Cultivating Joy & Empowering Hope: Strategies for Academic Nurse Leaders

Fall 2026 CACN/COADN Pre-Conference Leadership Session

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Session Learning Outcomes

Identify

Identify key nursing assets that help reframe workforce well-being.

Analyze

Analyze evidence-informed strategies to cultivate joy in nursing practice and improve day-to-day work experiences.

Examine

Examine leadership approaches that foster hope and meaning within teams.

Apply

Apply practical leadership strategies to support thriving, engagement, and sustainability in nursing practice.

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NURSING DATA

Macro View: U.S. Nursing Workforce By the Numbers

138,000

nurses left the workforce since 2022.

- Top reasons nurses are leaving the workforce aside from retirement:
  1. stress and burnout
  2. workload
  3. understaffing
  4. inadequate salary
  5. workplace violence

Learn more and see the full results at NCSBN.org/jnr.

40% indicate an intent to leave the workforce by 2029. That's potentially 1.6 million total nurses.

7.2% of nurses are Latino/Hispanic, double the percent in 2015.

73% have a baccalaureate degree or higher. This is the highest educational level for nurses ever documented by NCSBN.

10%-16% increase in median pre-tax annual earnings for nurses.

88% (RN) & **71%** (LPN/VN) licensees actively involved in nursing, an increase over 2022. A sign employment levels have rebounded slightly.

NCSBN 2025 Annual Report

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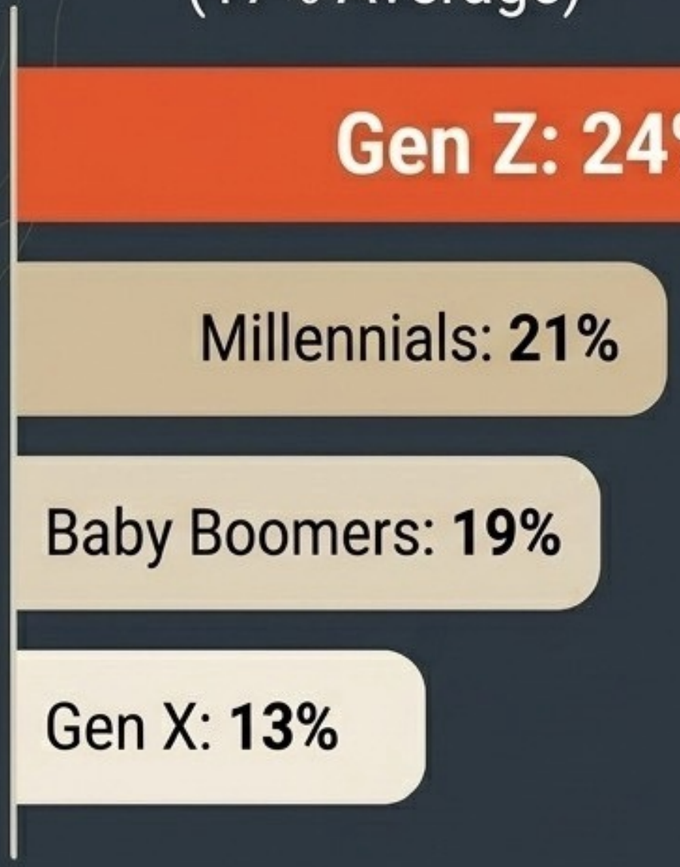
Current State: Generational Turnover & Engagement

2024 RN Turnover
(17% Average)



Pride drives retention. Among RNs, pride in mission, care quality, and reputation is the strongest predictor of staying.

What Gen Z Nurses Want Most

- Purpose and pride
- Psychological safety and trust
- Teamwork and support
- Leadership that listens
- Opportunities for growth

PressGaney Nurse Experience 2025; PressGaney What the youngest nurses need from their employers 2025

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Nursing Academic Leader Data: National Perspective

ADN
(2025 OADN Annual Assessment)

60% | have been in the role **0-3 years**
17% less than 1 year

37% | plan to **retire within 5 years**
19% within the next 2 years

BSN and Grad
(2025/2026 AACN Dean's Survey)

68% | are **new deans**

40% | have been in the role **less than 2 years**

OADN 2025 Annual Assessment Program Snapshot; AACN 2026 Research & Data, Rounds with Leadership

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National & Regional Data: Vacancies, Retirement Wave, and Hiring Bottlenecks

AACN Reported

7.9%

National Faculty Vacancy Rate

10-year national average stands at 7.64%, reflecting persistent structural deficits.

