



# ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

## Message from the President

### Leading with Knowledge – Serving with Heart: Servant Leadership

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Leading with knowledge and serving with heart is my theme. When I was thinking about how to influence my time as ASPAN's president, this was an idea I wanted to share with each of you. Each of us is called to share a vision and I believe continuing education is very important to maintain our place as leaders in perianesthesia nursing. But, I also wanted to share my heart, my love for each nurse that gives that piece of themselves each day to make our world a little better. As flippant and teasing as I can sometimes be, I truly view nursing as a calling. Serving with heart is at my core, and I hope, this year, you will also see it within yourself.

One reason for this theme is my longing to share ideas of servant leadership, a process that I strive for every day. I am not finished yet and, like many, I fail, pick myself up and try again. To me, it is the trying again that becomes essential.

#### **Leadership Sphere of Influence**

Leadership is described as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.<sup>1</sup> Leading is not reserved for just managers. Many nurses need to see and understand how they lead every day. I task each of us to look at this like superhero powers and how will we choose to lead and influence. Will we use our powers for good or for evil? I think this is key, as each of us owns our persuasive power within our sphere of influence. Some spheres are wider than others, but you probably have the ability to influence your co-workers, component members, maybe even some board members. Are you promoting or corrupting our nursing process?

By utilizing the term process for leadership, it becomes an action and not just a trait of a person. It is a process to affect change and requires not only leaders but also followers to get to that common goal. However, the leader then "has an ethical responsibility to attend to the needs and concerns of the followers."<sup>1</sup> I like to think of this responsibility in terms of servant leadership.

#### **What is Servant Leadership?**

Servant leadership was defined by Robert Greenleaf almost five decades ago. Yet, it is still utilized by many businesses, corporations, healthcare systems and leaders. It speaks to the betterment of all people encouraging a different way of leadership, management, service and even spiritual growth. I wasn't totally convinced until I was asked to manage other nurses. My early years of being a manager were challenging for me and, I'm sure, for the staff whom I supervised. Everyone was frustrated, and I had a lot to learn. Then, I read about Greenleaf in my first Master's program class, and the ideas made sense. It should not be a struggle to lead if your heart is in the right place as a servant. I started my own journey.

Greenleaf states the leader is servant first. He wrote, "It begins with the natural feelings that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit?"<sup>2</sup>

## **Embracing Change and Letting Go**

Part of my learning included not needing to always be right. How was I making room for others to shine? I believe that is an area where each of us can look at our components and see how we can help others shine. What are you doing to invite others to share their thoughts and encourage the actions associated with these new thoughts? We cannot continue to do things the way they have always been done. Although I respect those who forged this place ahead of me, it is sometimes in the letting go that true service is given and change can occur.

Nobody really likes change. I think I can make a leap and state nurses like stability: stable patients, stable schedules, stable practice. But, sometimes, true leadership challenges the stability of a situation and suggests, "Why not?" Over the next several months, I want to explore some concepts associated with servant leadership and challenge all of us to look at how we influence those around us.

## **Servant Leaders Listen**

Greenleaf's first characteristic of servant leadership is listening. "Servant leaders...focus on listening intently and reflectively to others in order to identify and clarify the will of a group of people."<sup>2</sup> Most of us think we are good listeners, but do you catch yourself thinking about what you are going to say in the following response? I know I go there sometimes. By doing that, we do not allow for true listening. We are called to listen with intention and empathy. We are called to be in the moment for another person.

So, this month I am going to look my colleagues in the eyes, not play with my phone, not jump on their words, not shuffle papers, sigh or look at my watch. I am just going to listen with my heart open and my mind quiet. I invite you to join me. Until next time, lead with knowledge and serve with heart.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Northouse PG. *Leadership Theory and Practice* 4th Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2007.
2. Burckhardt J, Spears L. Servant leadership and philanthropic institutions. In: Spears L, Lawrence M, eds. *Focus on Leadership Servant Leadership for the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons; 2002: 225-226.