

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Nurse education specialist utilizing career coaching to encourage lifelong learning

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ABSTRACT

Nursing as a profession in the current healthcare climate requires the professional development of nurses from the bedside to the boardroom. Career coaches emphasize the importance of continued professional development in a way that will motivate and employ nurses to seek to move their careers to the next level. The program was established to assist nurses in the pursuit of advanced education and prepare them for leading the future in nursing. With guidance from the program, registered nurses are encouraged to pursue promotion, certification, the transition to various practice areas of greater interest, and leadership roles. Ultimately, the career counselors aid the nurses in encouraging lifelong learning and the pursuit of personal as well as professional goals. The career coaching program can assist with job satisfaction and organization succession planning. This article describes an excellent solution for succession planning within an organization looking to develop nurse talent for growth and retention.

Key Words: Nurse coach, Education coach, Career coaching, Professional development, Career coaching program and succession planning

1. INTRODUCTION

Nurses today face many crucial decisions regarding career advancement. These decisions may include obtaining an advanced degree, which school, affordability for financing the degree, acquiring a specialty certification, transitioning to another unit or department, and how to create a career path. Nurse education specialists serving as career coaches can provide a broad range of services that include utilizing strategy tools for career assessments. One of the tools is a questionnaire designed to glean development ideas about plans. Nurses get assistance with needed continuing education, mapping out a professional development plan, providing guidance on financial planning and helping to identify resources to fund career advancement. A coach can help nurses reach their career goals by working with them as a partner in a creative process and by inspiring them to maximize

their personal and professional potential.^[1] Having an experienced coach may also give nurses the confidence they need to ask questions they would not have felt comfortable exploring otherwise.^[2] St. Joseph Hospital in Denver, Colorado established a coaching program in 2006 and have measured positive benefits from their nurses that received coaching. The nurses were more confident in their abilities and had a desire to continue working with the organization,^[3] this led to a significant decrease in turnover. Another example of a similar program at Children's Hospital of Boston introduced a program called "career mapping" for their staff nurses that resulted in many of their participants pursuing advancement degrees and certifications.^[4]

The Nursing Career Coaching and Professional Development program at Houston Methodist Hospital (HMH) was established as part of a retention strategy to help nurses advance

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their degrees and obtain specialty certification. In the year 2008, the hospital began the Magnet[®] journey. One of the goals the hospital needed to achieve for American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet[®] status is the change of nurse entry level degree to a Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN). At the time, HMH had nurses with licenses as Vocational Nurses. As an avenue to encourage a move toward BSN, they began the career coaching program. Initially, starting with the tool to determine if the nurses had the desire to advance in their current role or return to school for

personal goal achievement. Since that time, the program has grown and expanded to provide career coaching to all hospital system employees. At HMH last year, 973 coaching sessions were completed by the nurse education specialist providing 50% of the educator’s time to meetings and followed up contact (see Figure 1). The meetings succeeded in 49% of the staff motivated to advance their careers, 31% returning to school, 20% transitioning to new roles, and 18% needed guidance with work/life balance.

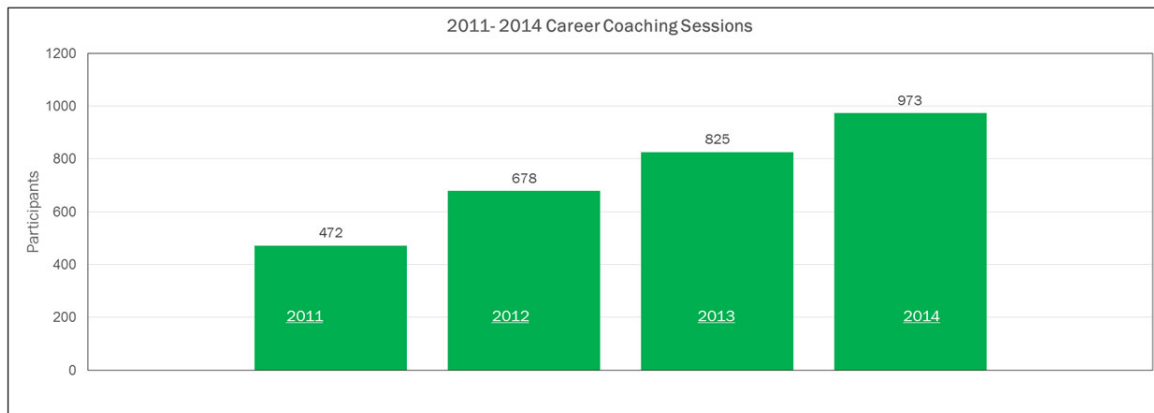


Figure 1. Managers’ and nurses’ competence assessments

2. THEORY UNDERPINNING THE PROGRAM

This program is based on Swanson’s Caring Theory, a delicate blend of guiding while partnering to empower persons to achieve their goals. The nurturing nature of the theory consists of five principal categories: (1) maintaining belief, (2) knowing, (3) being with, (4) doing for, and (5) enabling.^[5] The first component of caring theory is that of maintaining belief. The career coach must sustain a belief that the individual can accomplish his or her goals. It is paramount for the nurses being coached to have someone to believe in them and their dreams. For example, during a coaching session a nurse stated she had no support outside of work to pursue her goal of returning to school for a Master’s degree. She had family members telling her she could not complete another degree and why since she had a position as a nurse. It was a personal goal for her to return to school and grow within the organization. With coaching encouragement and belief she enrolled the next semester and began her journey for higher education. Second is knowing, or understanding as a partner what establishing career plans means to the nurse or staff member as an individual. Once she was on her journey, she expressed feeling more confident and sure about the decision she made to return to school. The third one is, having self-awareness and being emotionally available to the nurse or staff member for un-