8.96%

Western Regional Vacancy Rate

Western states face significantly higher vacancy pressure than national averages (Zangaro & Keston, 2026).

AACN Reported

~33% (1 in 3)

10-Year Faculty Retirement Wave

Study anticipates approximately one-third of the 2015 faculty workforce retiring over 2016–2025.

2.7% ➔ 4.1%

Rising Annual Retirement Rates

Annual retirement rates start near 2.7% and rise toward 4.1% under higher-growth scenarios.

OADN Reported

82% / 83%

Recruiting & Facing Difficulty

82% actively recruited full-time faculty; 83% reported recruitment was challenging across all program types.

17%

Unable to Fill Positions

17% of recruiting programs were completely unable to hire needed full-time faculty (OADN 2025 Fast Facts).

Zangaro & Keston (2026); AACN Faculty Shortage Data; OADN 2025 Staffing Fast Facts.

CA Nursing Academic Leader Data: Opportunities & Restraints

66% survey respondents plan to leave within 5 years (2019-2020)

Driving Forces (Stay)

- **93%** | Enjoy their job
- **99%** | Pride in work
- **93%** | Enjoy professional opportunities

Restraining Forces (Leave)

- **90%** | Work extensive hours
- **55%** | Satisfied with work/life balance
- **78%** | Rules/regulations make the job difficult

Apen, L. V., et al. (2021). Nursing education perspectives, 42(5), 304–309. CA Nursing Deans/Directors Survey Results (2019-2020): 66% of respondents plan to leave w

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AMPLIFYING ASSETS

Reframe from a Deficit to an Asset Mindset

“Let joy be in your journey, not in some distant goal.” – Tim Cook

Joy	Happiness
Result of inner peace and satisfaction	Result of an external force that brings satisfaction
Source lies within us	Source lies outside of us
It’s a choice	Dependent on external forces
A state of being	Temporary

Kennedy, K., Lecler, L., & Campis, S. (2022). Human-centered leadership in healthcare evolution of a revolution (pp.199). Morgan James Publishing.

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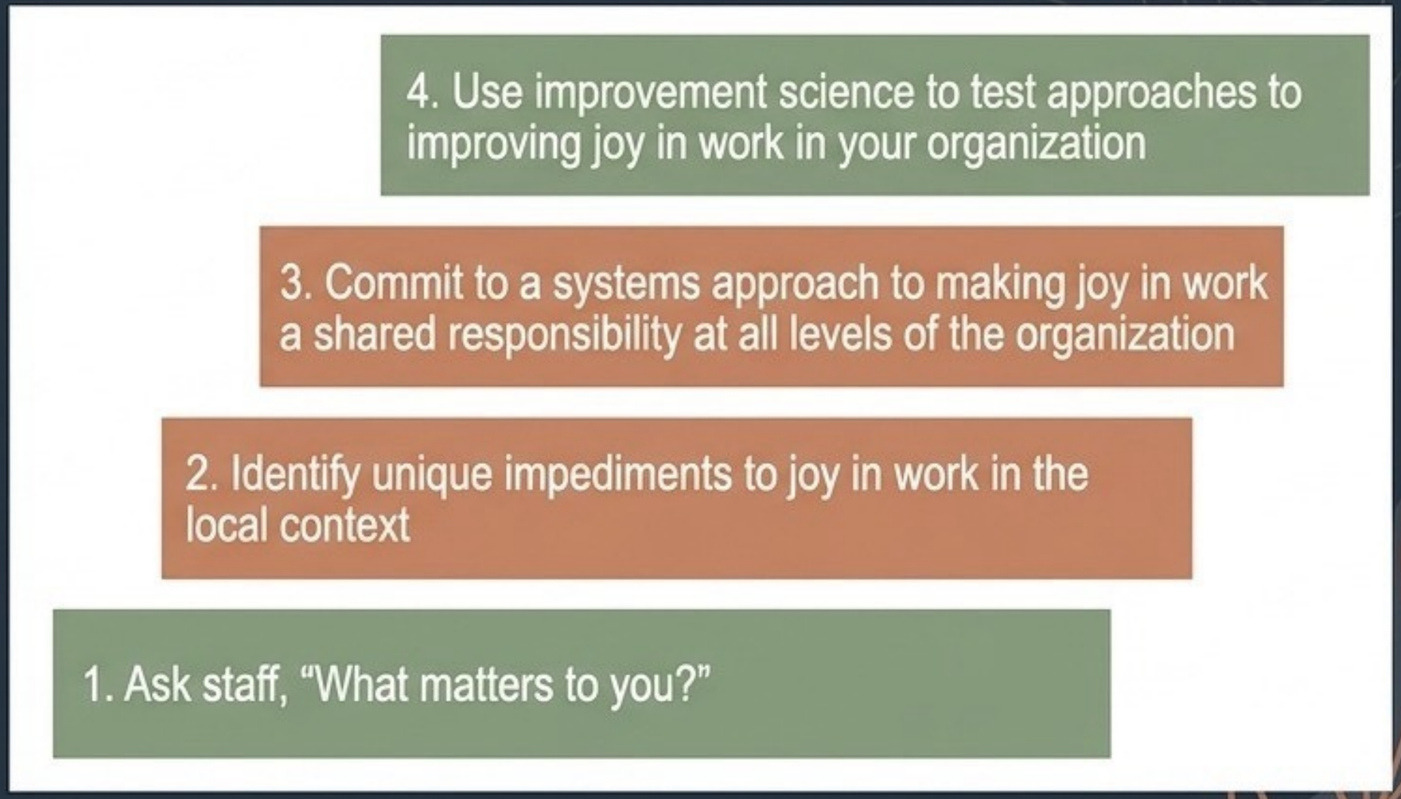
JOY FRAMEWORK

Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) Framework

Why JOY matters…

"Joy is about more than the absence of burnout…it is the presence of meaning, connection and purpose."



Perlo J, Balik B, Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J, Feeley D. IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work. IHI White Paper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Healthcare Improvement; 2017.

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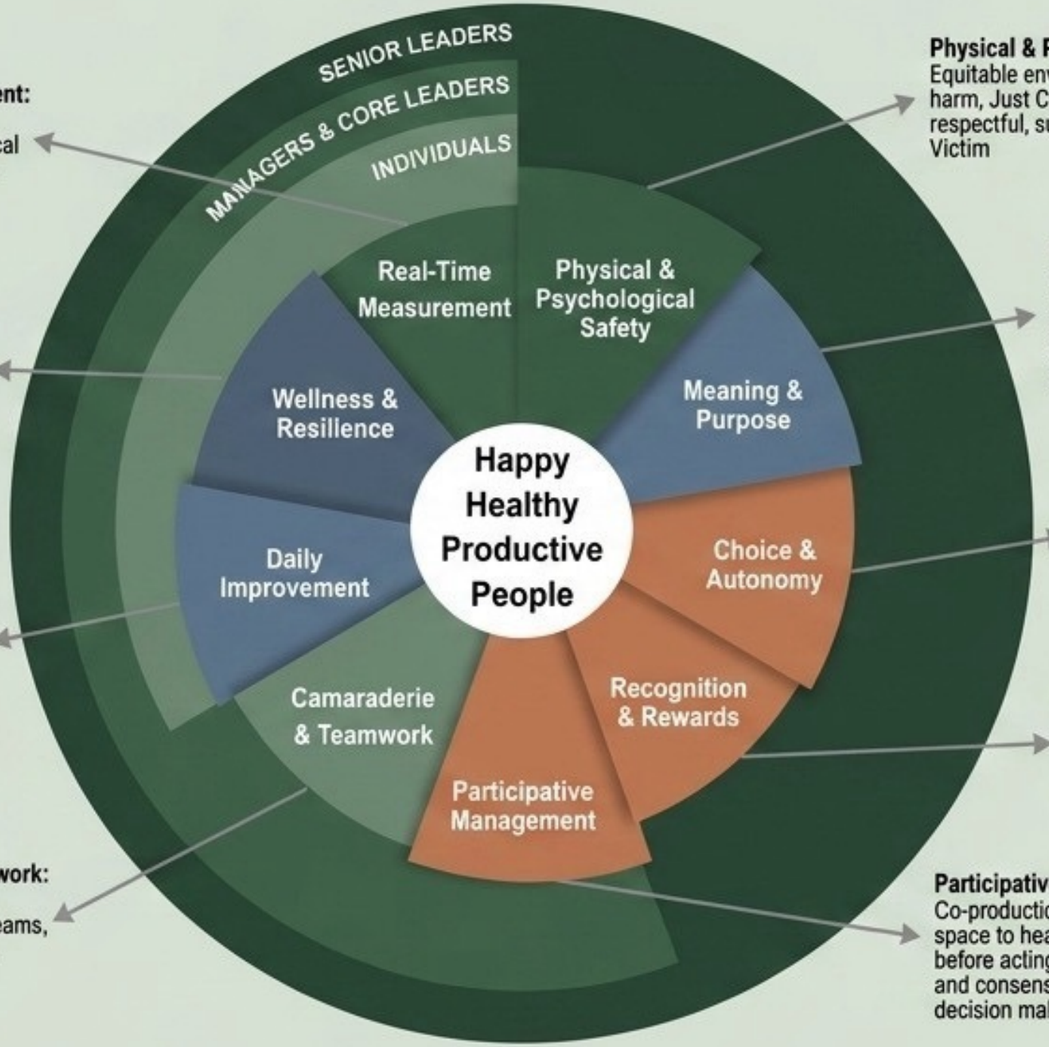
IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work



