

Creating Community: Book Club to Support Nurse Leaders

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Abstract

Background:

In 2021, as COVID continued to heavily impact operations in healthcare, VA Portland Nursing Executive leadership saw that many nurse leaders, especially those new to their roles, were experiencing significant amounts of moral distress and isolation. In exit interviews and individual conversations, intent to leave nurse leadership was rampant. As a result of this turnover, 56% of current nurse leaders at VAPORHCS have been in their current role for less than two years. These new leaders face role uncertainty, resource limitations, and lack a peer group of other nurse supervisors for support and mentoring.

Purpose: To support nurse leader competency in management of self and others, building relationships across service lines, and leadership abilities, two division directions developed a book club and discussion group. Beyond simple skill-building, the group also aimed to renew a sense of community and generate support from peers to lead a workforce struggling to provide care during this historic time.

Methods: Nurse Leader Book Club (NLBC) was created for nurse supervisors of all levels to read and discuss leadership focused books together. Two consecutive cohorts of 12 participants in 2022 and 20 in 2023 were provided a variety of books, with discussions held monthly. Anonymous pre/post self-assessments distributed to participants assessed participant perception of 18 competencies related to management of self and others, building relationships, and leadership abilities, based on AONL Nurse Manager Competencies.

Results: Both cohorts showed positive change in 7/18 competencies, mixed change in 10/18 competencies, and no change in 1/18 competencies. Qualitative feedback from participants about the experience was overwhelmingly positive.

Conclusion: Nurse Leader Book Club increased confidence of nurse leaders in core competencies. Feedback indicates that NLBC is an effective tool to develop professional community and reduce isolation for new leaders.

Background and Purpose

At all levels, nursing leadership roles are challenging. Success requires strong skills not only in the specific tasks of managing people, resources and practices, but also in managing relationships and self care. The COVID19 pandemic amplified existing challenges and forced nurse leaders to contend with rapidly changing priorities and unprecedented uncertainty in their personal and professional spheres (Schlack et al., 2022). Turnover and intent to leave increased dramatically in the health care system as a result (Fatah, 2021). VA Portland Healthcare System Executive Nurse Leaders witnessed this trend not just among staff nurses, but among nurse managers and directors as well. Nurse leaders at all levels, but especially those new to their roles, were experiencing significant amounts of moral distress and isolation. In exit interviews and individual conversations, intent to leave nurse leadership was rampant and many areas saw a complete replacement of their supervisors. As of early 2024, 56% of current nurse leaders at VAPORHCS have been in their current role for less than two years. These new leaders face role uncertainty, resource limitations, and lack a peer group of other nurse supervisors for support and mentoring, all of which contributes to increased stress and a lack of confidence in their abilities, in turn contributing to continued turnover

While VAPORHCS does offer a formal new manager training program, nurse managers still described feeling isolated, which impacts efficacy, burnout, and satisfaction in their work. There was a gap in peer networking opportunities. In a 2023 survey by AONL Foundation, nearly 40% of nurse leaders indicated rated their emotional health as neutral or worse, and 42% were missing a sense of belonging in their workplace. In that same survey, "meeting with direct reports and colleagues" was identified by 48% of nurse leaders as a task that brings them joy" (AONL, 2023). To respond to the need

Materials and Methods

The first cohort of the Book Club began in January 2022, and a second cohort began in January 2023. Participants were solicited from Nursing Professional Council, which is a committee consisting of all supervisory nurses within VAPORHCS. The books were selected by the two co-facilitators based off recommendations by other leaders, and were purchased with facility funds. Participants were provided with copies of the selected books to keep, and asked to attend as many meetings as they could. Discussion meetings were held monthly over Microsoft Teams, and while participants were encouraged to attend as many meetings as they could, participation or completing the readings were not mandatory.

