**Lessons in Leadership**

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As a woman leader, I am humbled when asked to speak or write about leadership. Throughout my life and my professional nursing career, my path has allowed me to assume numerous leadership positions. I have only consciously accepted such positions when I felt the time was right, such as not becoming a dean until my three children, who are now adults, were finished with college or high school.

While I began nursing at age 16 years as a candy striper and nurse’s aide, I then went to The Ohio State University (OSU) for my bachelor’s degree in nursing after high school. Pediatric nursing was my favorite nursing course, inspired as a young girl by my neighbor girlfriend who had a severe case of polio that confined her many days to an iron lung or a wheelchair.

Upon my OSU graduation, my pediatric nursing practice began formally as a registered nurse at Beverly Hospital in Beverly, Massachusetts. Immediately my supervisor put me into a charge nurse position where I observed and cared for many very sick infants and children during the night until they were transferred into Boston Children’s Hospital the next morning. I learned quickly to pick up subtle cues from non-verbal children and to listen closely to what the parents had to say.

Upon moving back to Ohio three years later, I then worked at Children’s Hospital in Columbus, OH, for my children’s pediatrician in his office and at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital as evening and night charge nurses. There I earned my master’s degree and doctoral degree from the University of Cincinnati (UC). Serving for 21 years as UC faculty, I can truly say I had a leadership epiphany in 1998 when I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa, the same year I became department chair of Parent Child Nursing.

Having never climbed a mountain before, and hardly ever had camped outdoors in a tent, plus with a fear of heights and about to embark on a 6-day up and 2-day down 19,341 feet climb, I relied heavily on my guide whom I trusted completely and on friends with whom I traveled. How did this experience shape me as a leader and perhaps helped me to twice become a dean at Texas Woman’s University in 2004 and at University of Louisville in 2007? What were my lessons learned from such an out-of-my-comfort zone experience? These are some:

 Know thyself. If you have a fear or weakness, then either work with or hire others who can outshine you in those areas.

 Taking calculated risks is integral in leadership. Usually no one learns to walk without first falling down.

 Leaders must help an organization, faculty and/or colleagues to move beyond their comfort zone. If you keep doing what you have always done, then you will get exactly what you have always got. Nimbleness, flexibility and accepting of change are critical aspects of today’s leader. Transformation leadership is key to 21st century successes.

 Goals must be set and one must keep his or her eye on the target. For me, my summit goal stopped at 16,000 feet at Barafu Hut in the clouds, as compared to summiting at midnight with headlamps on, and trekking across icy and slippery scree in dropping temperatures below freezing. (However, I did miss the gorgeous sunrise, but saw photos!)

 Pay close attention to subtle changes in organizational dynamics and listen carefully, especially to what is said and what is not said. You will gain valuable insights.

 Celebrate successes, praise and appreciate others often.

 And, if you should fall down, (which you will), pick yourself up, learn from it and laugh!

 Being a leader means learning from others, especially all that are different from oneself.

When I arrived in Tanzania, I thought how poor the people were. When I left, I learned how very rich they were… in terms of kindness, contentment and generosity of self. They led me more than I have led.