derstanding and assisting them to make adjustments in their future. The coach is there for the nurse every step of the way as a resource and can identify with their fears and allowing the nurse or staff member to express themselves for growth and ultimately personal development. The career coach will be the one encouraging the nurse or staff member by being with them throughout their career journey or as long as they feel it is needed. The fourth one is doing for, assisting the nurse or staff member by mapping out options and providing guidance based on their needs. When a nurse is unsure about which direction to take, the coach offers viable options for them to consider and times to assist them with a selection that is the best fit for them. It is important to allow the staff member to see the vision from an educator/coach perspective, once trust has been established. When the coach allows the nurse or staff member to choose a path that will give them work life balance they are doing for themselves and the coach can visualize the client utilizing a guide as a foundation for future endeavors. Lastly, enabling, or facilitating the staff member to become active participants in their pursuit of a career path. Having the nurse also to place options on their pathway gives them the sense of empowerment and that they can now take control of seeing where their guide will take them. When the nurse or staff member are completely enabled and feel empowered to assume, as well as achieve

their goals they can continue to move forward. At that point, the career coach can step into knowing and become a full partner as the client celebrate their successes. Various studies advocate that caring theories have the potential to produce positive outcomes in many aspects for nursing.^[6] Characteristics of a career coach include the ability to listen intently, ask pertinent questions, focus on the needs of the nurse or staff member and customize a plan to meet their needs. The career coach realizes that each have their path to assume while gaining the confidence that they need to believe they can achieve their goals.

The Nursing Career Coaching and Professional Development Program strategic objectives are to continue preparing nurses and nursing leaders at all levels of the organization and to shape and influence the nursing profession, as well as the health care community. Nurturing leadership development and exposure to extensive career development opportunities for nurses and staff to pursue life long learning. In this program, nurse educators working as career counselors will continue to provide a broad range of services to assist nurses

in the pursuit of advanced education, growth, and development. These services include career assessment, identification of programs available for continuing education, support in mapping out a professional development plan, and guiding financial planning and resources to fund career advancement. The career counselors also research schools that will work best for the individual to achieve advanced degree status or their personal goals. For nurses wanting to advance in the Clinical Career Path, coaching by qualified career counselors focuses on four broad categories: promotion to the next level, nurses start from a graduate nurse, level one and can advance to level four. They have the opportunity to obtain a specialty certification in their clinical area of interest. The nurses can transition to a specialty area like cardiovascular or neurology. If the nurse is experiencing difficulty with how they will continue to work, return to school and spend quality time with their family, the coach assists with work/life balance. Additionally, career counselors provide shadowing opportunities for those undecided about their career a path and would like a glimpse in a particular area before making a decision about which path to pursue.

CAREER COACHING/CONSULTATION

During a Career Coaching session, Houston Methodist Hospital employees will have the opportunity to:

- Utilize career assessment/self-exploration tools
- Assess values
- Assess career needs
- Formulate goals
- Develop a career map or transition plan
- Gain information related to potential job openings and educational opportunities
- Gain exposure to various professional development opportunities
- Receive guidance toward advancing their careers



All Career Coaching appointments are very flexible and can be conducted via a face-to-face interview or telephone.



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CAREER COACHING PROGRAM



Figure 2. Managers’ and nurses’ competence assessments

This program has since expanded to assist every employee to reach their individual goals and take responsibility for their achievements. For example, an employee working in the food and nutrition department of the hospital had traveled many miles to America seeking work in healthcare. He had a desire to help people; it was his dream. He completed a certified nursing assistant (CNA) course and began looking for a job as a CNA. Unable to locate employment as a CNA, he heard about career coaching and thought that this resource could help him to fulfill his dream. After meeting with the career coach and choosing a path, he is now a CNA in the emergency department at the hospital.

3. CONCLUSION

The Nursing Career Coaching and Professional Development Program is a successful resource for those unsure about direction as well as capabilities to achieve what they consider as their dreams and aspirations. The program gets the an opportunity to highlight success stories in the organization's Nurse magazine, as a way to encourage others who would like to participate in the program. Being a partner as a coach,

engaging the client in thought-provoking and creative ideas will motivate them to take full advantage of personal and professional future possibilities.^[1] Ultimately, the career counselors support the nurses in reaching real work-life balance and the pursuit of personal and professional goals. In the future, this program will expand to develop a training program for other nurse educators to become career coaches to reach more staff members and make a positive impact on job satisfaction and retention. The utilization of nurses growing and pursuing higher levels of education will help the profession meet the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) for nurses to be lifelong learners and enable other nurses to become leaders in making changes in improving quality health care.^[7]

Advertising the program with a brochure (see Figure 2), continues to recruit those interested in advancing their nursing knowledge, seeking guidance, for progressing their careers to aspiring positions becoming executive leadership and nurse educators of tomorrow, making their contribution to filling the gap in nursing, nursing faculty, and nursing leadership.

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