek topics of interest to help you cultivate ideas, increase knowledge, and find new innovative approaches to nursing practice. Books allow you to gain wisdom from the experiences of others who have come before you. Reading is a meaningful way to gain knowledge in a short amount of time with little effort. With audiobooks, you can listen to an author read the book, an excellent use of time when you're driving, walking, or doing chores. Some books to consider:

- *The Nurse Leader Coach: Become the Boss No One Wants to Leave*. By Rose O. Sherman. 2019. ASIN: B07N6MZ26H
- *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*. By Simon Sinek. 2017. ISBN-10: 1543614620
- *Leadership and Nursing Care Management* (6th edition). By Diane Huber, PhD, RN, FAAN, NEA-BC. 2017. ISBN-10: 032338966X
- *The 360° Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*. By John C. Maxwell. 2011. ISBN-10: 9781400203598
- *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow*. By Tom Rath and Barry Conchie. 2008. ISBN-10: 9781595620255

4. Take a certification review course, study a curriculum, and get “certified”

What better way to say, “I am a confident nursing leader,” than to achieve certification in your area of specialty? Certified nursing leaders are an elite group of nurses validating they have specialized knowledge, clinical competence, and credibility in their specialized area of work. You must meet certain requirements

before you can take a certification examination, and sometimes there is a waiting period before you are eligible. In the meantime, you can purchase a certification curriculum or take a certification course so you can begin to prepare. Although there is a fee for taking a certification exam, some employers provide financial incentives for obtaining certification and some organizations provide scholarships. Some links to nursing certification organizations:

- American Organization for Nursing Leadership: <https://www.aonl.org/initiatives/cnml>
- American Nurses Credentialing Center: <https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/>
- Hospice and Palliative Credentialing Center: <https://advancingexpertcare.org/HPNA/Certification/HPCC/CertificationWeb/Certification.aspx?hkey=993a4764-2575-4c2e-ac38-203812fc7a0f>

5. Enroll in a program to earn a master's degree or doctorate

Today's nursing leaders are expected to not only obtain the clinical knowledge and expertise needed to lead but also have insight related to business, finances, and human resources. To meet such demands, nurses must build on their knowledge to advance as strong nursing leaders. One way this can be accomplished is through higher education. Consider enrolling in an RN-to-MSN, MSN-DNP, or PhD program to earn a master's degree or doctorate. Many MSN, DNP, and PhD programs in leadership can be completed online at a pace the nursing leader can manage. Some of the top-rated online programs as reported by U.S. News & World Report for 2022:

- Post University: <https://www.americansentinel.edu/degrees-programs/nursing/online-doctoral-degree-programs/>
- Vanderbilt School of Nursing: <https://nursing.vanderbilt.edu/msn/nhcl/index.php>
- Western Governors University: <https://www.wgu.edu/online-nursing-health-degrees.html>
- Rush University: <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-nursing-schools/rush-university-33081>

6. Discover nursing literature

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- Journal of Nursing Management: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/13652834/2017/25/6>
- Official Journal of the American Organization for Nursing Leadership: <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/nurse-leader>
- Journal of Nursing Administration: <https://journals.lww.com/jonajournal/pages/default.aspx>
- Nursing Management: <https://journals.lww.com/nursingmanagement/pages/default.aspx>
- Journal of Advanced Nursing: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/13652648>

7. Attend conferences and seminars

There's something special about being in a room of hundreds of strangers who are passionate about the work they do. Attending a conference in person is a powerful experience; for a new nursing leader, it can be life-changing. Conferences often allow attendees to tailor their schedules based on topics of interest. Your schedule should be value-packed with hours of continuing education and networking. Consider attending seminars presented by leaders in your field or specialty. Most conferences are held annually in beautiful cities all over the world (sometimes even virtually), and you will have opportunities to make new friends. To find a conference or seminar that's right for you, go to the website of your favorite nursing organization to see what's coming up. Some conference opportunities:

- American Organization for Nursing Leadership: <https://www.aonl.org/aonl-virtual-conference>
- Academic Nursing Leadership Conference: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/ANLC>
- International Nursing Research Congress: <https://www.sigmanursing.org/connect-engage/meetings-events/congress-2021>
- Annual Assembly of Hospice and Palliative Care: https://advancingexpertcare.org/HPNA/Education/Events/Annual_Assembly/HPNAweb/Education/2021_Annual_Assembly.aspx?hkey=c926d71d-f295-4c32-9ce3-1101dacbe33

8. Discover podcasts

If you like multitasking, podcasts might be for you. Podcasts are prerecorded digital audio files you can listen to at your convenience. They can be downloaded from the Internet or streamed on an app. Most are free because they are sponsored by advertisers. There's a podcast for almost any topic imaginable, including nursing leadership. Podcast hosts interview experts in the field and talk about topics of interest based upon the audience they're trying to reach. If you want to grow as a nursing leader and feel like you don't have enough hours in the day, podcasts are a great option for you. You can listen to a podcast on your smartphone while driving down the road or washing dishes. Some highly rated healthcare and nursing podcasts:

- Nursing Management Podcast: <https://journals.lww.com/nursingmanagement/pages/podcastepisodes.aspx?podcastid=1>
- Radio Advisory: <https://radioadvisory.advisory.com/>
- Nursing Economics Podcast Series: <https://www.spreaker.com/show/nursing-economics>
- Nurse Leader Network: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/830599>
- HPNA Podcast Corner: <https://advancingexpertcare.org/PodcastCorner>

9. Engage in professional development activities

Continuing education is for nursing leaders, too! Most nurses are required to obtain credits for licensure and recertification in specialty areas. Tailor your courses and credits around topics you need to learn more about or those that interest you as a nursing leader. There are many options, and it's important to know where to look. Nursing organizations offer free or discounted continuing nursing education to their members. Some organizations that offer credits for nursing leaders:

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing: <https://www.aacnursing.org/Professional-Development/Online-Learning>
- Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association: <https://advancingexpertcare.org/elearning>
- Incredible Health: <https://www.incrediblehealth.com/ceu/>
- NURSE.com: <https://www.nurse.com/ce/management-and-leadership>

10. Keep a journal

Remember when you started your nursing journey? Would you ever have imagined you would be where you are today? No doubt you have come a long way. For many, the question is: “How can I have a positive impact within my nursing community?” If you’re not tracking your progress, you should be. It’s not too late—grab a journal and keep a log of your achievements, milestones, thoughts, and reflections. Nursing leadership is not for everyone, but for those who choose this path or find that the path has chosen them—document the journey. There is no better way to capture your legacy for yourself and for those who may follow you.