

Leading with Compassion and Competence: My Nursing Leadership Journey

By Dr. Arby James Abonalla
Chief Nursing Officer
Pasig Doctors Medical Center
arbyjamesabonalla@gmail.com



Dr. Arby James Abonalla is the Chief Nursing Officer of Pasig Doctors Medical Center, a certified hospital administrator, and an active member of the Philippine College of Hospital Administrators. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Arellano University and completed his Master of Science in Nursing, major in Adult Health, at the University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center. Committed to lifelong learning, he later obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing, major in Nursing Administration, from the Philippine Women's University. Dr. Abonalla currently serves as a National Officer of the Association of Nursing Service Administrators of the Philippines (ANSAP) and a Chapter Officer of the Philippine Nurses Association NCR Zone 4 and 5, demonstrating his strong leadership and

dedication to advancing nursing practice and service administration in the country. A highly respected nurse leader and educator, he was recognized as Outstanding Teacher of the Year by the Instabright National Awards for Educators in both 2021 and 2023. His exceptional passion for teaching has earned him recognition from multiple universities across the Philippines. He is also an active member of several professional organizations, including PNA, ANSAP, ORNAP, PHICS, PCHA, SLNP, and PANACCEA. In addition, he is a co-author of books on Nursing Leadership and Management and Nursing Bioethics. Beyond his professional achievements, Dr. Abonalla is deeply committed to humanitarian work. He is part of the HOPE (Help Other People Everywhere) Organization, which supports indigent families and brings joy to homeless children throughout the Philippines. His philanthropy, compassion, and dedication to service reflect his values as a true advocate for health, education, and community welfare.

Introduction



Being kind as a leader is the first step to building a workplace where employees feel valued and understood. Compassion is the ability to see that someone is in pain and do something to help them. This trait is similar to empathy, which helps leaders connect with their team members on a deeper emotional level. Leaders show that they care about their employees' well-being by being empathetic, which builds trust and loyalty in the team.

When leaders are kind and understanding, it makes the team work better together. People on the team are more inclined to talk to each other honestly, work along well, and help each other, which makes the workplace more peaceful.

This friendly environment makes people feel safe sharing their thoughts and worries, which boosts creativity and problem-solving skills. Because of this, teams with kind leaders usually have higher morale and productivity, which is good for the overall organization (Wijaya & Amir, 2022).

Understanding compassion in leadership is not only about creating a helpful environment; it is also the basis for good leadership qualities. A leader needs to be both kind and skilled. Leaders need to be able to care about and understand their team members, but they also need to know

how to lead them well. This balance between caring and being good at what you do makes leaders who can motivate their workers and get good results.

The Importance of Competence in Good Leadership



Competence in leadership means having the right mix of skills, knowledge, and talents that lets leaders effectively lead their teams. This idea is not just about having technical talents; it includes a lot of other skills that make a good leader. Good leaders know a lot about their industry and can think critically, solve problems, and make smart choices. These talents help them deal with problems and move their businesses ahead.

Leaders should remember, though, that competence and compassion should go hand in hand. It is crucial to have the correct abilities, but it is also important to exhibit empathy and understanding to your team members. When leaders are kind, they make it safe for workers to share their thoughts and worries. This kind of environment can boost morale and make people more productive.

For example, a leader might know how to put new ideas into action, but they will get better outcomes if they think about how these changes would alter the way the team works together. When leaders combine their abilities with a caring attitude, they earn the trust and loyalty of their workers.

This balance between skill and kindness makes it possible to combine the two in leadership styles. Leaders who are better at combining these traits not only become more productive but also create a work environment where everyone feels appreciated and involved, leading to greater results for the organization as a whole (Susanto et al., 2023).



Combining compassion with leadership skill is a strong way to change organizations. When leaders really care about how their team members are doing, the workplace becomes more productive and peaceful, as shown by case studies of effective leaders. For instance, leaders who listen actively and show they understand are more likely to earn their teams' trust and commitment. This kind of caring attitude encourages and empowers employees, boosting morale and teamwork. To make this integration work well, leaders should use methods such as regular feedback

sessions and team-building events that focus on building emotional bonds. Encouraging open communication lets team members share their worries and ideas without fear of judgment, which builds trust and respect. Training programs can also assist leaders in improving their

emotional intelligence and technical skills, making sure they can handle problems with both empathy and knowledge.

