

# Karen Bankston: A leader who listens

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ANA's 2016 Mary Mahoney Award  
recipient discusses effective leadership  
in the workplace.

**ANA'S MARY MAHONEY AWARD** honors significant contributions to advancing equal opportunities in nursing for members of minority groups. Karen Bankston, PhD, MSN, FACHE, has devoted much of her career to this endeavor. In her role as associate dean for clinical practice, partnership, and community engagement in the college of nursing at the University of Cincinnati (UC), Bankston develops partnerships between nursing and other disciplines to support an inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. She also is president and CEO of KDB and Associates Consulting Service. For Bankston, a member of the Ohio Nurses Association, the YWCA USA tagline, "She lifts as she climbs," represents a leadership approach to which she has always aspired.



Karen Bankston

## What's most rewarding about your current role at UC?

At UC I'm working with students at all levels from high school through their doctoral education. One example of a significant program is Leadership 2.0: Nursing's Next Generation. The program's goal is to increase the number of racially and ethnically diverse, first-generation or economically disadvantaged students in nursing by providing them with strategic support through graduation. I enjoy playing just a small role in shaping their lives.

## Of what achievement are you most proud?

I've been able to do more things than I would have ever imagined, so it's hard to select just one accomplishment. As a native of Youngstown, Ohio, born in the 1950s, and the eldest child of a single mom, this journey in and of itself is a major achievement. I'm just so thankful to have been able to touch the lives of so many people and make a difference.

## What's your leadership style?

I'm someone who loves opportunities to help other people no matter what their role in an organization. If you were to ask people who've worked with me in my various roles over the last 40 years, they would say that I'm honest, direct, and transparent. There are both internal and external influences that you have to be concerned about when leading an organization, which is why it's essential to listen, as well as talk, to others. It's important to value information that you're getting from all levels in an organization regardless of their position. In every leadership role that I've held, I would take the time to interact with associates to hear how they were doing and to let them know how much I appreciated what they were contributing to help achieve our vision and goals.

## Why is it important for more tenured nurses to mentor those newer to the profession?

We have a responsibility to help newer RNs navigate through the feelings that are experienced when you first enter this very trusted profession. I stress to my mentees the importance of acknowledging and reflecting on their values. To deal with challenges effectively, you have to know what you believe in and what line you aren't willing to cross.

You have to identify those values for yourself early in your career.

## What are the benefits of serving on a board?

Nurses need to position themselves to be on boards beyond health care. We have the ability to think critically and connect the dots in ways that others can't. Board service has opened up so many doors for me. I have a network of business leaders that I can call on for advice. And they see me not only as a nurse, but as a leader. ★

## Learn more

Leadership 2.0 program  
🌐 <https://goo.gl/23S8p4>

ANA's National Awards  
🌐 <https://goo.gl/laDJGo>

Interview by Apryl Motley, CAE, professional writer.