Faculty, What Legacy Will You Leave?

Picture the following scenarios:

Scenario A: In response to an editor’s request to revise a manuscript to a much shorter format, an author responds, “How can I do that?”

Scenario B: When working with a novice author, a seasoned author and faculty member indicates that she did not believe it would be appropriate for her to suggest improvements to a manuscript developed from a course paper for which the novice author had received a grade. Yet, the author and the manuscript could have benefited from the input of this seasoned author.

How might these scenarios differed had the involved parties considered the situation from the perspective of their legacy? What does legacy mean? Why should faculty pay attention to it? What role does leaving a legacy play in the development of scholars?

How is legacy defined? Frequently, the term legacy connotes money or property left to someone in a will or something handed down from an ancestor. However, legacy also can be a reflection of one’s contributions over time. Bosak (n.d.) stated, “Legacy is about life and living. It’s about learning from the past, living in the present, and building for the future” (para. 1). Moreover, the author stated that legacy “is fundamental to what it is to be human” (para. 1). Legacy is the enduring influence a person has on others with whom they interact. Although legacy is frequently considered in the context of the work environment, the impact can extend beyond those bounds.

Leadership experts also speak of legacy thinking—an activity that places daily actions within a broader context, requires assuming responsibility for one’s own actions, and recognizes that actions have consequences (Galford & Maruca, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Legacy thinking can be undertaken at any point in an individual’s career. In fact, thinking about one’s legacy early in one’s career can increase the individual’s impact, as doing so provides time to craft a meaningful legacy that will endure over time. Further, thinking about one’s legacy affords the time to align one’s instincts or natural roles with legacy planning. Galford and Maruca (2006) highlighted five natural roles that support legacy planning: ambassador, advocate, people mover, truth seeker, and creative builder. Of these roles, people mover may be the most relevant to nurse educators, as People movers are individuals who willingly, and even enthusiastically, assume the roles as nurturers and mentors. They also have a genuine appreciation for the multiple dimensions of all aspects of a person’s life, such as personal, family, work, community, political, and societal.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) approached legacy though the lens of significance, relationships, aspirations, and courage. They challenged readers to consider how to incorporate behaviors that acknowledge the contributions of everyone, to build relationships, to be visionary, and to display courage. Importantly, they asserted, “It’s the quality of our relationships that most determines whether our legacy will be ephemeral or lasting” (p. 55).

Why are we having this discussion? Irrespective of their roles, faculty members have an impact on those with whom they interact: students, peers, clinical colleagues, and other professionals. The examples offered in the opening paragraph provide a context from which to consider faculty impact and legacy. Given the continuing shortage of faculty and the various reasons that nurses may not seek a faculty career or that nurse faculty may leave a teaching position, exploring such issues within the broader, more long-term context of legacy, such as that of legacy and legacy thinking, may provide a powerful innovative strategy to address recruitment and retention of nurse faculty.

Think about it. In the first scenario, institutional strategies, such as highlighting faculty who are successful authors and reviewers, who are willing to help others, and who do not have personal agendas, can help newer authors consider their legacy impact while building a legacy for the more seasoned faculty member. Thus, a simple conversation with an accomplished faculty member by the author in the first scenario could have provided a needed sounding board, as well as professional support. Frequently, however, such a resource is not available, or the environment in which the author resides is not conducive to such collegial exchanges. In addition, although mentoring can be an option to enhance faculty success, Turnbull (2010) found that quality mentoring is an important, but not sufficient, element in facilitating faculty scholarship. Strong academic leadership that creates a supportive environment is also essential to scholarship development. I know of faculty members at one institu-
tion who intentionally and strategically invest considerable time and effort in the development of new faculty as they acclimate to the tripartite roles—teaching, scholarship, and service—of the nurse educator. The legacy that the academic nurse leaders and seasoned faculty members are creating there will be long lasting, will contribute to individual and institutional success, and serves as a model for other faculty and institutions to emulate.

The second scenario reflects a missed legacy opportunity. If one goal of faculty is to contribute to the development of students, colleagues, and the profession, in this instance it would seem that the seasoned faculty relinquished responsibility in achieving this end. It is important to acknowledge that seasoned faculty members may have many competing demands; nonetheless, in this scenario, had the seasoned faculty member considered her behaviors within the context of legacy and legacy thinking, it is possible she would have engaged the novice author instead of distancing herself from the project.

Regrettably, scenarios such as these are not uncommon. However, deliberate, combined efforts by faculty members and leaders can create environments in which personal, professional, discipline, and institutional legacies flourish. How will you contribute to these legacies?

References

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