Real-Time Measurement:
Contributing to regular feedback systems, radical candor in assessments

Wellness & Resiliencs:
Health and wellness self-care, cultivating resilience and stress management, role modeling values, system appreciation for whole person and family, workfiife balance, mental health (depression, anxiety) support

Daily Improvement:
Employing knowledge of improvement science and critical eye to recognize opportunities to improve, regular, proactive learning from defects and successes

Camaraderie & Teamwork:
Commensarily, social cohesion, productive teams, shared understanding, trusting relationships

Physical & Psychological Safety:
Equitable environment, free from harm, Just Culture that is safe and respectful, support for the Second Victim

Meaning & Purpose
Daily work is connected to what called individuals to practice, line of sight to organization mission and goals, constancy of purpose

Choice & Autonomy
Environment supports choice and flexibility to work, hours, and use of electronic health records

Recognition & Rewards:
Leaders understand daily work, recognizing what team members are doing, and celebrating outcomes

Participative Management:
Co-production of joy, leaders create space to hear, listen, and involve before acting, clear communication and consensus building as a part of decision making

IHI - Institute for Healthcare Improvement

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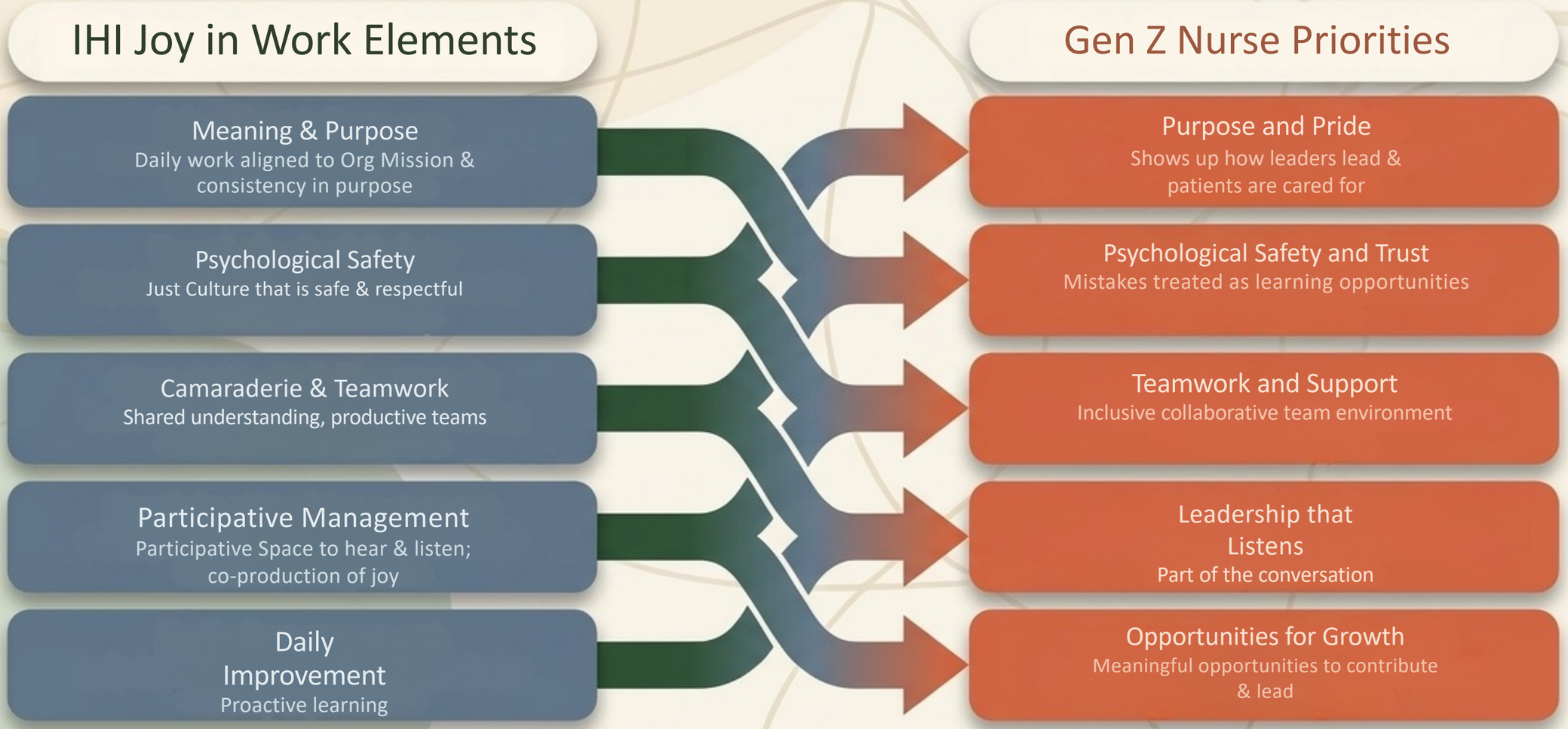
Alignment: IHI Framework & Gen Z Priorities

Connecting systemic joy with generational retention.



Sources (IHI Framework) aligned with Sources (PressGaney 2025).

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IHI JOY IN WORK NURSING EDUCATION EXEMPLAR

Operationalizing Joy in Work: Identifying & Resolving Academic "Pebbles in the Shoe"

STEP 1 — DISCOVERY

Asking What Matters

- Faculty joy in work team formed
- Reflective staff surveys
- Anonymous pebble boards

STEP 2 — IDENTIFICATION

Targeting Clinical Paperwork

