

McNally & Associates

LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS

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Develop Your Personal Care Plan

As a professional coach, educator and registered nurse, I have the privilege of assisting healthcare professionals to clarify their values and life vision, deepen their learning, improve their performance and enhance their self-care. In my coaching role, I witness people take remarkable journeys of self-discovery and action to realign and reconnect them to what really matters most in their lives. As a result, they experience greater job and personal satisfaction. Using the nursing process framework, this article will explore some ideas about taking the journey to achieve excellence in your life.

Working in health care has never been more challenging or demanding, requiring personal and professional excellence from each of us. I know the pace and expectations in healthcare can be dizzying and can take a high toll on our personal health and well-being. We may feel confused and encumbered with difficulties. Our bodies may feel stiff and painful, and our minds a jumble of worries and self-critical thoughts. To use the analogy of a car race, we can find ourselves shifting into autopilot, at a speed of 90 miles per hour, just to make it through the day. It can feel like we're driving someone else's car or that we're spectators in the stands watching our lives race by, rather than the drivers of a car carefully designed to take the journey we map out. So, consider taking back the wheel and develop a plan for living excellently. I have seen the benefits of people (including myself) taking time to identify meaningful life goals and to understand how choices, habits and beliefs support or diminish their efforts to achieve personal and professional excellence. We'll explore how to start this by using the familiar nursing process steps of assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation.

First, conduct a brief assessment to take stock of where you are today. To get started, take twenty minutes to slow down and reflect on the following questions. Think about it as pulling up a chair to the bedside of your life. Your responses to the questions will serve as the starting point for your plan. Write down whatever comes to mind and notice how you respond to each question. After you finish, note any themes or patterns in your responses. Building awareness is the first step to taking back the wheel.

Next, comes the planning stage. Using the skills you've honed providing patient care, develop your "personal care plan" based on your assessment. Include expected outcomes, timelines and support needs. Think about the following questions. What possibilities, choices and situations would you like to explore? What would personal and professional excellence look like? What action steps are required? What criteria will you use to assess progress? What support will you need to achieve your plan? Make some notes. Unlike a policy book that sits on the shelf, this document should be referenced daily and updated at least monthly.

Sometimes, obstacles get in our way; like self-limiting thoughts and fears and a tendency to meet everybody else's needs at work and home leaving little time for our own self-care and learning. Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us "life is what a person is thinking all day long." Begin to notice how you might get in your own way, thus negatively impacting your achievement of personal and professional excellence. For

example, instead of saying “yes” to every request as to not upset others, try saying “no” to certain activities so you can spend some time investing in yourself. Now that the assessment and planning is done, move to implementation and ACTION. As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “The greatest thing in the world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.” Even though most people agree that it is their responsibility to learn new skills and to practice self-care, many people put off taking action. Taking action reduces anxiety and increases self-esteem. Whether your plan is to go back to school, learn a new specialty, read one journal a month, take a yoga class, expand your support network, take on a spiritual practice or pursue a new hobby, design small steps to move towards your vision of excellence. Rather than focusing on how much change you need to make, or comparing yourself to someone else who seems miles ahead of you, choose to focus on what you are accomplishing everyday towards your vision. Like a tourist on a trip, enjoy where you are right now, taking in the experience as if you were enjoying a leisurely meal. Some find it helpful to record successes and failures in a journal. Reflect on what you are learning. Ask for support from your colleagues and family to make the changes in which you’re invested. Sharing your vision and plan with others will give you a better chance of keeping promises to yourself.

Personal Assessment Questions

1. What was the most significant lesson you learned this year?
2. What risks did you take and what was the result?
3. How are you using your talents in your job?
4. What innovative ideas have you had that really excited you about the future?
5. What aspects of your job are you really committed to?
6. What gives you energy? drains your energy?
7. What personal habit or way of thinking holds you back the most?

Lastly, don’t forget the evaluation stage. Recognize your accomplishments, big and small, and celebrate them heartily. Consider how you will sustain the personal and professional changes you’ve made. Think about what preventive steps need to be put in place to avoid slipping into self-defeating behaviors and attitudes. Make a discipline of asking yourself periodically:

- How are my day-to-actions and activities a reflection of my vision?
- What experiences do I want to be having?
- What new ways do I want to be growing? What’s missing?
- What contribution do I want to be making?

In closing, remind yourself often of what Herbert Otto said, “Change and growth takes place when a person has risked himself and dares to become involved with experimenting with his own life.”

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