

Five ways to embrace your inner leader

Leading is an innate part of nursing. Even if you're not in a formal leadership role, you can assert your influence and lead. Here's how.

Show emotional intelligence

There are many theories and frameworks regarding emotional intelligence (EI), but common to all is an individual's ability to monitor and manage their own feelings while understanding those of others. EI enables you to respond calmly and rationally, but crucially also allows you insight into another person's emotions.

Can you learn EI? Certainly. Reflection will improve your self-awareness, providing clarity on what you're feeling and why you're feeling it. Listening to others – being able to give and receive honest feedback – is also important, as is being responsive to what you've heard and showing empathy.

Less conventional methods, like storytelling, can work too as shown by the Council of Deans of Health student leadership programme: tinyurl.com/student-nurse-leadership



Be a role model

This is about displaying values and behaviours that exemplify professional practice. Leadership is a shared responsibility and exists at all levels, so you don't have to be "in charge" to be a role model. Think "influence" rather than "seniority".

Role models hold high standards, support colleagues, and know the limits of their own skills. They also understand and help shape the culture of an organisation. Visit the leadership subject guide from the RCN Library to find out more: rcn.org.uk/library



Display courage

Leadership, no matter what stage of your career, can be difficult. But whether you're a student with concerns about poor care or a senior nurse struggling to meet the needs of patients due to short staffing, staying silent can pose risks.

Leaders make tough decisions and doing so can upset people. But don't settle for mediocrity, the *Ward Leader's Handbook* advises. If you feel prevented from providing safe, compassionate care, read our guidance on how to raise concerns: rcn.org.uk/raisingconcerns



Motivate others

Leadership behaviours are interlinked. Effectiveness as a role model, for instance, helps motivate others. All team members can play a part in influencing colleagues. Though designed for more senior staff, NHS Improvement's *Ward Leader's Handbook* has some helpful advice for developing motivational skills: tinyurl.com/ward-leaders-handbook

It says leaders can motivate by:

- recognising team members' passions and concerns
- seeking out and listening to different views
- encouraging the whole team to own an idea or initiative.



Create shared goals

Good leadership isn't about being the best, it's about making everyone else better. It involves working together towards a shared aim, with people influencing each other.

When nursing leadership is effective, team members each contribute and act together, producing positive clinical outcomes. Team members feel valued and supported in that process.

But while those in formal leadership roles have a responsibility to create the conditions for that to happen, building constructive working environments, positive cultures and the freedom to innovate rests not on one person but on a collective contribution to leadership from each team member.