- Grading named as top frustration
- Heavy after-hours workload
- Students called it busy work

STEP 3 — REDESIGN

The ClIP Clinical Project

- 6 faculty formed ClIP
- Tested via PDSA cycles
- Real-time CJR, aligned to NGN

EVALUATION & MEASURED OUTCOMES (ClIP PROJECT RESULTS)

Real-Time Feedback
Immediate clinical coaching during active shifts

Less After-Hours Grading
Evaluation moved entirely into clinical hours

High Student Satisfaction
Faster, actionable feedback & manageable workload

Kargo, J., Kuhn, S., Lacue, S., & Peterman, D. (2020). Implementing and sustaining Joy in Work. Sigma Repository (Penn State College of Nursing).

Role Model: Strategies to Cultivate Joy

Carve out time on your calendar

Have mission-driven meetings

Stay close to the evidence & be curious

Stay committed to purpose & life-long learning

Seek out what inspires you

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HOPE & LEADERSHIP

Empowering Hope: A Real Act of Imagination

"A real act of imagination. Looks at the evidence and it doesn't look good at all. Take a leap of faith to create new possibilities based on visions to allow people to engage in heroic actions." – Dr. Cornell West

Tell Me More with Kelly Corrigan | Anna Deavere Smith | Season 3 | Episode 1 | PBS

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Kaye Herth’s Hope Paradigm Model (2005)

Leading from a 'Center of Hope' — Integrating Affective, Cognitive, and Affiliative Dimensions

AFFECTIVE DIMENSION
Feelings of possibility & optimism

COGNITIVE DIMENSION
Goal-setting & practical pathways

AFFILIATIVE DIMENSION
Relational trust & connectedness

PILLAR I: STRENGTHENING THE HOPING SELF
Internal Leadership Resilience

- **Interconnectedness:** Deep connection to self, mission, and colleagues.
- **Dual Goal Alignment:** Balancing daily tasks with meaningful legacy goals.
- **Lightheartedness:** Using mirthful spirit and humor to maintain perspective.
- **Reflective Practice:** Pausing to cultivate emotional balance and clarity.