It is apparent that combining compassion with competence is a good idea. Companies with compassionate leaders generally have employees who stay longer, work more, and come up with new ideas. When team members feel valued and understood, they are more willing to take smart risks and accept change. Also, this kind of setting fosters a sense of belonging and common purpose, which is increasingly crucial in today's diverse workplaces (Yuen et al., 2003).

In short, combining compassion with competency in leadership not only makes each person do better, but it also makes the whole business stronger. Leaders can create an environment where everyone can do their best work by prioritizing both skills and empathy. This balanced approach will ultimately lead to long-term success and a good work environment.



My Reflections

Although a nurse leader's responsibility is to lead, it is also to serve and



nurture the well-being of others while making sound, well-informed decisions based on the knowledge they possess; this can only be accomplished by nurses showing compassion and expertise to their patients. Throughout my career as a nurse leader, two principles of leadership have consistently guided my decisions: Compassion and Expertise. These two beliefs have shaped my identity as a healthcare professional, my leadership style, and my commitment to improving the practice of nursing and

education for the benefit of nurses and nurse administrators in the Philippines. Most of what I learned about nursing occurred at the bedside, when I first learned how important it was for nurses to care about their patients. It was while I was providing comfort to patients in their most vulnerable state that I recognized compassion is more than just a phrase; it is an activity, a state of being, and a conscious choice to see the man/woman beneath the illness. From this experience, I learned that while technical skills are essential, they are not sufficient. You must also demonstrate empathy, respect, and a genuine human connection to your patients. As I developed in my role as a nurse leader, the way I approached my work was dictated by my moral compass, which is guided by compassion and expertise. A leader must also be a lifelong student, whether that means pursuing higher degrees in nursing, evidence-based practice, or being ethically responsible in strategic planning. As I pursued my master's and doctorate in nursing

administration, my experiences in academia have provided me with the foundation to lead with clarity, manage systems appropriately, and advocate for improved patient care and nursing service through policy initiatives. I have gained additional insight into being both a responsible leader to my organization and a responsible manager of the individuals I manage.

My leadership decisions impact not only the health of my patients but also the morale, growth, and dignity of the nurses who provide care to my patients. Through my experience as a nursing supervisor, I have learned that a compassionate leader listens first, mentors second, and empowers others to act rather than oppress and disempower. Competence includes being tough, consistent, and having the courage to make difficult decisions related to quality, safety, and sustainability. Involvement with professional associations such as ANSAP and the Philippine Nurses Association has provided me with a different perspective on nursing leadership. Participation in these associations reinforced my belief that the profession of nursing requires a commitment from all professionals to advance the profession, mentor the next generation of leaders, and contribute to nationwide discussions on improving healthcare. I have come to realize that a collaborative leadership approach creates a stronger leverage to advocate for nursing. Education has played a major role in my evolution as a leader. As an educator, I have witnessed firsthand how education can enhance someone's confidence and provide a sense of purpose, and I am deeply humbled by receiving recognition as an outstanding educator. However, my greatest joy is watching my students and current young nurses develop into compassionate and highly skilled practitioners. Teaching young professionals reinforces my conviction that a true leader leaves their legacy not through titles but through the positive impact they have on others' lives and careers. Additionally, my personal experiences with humanitarian organizations have heightened my sense of social responsibility as a leader. Caring for low-income families and homeless children is a reminder that nursing leaders should never lose sight of

people. My involvement with humanitarian organizations has reinforced my belief that compassion and competence are essential components of healthcare, as healthcare ultimately represents a moral and social obligation. In reviewing my leadership journey, I have concluded that leading with compassion and competence is a continuous process rather than an endpoint. You must have humility to learn; you must have



courage to lead; and you must have a heart to serve.

Conclusion

As I continue on this journey, I still want to accomplish one simple yet profound goal: to be a leader worthy of others' trust, to promote and encourage excellence, and to demonstrate respect for the dignity of those who receive nursing care. I hope to have a significant impact on a field that has provided me with my sense of purpose, identity, and opportunity.

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