



Linda Hofler

Human touch

Linda Hofler knows how to bring data to life.

AFTER nearly 40 years in nursing, Linda Hofler, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, retired in 2020 as senior vice president–nurse executive/chief nursing officer at Vidant Medical Center in Greenville, NC. She continues to make an impact as a clinical assistant professor at East Carolina University and is a member of the North Carolina Nurses Association. As a cultural transformation expert, Hofler believes in engaging nurses to develop best practices and improve patient experience. She spoke to the American Nurses Association about the importance of combining hard data and human experience.

What sparked your interest in cultural transformation?

I've had a lifetime fascination with human interaction and have always been interested in how organizations function. My doctoral work focused on health policy and regulation and their impact on the nursing workforce. I worked for Vidant Health in various roles over 37 years and understand the importance of aligning mission, vision, and values. When you do cultural transformation well, that alignment is there, and it plays out in how you deliver service.

What can nurse leaders do to spearhead a culture change in their organization?

Data are essential to make sure you're looking at and managing the right things. Vidant's chief experience officer and I built an integrated database to look at complaint and grievance data, employee engagement, survey data, quality data, event reporting, and more. Having all of that data in one place tells a story and helps identify where you can make the most difference.

But leaders can make the mistake of assuming they know what to do based on data without going to staff to understand their lived experience. We had a team that developed an hourly rounding strategy for their unit to help them address patient issues and decrease complaints. It was successful for that unit, but didn't work for the next two units that tried it because

those team members weren't involved in the design; they had no opportunity for input.

We coached our leaders on how to be effective listeners—to listen with intent and then engage the end users to develop systems that work for them.

Could you describe the “salons” you conducted as a nurse executive?

In ancient Greece, philosophers would pull together people of like mind to discuss ideas. I've used this concept to gather teams of people to develop strategies. The salons are never more than 90 minutes. They're focused, introspective, and interactive, unlike lectures.

In “practical” salons, participants discussed things like effective leader rounding. Sometimes we used improv in training, which made it fun and helped people remember what they'd learned. Others focused on empathy and gratitude. Those could get very emotional. The salons are a unique way to help people reconnect with the heart of what they do.

What's the most important leadership lesson you learned during your career?

The biggest lesson I learned as a leader is that humility is essential. To be an effective leader, it can't be about you. It has to be about the work and the people. I've watched many leaders during my 4-decade career. People who lead with kindness, love, and humility are the ones who built strong organizations and made the people they lead better.

What's important for nurse leaders to know?

We must encourage students and early career nurses to be brave and unafraid. That's how we build the next generation of leaders. I've had students who prepare projects or presentations but are afraid to share their work in front of the class. Our goal should be that when our students start their first professional jobs, they're prepared to lead from the frontlines. **AN**

— Interview by Elizabeth Moore, writer at ANA.

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