PILLAR II: MINIMIZING HOPE INHIBITORS
Removing Systemic Obstacles

- **Energy Sappers:** Identifying & reducing sources of systemic burnout.
- **Powerlessness:** Supporting teams through structural change & loss.
- **Upholding Personhood:** Preserving dignity; eliminating devaluation.
- **Asset-Based Focus:** Shifting culture from deficit to potential.

PILLAR III: CREATING HOPE IN OTHERS
Contagious Influence & Trust

- **Narrative Listening:** Hearing individual stories; creating psychological safety.
- **Leadership as 'Opener':** Catalyzing new possibilities vs. rigid control.
- **Contagious Hope:** Modeling authentic hope to build reciprocal trust.
- **Incremental Wins:** Celebrating small steps forward to maintain momentum.

Herth, K. A. (2005). Leadership from a Hope Paradigm. Minnesota State University.

Leading with Hope: An Ethical Imperative

Connecting Hope-Centered Leadership to Nursing Ethics and Faculty Sustainability.

ETHICAL OBLIGATION

ANA Code of Ethics & Human Flourishing

- **Moral Duty of Hope (Fowler, 2025):** Hope is not a passive sentiment; it is an active ethical obligation connecting leadership competencies directly to workplace flourishing.
- **ANA Provision 5 Alignment:** Leaders have a moral duty to foster environments of inherent dignity, self-respect, authenticity, and professional competence.
- **ANA Provision 9 Alignment:** Enacting institutional policies that support human flourishing, social justice, and health equity across academic nursing.
- **Reciprocal Flourishing:** Creating interdependent workplace relationships where both faculty and leaders are mutually strengthened.

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Translating Hope into Faculty Sustainability

- **Well-Informed Hope:** Leaders stay continuously informed on workforce trends, fulfilling personal accountability without succumbing to false hope or despair.
- **AONL Competency Shift:** Enhancing standard leadership optimism with active, goal-directed hope to propel adaptive decision-making and innovation.
- **Reframing the Reference Point:** Guiding faculty from a 'half-empty' perception to a 'half-full' probability of success, empowering self-directed goals.
- **Long-Term Faculty Retention:** Instilling systemic hope transforms abstract organizational vision into tangible, daily support for nursing educators.

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LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

Strategies to Empower Hope

Center on a common vision

Align the team around shared goals and values for collective purpose.

Mentor with intention

Foster guided relationships for growth and support.

Encourage safe spaces to brainstorm

Promote open dialogue and creative thinking without judgment.

Try, Learn, Celebrate and Affirm

Embrace experimentation, recognize progress, and validate efforts.

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Hope in Action: Reviving Coral Reefs

The Evidence: A Bleak Reality

Climate change has ravaged marine ecosystems, leaving once-vibrant coral reefs bleached, fractured, and ecologically silent.

A Leap of Faith and Common Vision

Scientists deploy innovative underwater speakers, broadcasting the specific acoustic signatures of healthy reefs to call marine life back to the degraded areas.

Heroic Actions and New Possibilities

The targeted sound technology successfully attracts vital species, accelerating biodiversity return and physically reviving the reef ecosystem from the brink.

Reference: PBS NewsHour. (2023, November 8). How underwater speakers are helping revive coral reefs devastated by climate change. [Video]. PBS. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-underwater-speakers-are-helping-revive-coral-reefs-devastated-by-climate-change

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Recommended Books & Resources

Print Media

Heath, C. & Heath, D. (2017). The power of moments.

Lama, D. Tutu, D., & Abrams, D. (2016). The book of joy.

Robinson, J.P., Kenner C., Pressler, J.L. (2020). Nursing deans on leading.

Digital/Audio Media

Cultivating Joy in Your Nursing Career | The Nurse Keith Show, EPS 120

The Handoff - Episode 59: Becoming an “ends of the earth leader”

IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work | IHI

Nurses in Pursuit of JOY: An Attitude that Defies All Circumstances | LinkedIn

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