Cohort One Reading
Dare to Lead, Brene Brown
Reality Based Leadership, Cy Wakeman
Leading at the Speed of Trust, Stephen M. Covey

Cohort 2 Reading
Spark, Angie Morgan, Courtney Lynch, Sean Lynch
Ask a Manager, Allison Green
Just Work, Kim Scott
Thanks for the Feedback, Douglas Stone, Sheila Heen



Participants were asked to take a pre and post assessment, designed to evaluate their self perception of leadership skills and qualities, based on AONL's Core Competencies for Nurse Leaders (Hughes et al., 2022). The pre/post assessment contained the following questions, which participants rated themselves on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1= Never True to 5 = Always True):

1. I am excited to come to work.
2. I feel connected with other leaders here.
3. I feel like I know what I'm doing as a leader.
4. I can bounce back quickly after bad days at work.
5. I feel supported by my direct supervisor.
6. I am confident in my ability to lead others.
7. I know when I'm at my limit.
8. I am good at managing conflict between my staff.
9. I effectively help others manage their work stress.
10. I know what my professional goals are and I have a plan to achieve them.
11. I integrate my personal and professional values in how I do my job.
12. It's easy for me to see the best in others.
13. I can work comfortably in ambiguity.
14. I take time to reflect on decisions before I make them.
15. I enjoy learning new skills or implementing new processes at work.
16. It's easy for me to hear the perspectives of those who are different from me or disagree with me.
17. Reflecting on my personal growth makes me a better leader.
18. I take enough time for myself away from work to recharge.

Demographic data on tenure with the VA and years of experience was

Results

Participant Professional Experience



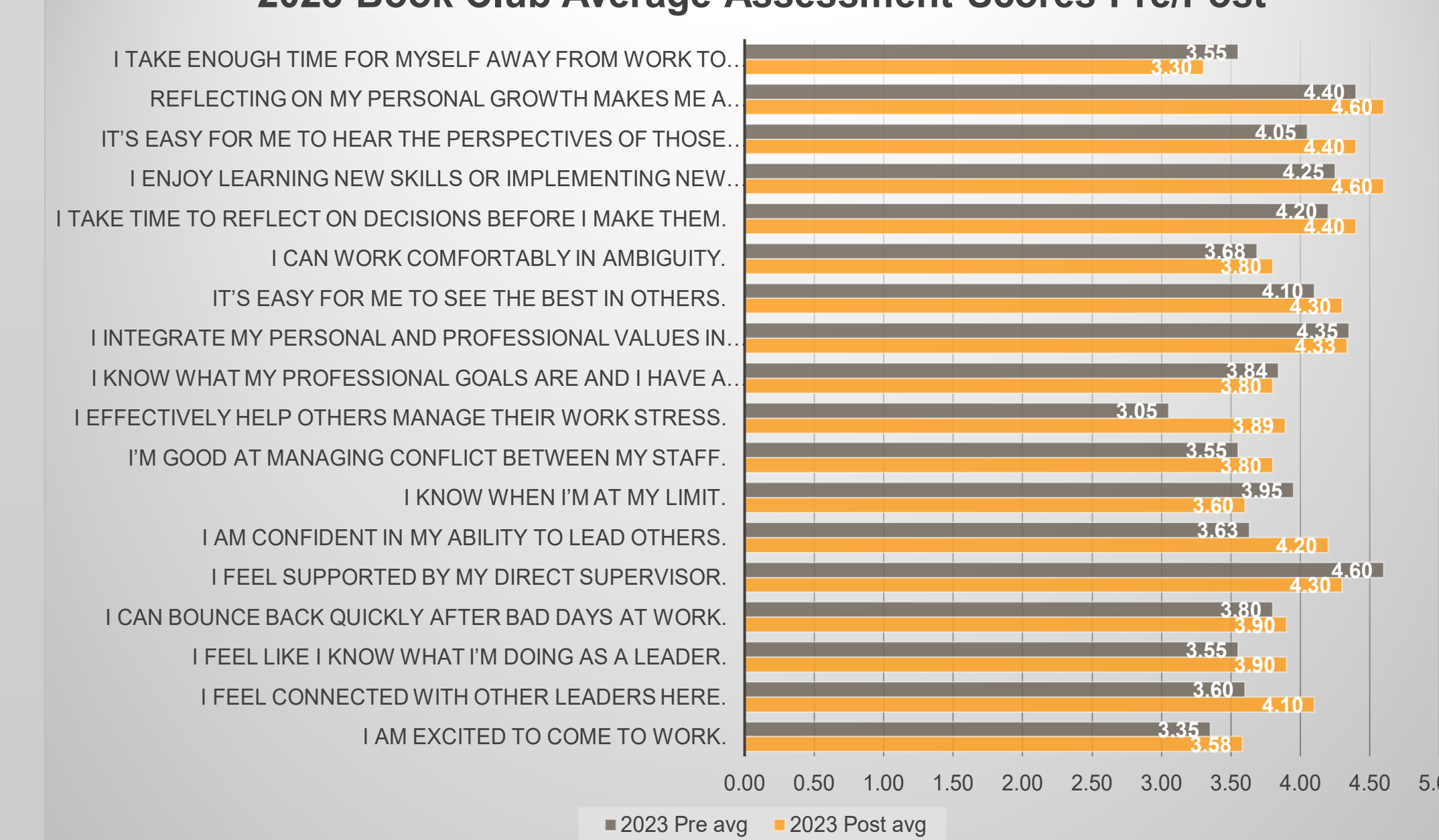
The average length of time in leadership fell between the two cohorts, from a mean of 8.5 years to 4.5 years. This reflects the trend of new nurse leaders in the organization. 1/3 of the Cohort 2 participants had been in their role less than a year.

