Nurse Coaching Is Not What I Do: It Informs Who I Am

by LINDA BARK, PhD, RN, MCC, NC-BC and SHIRLEY CONRAD, MSN, RN, CCRN, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC

Individuals operate simultaneously within multiple paradigms including professional, religious, political, scientific, cultural, and gender. Similarly, nursing practice is informed by more than one paradigm, and shifting from one to another can require a fundamental change in viewpoint. Learning the process of nurse coaching appears to be a transformational experience, which can change this viewpoint. In fact, nurse coaches often notice a shift in themselves after integrating the principles of coaching into their practice and daily lives.

As evidence of this transformational experience, one nurse coach educator reports the following comment from a student, “This coach training is a total paradigm shift for me, and I see applications across the board. It is not just with my patients but it is with any conversation I have now.” This master certified coach trainer frequently hears other graduates of the holistic/integral program state, “This program...

“I knew I would use coaching with my patients, but I find that my personal relationships are very different and even better.”
has changed my life” or “I knew I would use coaching with my patients, but I find that my personal relationships are very different and even better.” Another student reported that she and her husband were so much closer because she was using what she learned in class when talking with him. She had changed, and now he was changing. She was amazed. A mother offered, “My relationship with my teenage son has really improved during my coaching class because I am treating him different.”

Conrad (2014) conducted a pilot study, which sought to describe the effects of an integral coaching program on registered nurse participants and their professional practice. Participants reported a shift that allowed them to be in familiar professional situations, but in a new way. This resulted in nurses going “to work with a totally different attitude,” finding “easier collaboration” and “less tension,” no longer feeling “trapped” in their jobs. This shift also led registered nurses to consider what was working in their personal lives. Participants noticed they were making more mindful choices. It became easier for them to say “no” to requests that no longer suited them and “being ok with that.” What happens in nurse coach training that impacts so much of the student’s inner and outer worlds?

It is not unusual for nurses to operate from a paradigm of expert. However, coaching principles outlined in The Art and Science of Nurse Coaching: The Provider’s Guide to Coaching Scope and Competencies (Hess et al., 2013) diverge from this model. The nurse coach-patient relationship shifts this expected pattern from patient as “passive” to patient as “dynamic.” In a coaching paradigm, the nurse coach acknowledges the patient as the expert. When first learning coaching principles, this can be a major shift for registered nurses, moving from an expert role to a coaching role. The expert role can be analogized to walking in front of and leading the patient, and the coaching role as “being next to and a little behind the patient” (Bark, 2011, p. 28). There are times, of course, that a nurse needs to be the expert, and situations when patients want the nurse to provide answers. However, we are learning that patients, more often than not, want to find their power and direct their growth. Coaching facilitates “client discovery of their own solutions” (Hayes & Kalmakis, 2007, p. 556), and self-determination theory supports the efficacy of coaching while pointing to the fact that when people have autonomy, support, and confidence, they find their intrinsic motivation and can move forward forcefully toward their goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Nurse coaches transition from directing, anticipating, fixing, and controlling to appreciating they are not qualified to determine the next best step for their patients. They become adept at staying in the moment, relinquishing any illusion of control, become comfortable with not knowing, and trust that self-selected goals and actions of their patients are integral to their self-development and learning. As the nurse recedes into a supporting role, the patient can shift into the expert role. These subtle but powerful changes could shed light on reports of improved relationships.

Perhaps because nurses have been trained to be the expert, we operate from this paradigm in our non-professional relationships too. We give advice and stay in front, leading the friend, colleague, or family member. We ask questions to obtain all the information of a situation so we can efficiently and skillfully fix their problems. We may operate in this manner unconsciously and have the best of intentions of wanting to be helpful. However, is this always the best way to help another person lead a healthier life or address a challenge? We might conclude that supporting autonomy, providing support, and facilitating confidence enhances personal relationships.

As the nurse coach successfully integrates coaching principles through the process of coaching with patients, many

*continued on page 20*
find these skills flowing into their personal life and enriching those relationships as well. A transition occurs from doing coaching to being a coach. That is, a “shift happens,” which impacts all interactions (Rose, 2012). When personal and professional relationships are mindfully held within this new way of being, nurse coaches should expect nothing less than positive and profound changes in their relationships. We have seen this paradigm shift many times, which leads us to say that coaching is not what we do: it informs who we are.

**REFERENCE**


**Linda Bark**, PhD, RN, MCC, NC-BC is a Master Certified Coach (International Coach Federation), a Board Certified Nurse Coach (American Holistic Nurses Credentialing Corporation) and founder of the Wisdom of the Whole Coaching Academy. She has more than 25 years of coaching experience in her private practice as well as 20 years of training coaches internationally. Linda’s integral/ holistic coaching model is an innovative and unique approach to co-creating learning experiences that empower people and help them feel and maintain a sense of ease, fun, and fulfillment. You can learn more about Linda’s coach training program by visiting www.wisdomofthewhole.com

**Shirley Conrad**, MSN, RN, CCRN, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC is a PhD student at Florida Atlantic University with plans for exploring an aspect of nurse coaching in her dissertation work. Her graduate track was Advanced Holistic Nursing, a paradigm that has informed her life for decades. She uses coaching principles in leadership in the acute care setting of a trauma intensive care unit where she feels the principles of complexity and coaching match effortlessly.

---

**Some Thoughts on Why I Coach**

*Awakening dreams and igniting passions coming through to places of respect and trust*

*Opening and deepening the caverns of desire discovering the shapes of things to come…*

*Playing out in Rumi’s field - permission granted; life allowed. Molding dreams, and planting seeds; nurturing the tenderness, cultivating moments of deep knowing and awareness.*

*Clarity and purpose in a dance of depth and hope; Coalescence and amazement as alignments emerge Companions as the path unfolds.*

**Marian Long, RN, MSN, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC, ND, HTCP/I**
Beginnings magazine is a benefit of AHNA membership.

We hope you have enjoyed this article from Beginnings. This article is provided for personal and educational use only. Any other use requires prior permission of the author and the American Holistic Nurses Association. For permission, contact communications@ahna.org.

Why Join AHNA Today?

AHNA helps nurses transform healthcare while supporting each other. Nurture yourself and advance your profession with the support, resources, education, and community that only AHNA provides. Together we can build a more united voice.

By becoming a member of AHNA, you have access to resources that exist nowhere else — as well as to a supportive community of nurses who speak your language and know how you feel.

Don’t Burn Out – Discover Self-Care!

Other professions and professional organizations do not talk about caring and self-care as an integral part of their theoretical foundation. At AHNA, you’ll find a supportive group of nurses who empower each other to be what we wish for our clients: healthy.

Join now at

www.ahna.org/Join