

## Leading Through Difficult Times

The Center for Black Women's Wellness is a small, non-profit organization dedicated to providing affordable, quality healthcare and health programs to medically underserved women and families. As an organization that relies heavily on grants for funding, it goes without saying that these have been some challenging times financially.

Yet it is these very challenges that bring forth opportunities to rally a small staff – who are naturally motivated to help the women and families we serve – and stretch them to greater heights. Also, leading through difficult times has grown me into a more effective leader and deepened my commitment to invest in my staff's growth and development. Thus, whether leading an organization, team or department, there are tremendous opportunities to inspire during these times. Here are a few:

**Maintaining the Right Perspective:** As a leader, I have tried to always remain positive, optimistic, and encouraged so that the work environment remains upbeat and staff remain motivated. This includes framing discussions with the right perspective; for instance showing staff how as a small organization our budget shortfall has less impact



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than a budget shortfall for the larger organizations with whom we work. Also, while we have had to reduce work hours for some staff, many of our partner agencies have had to cut jobs. With that said, when companies have to scale back there are numerous examples of companies in far worse shape. This is a sobering reality and can help you and the staff to keep everything in perspective and remember that you are not the only ones adjusting to this economic climate.

**Finding Creative Solutions:** Earlier this year, a foundation that was funding CBWW to provide screening mammograms did not refund the program. Although the defunding of the mammogram program could have been devastating to both our organization and the community we serve, in fact it provided an immediate opportunity for the staff to develop new strategies by finding new programs and partnerships to ensure that we could link women to this necessary service. Key to this was that the staff understood the value of the program and remained committed to problem solving.

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This also afforded the Board of Directors a new opportunity to raise funding through individual donors to ensure that we could meet our newly defined goal of the number of mammograms we wanted to provide. In all, this challenge resulted in the staff and Board feeling a greater sense of ownership for the program and a commitment to its future.

**Valuing Transparency:** It's valuable to use your communication mechanisms to inform staff of where the company is headed in ways that demonstrate a reasonable degree of candor without invoking fear. By ensuring a good level of transparency, it has helped me to build up trust and buy-in among the staff, and has also presented more opportunities for staff to demonstrate greater fiscal accountability. In this sense, it becomes not just the fiscal department's role to find ways to reduce spending, but everyone is involved in the process for the good of the company.

**A Cause for Celebration:** There becomes a greater importance to celebrating victories, large and small, in ways that are low-cost but energizing. Our agency has thrown ice-cream sundae parties (and salad bar parties too), and had cider toasts when a grant is received. I have found it

extremely beneficial to make time to rally the troops and celebrate successes along with celebrating each other.

**Keeping the Mission at the Forefront:** One of the ways in which staff can remain committed to the values of the company is by staying focused on the impact the company has on its clientele and/or community. For instance, in this economy our organization has seen more people seeking affordable healthcare, and it is often the frontline workers who hear firsthand the need for help from those who are newly unemployed and without insurance. The despair of those who enter our doors can be heartbreaking, yet very motivating, and seeing clients' needs met helps staff understand why our mission is so important. As a leader, this means finding every opportunity to share information which demonstrates the company's impact with all levels of staff; such that a case worker, receptionist and accountant each understands the real difference the organization - and thus each of them - has made.

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## Situation Critical - Inspire and Develop Leadership in Our Young

Preparing nursing students to practice in our complex health care environment is no small task. Educators must balance the needs of the profession, the health care system and anticipate the healthcare systems of the future. Young nurses from collegiate programs are expected to pass licensing exams that test only a small portion of what they have been taught and enter practice settings where the care of hospitalized patients is emphasized. Community agencies often expect graduates to acquire skills in caring for hospitalized patients before entering community sites. This system continues even though it is well recognized that in the future the largest need for nurses will be in non-hospital settings.

New graduates have been introduced to the trends in the workforce and the urgent need for leadership in nursing. The workforce is reaching a critical age where younger graduates must move quickly into leadership roles. However, few clinical models exist. Our expectation that all graduates attain technical skills may slow down their growth into leadership positions.

Students will tell you that they feel torn between obtaining technical and clinical skills and the emphasis on professional development. They sit through classes and answer test questions on the components of leadership, but few actually have the opportunity and few faculty have the expectation that their students will quickly develop leadership skills.

Are we focusing on developing leadership in our young students? Are we devel-



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oping models that allow students to excel in whatever area of practice they enter? And are we preparing them to have a voice in addressing major issues allowing them to emerge as leaders? Never before have nurses faced such a critical need for leadership.

WE AS EDUCATORS AND LEADERS MUST ASK OURSELVES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING OUR GRADUATES:

1. What are they doing locally and state wide to contribute to health care reform and do they have a voice in the critical solutions to the problems facing us?
2. What is the meaning of health equality? Are they prepared to emerge quickly as leaders providing new models of care – prenatal, violence prevention, elder, and palliative care – that will narrow our health care gaps?
3. How will they be engaged in bringing back strong public health and community health infrastructure? When will they realize that major leadership roles will not

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be in hospital care?

4. How will they bring uniformity to advanced nursing practice? How many know their state leaders who will partner in bringing about change in this area?

5. Why do we continue to encourage them to gain clinical skills before considering careers in research?

6. Will they emerge as leaders at the table to improve care and strengthen communication between all facets of our health care system?

7. Can they dream of being leaders in global health? Are we making global health a reality?

8. How do they see nursing's role and potential leadership in addressing climate change and promoting sustainable environments?

We have so much work to do and as our nursing workforce ages, its leaders rest among our young graduates. Too often we resent the idealistic vision of new graduates and do not provide arenas for them to develop their leadership skills. Graduates are torn between our profession's view of what a nurse needs to become a leader in their field and what our world needs from its nursing leadership.

There is no doubt that students are entering nursing to make a difference in care delivery and healthcare systems. It is critical that we provide the clinical incubators both within and outside of hospital systems to continue to nurture their leadership.

We need to have career ladders in every health care system to allow every nurse to move to higher levels of leadership and influence. We need dedicated education units that allow students to be taught and mentored by outstanding clinical nurses. We need to encourage more young nurses to move directly into doctoral programs and develop clinical internships.

We need to encourage our graduates to engage in interdisciplinary professional and scientific projects so nursing is recognized for its multitude of knowledge and talent. These pathways are not just desirable, they are critical for the future of our profession.

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