Both cohorts showed improvements in self rated confidence in most items:

2022 Book Club Average Assessment Scores Pre/Post



2023 Book Club Average Assessment Scores Pre/Post



Increases were seen in 7 questions in both cohorts

I am excited to come to work (+.26)

I feel connected with other leaders here. (+.33)

I effectively help others manage their work (+.34)

It's easy for me to see the best in others (+.09)

It's easy for me to hear the perspective of those who are different from me or disagree with me (+.43)

Reflecting on my personal growth makes me a better leader (+.18)

Discussion

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. 100% of respondents from both cohorts stated they would be interested in participating in another book club.

What about the Leadership Book Club did you find most helpful?

"I enjoyed the books - giving some ideas to help managing, also the networking is so helpful, adding people who you can reach out to." "Truly enjoyed hearing others perspectives and insights on the books. What each of us took away and learned."

"Connecting with peers, hearing about similarities and challenges" "Being able to have open discussions and relate to other nurse leaders about issues and concerns related to managing. As a new nurse manager, I found this invaluable."

"Found Reality Based Leadership and Daring to Lead very valuable resources. They both have different approaches so they are an interesting mix of ways to look at Leading staff."

Participants consistently highlighted the connections they made, and the value of being able to discuss the material, as well as work situations with a peer group. They also identified barriers to reading the books or participating in the meetings, which included lack of time, conflicting clinical obligations, and not liking the virtual meeting format for discussions.

In reviewing the pre and post self evaluation, there are several possible confounding factors. The cohorts were generally small and of different sizes, and several participants from the first group joined the second cohort. The groups were also comprised of self-selected leaders who may have more motivation to develop skills or more time than others, so the NLBC may not be targeting those who could benefit most from the material or peer connection. It is also challenging to determine what other factors could be impacting participants' self reported confidence in their leadership skills; clinical acuity, institutional demands, and personal stresses all impact nurse leaders' sense of efficacy (AONL, 2023).

In conclusion, the intent of the Nurse Leader Book Club was to provide novice and experienced nurse managers an opportunity to build connections and share perspectives with a group of peers. Cohort 3 is underway, which will continue to provide valuable information about the needs of nurse leaders. We will also begin to track changes in responses with participants who have engaged in multiple cohorts vs first time members.

References

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