

Leader to Honor

Pam Thompson, MS, RN, CENP, FAAN

Bob Dent, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, CENP, FACHE

It is my privilege to interview a great nurse leader, Pam Thompson, about her plans in the next phase of her life after retiring as American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE) chief executive officer (CEO)/American Hospital Association (AHA) chief nursing officer (CNO). She plans to keep life simple and reflect on how she might best add value to the nursing profession. She assured me she was not looking for another full-time job. She loves her work with young leaders, teaching, and her international work. “I want to better understand how I might contribute to this work,” Pam says. Although writing may be an unknown exploration for her, she has a lot to say and will begin journaling her insights. She is only going to do the things she loves to do but not at the same pace. Bob, Pam’s husband, tells her she cannot go from “hair-on-fire” (90 mph) to stop. Pam said she has been practicing. Pam has a love for endangered species and plans to raise bees in her retirement. Other simple pleasures she plans to indulge include volunteering, learning Spanish, and remodeling her kitchen (she and Bob love to cook). I know you will enjoy hearing about her and hearing from her journey as she answers my interview questions.



BD: Who helped shape your outlook on nursing leadership?

PT: My first mentor recognized leadership qualities in me that I didn’t recognize. She helped me see my leadership behaviors and identify my strengths and areas for improvement based on her belief that I would take her job when she left—which is what happened. She has been a mentor to me ever since and has continued to help me shape my leadership growth and

development. She also taught me the role of a mentor and the importance of asking the right questions, rather than giving the answer.

BD: Tell me how you first got involved with AONE?

PT: During the interview for a leadership position at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, one of the senior nursing leaders there told me that my resume was excellent except for one thing—I was not involved in my professional association

and because of that, she couldn’t support me. I was hired into the position and immediately got involved in AONE and the New Hampshire Organization of Nurse Executives. I took her advice to heart and became an active member in both, eventually becoming president of NHONE [New Hampshire Organization of Nurse Executives] and on the national board of AONE. At the same time, because of my role in NHONE, I became active

in the New Hampshire Hospital Association and was elected chair of that board and the New Hampshire Foundation for Healthy Communities. I will always be grateful for her honesty and her encouragement for me to become active. I would never have guessed I would eventually be the CEO of AONE!

BD: What was your first memory of your work with AONE?

PT: I had a poster accepted for the AONE annual meeting. It was about a multidisciplinary task force I had created and led. I was so impressed with the meeting that I continued to be involved, volunteering for committees.

BD: What are some of your favorite memories with AONE?

PT: I have loved the board meetings and the AONE annual meeting each year. It is the opportunity to work with so many outstanding leaders that have inspired and encouraged me to be and do my best. I have wonderful memories of working with each president and seeing how they each leave their mark on the association and nursing. I have loved to work with staff to create new programs and services, and watch

them get implemented. These memories make me smile and truly appreciate how lucky I have been to be part of this work. I also have very fond memories of all of the international work that I have done with AONE. The People to People delegations to Russia, China, India, South Africa, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Costa Rica; the International Council of Nursing meetings in Denmark, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, and South Korea. And especially the leadership development programs that we have offered in Croatia (a 20-year relationship for me), Mozambique, and Tanzania. These experiences have enriched my view of nursing and created amazing friendships. I always learn more than I can offer in return.

BD: What has surprised you most about working with AONE?

PT: I continue to be surprised by all of the opportunities that are available to us. In preparation for my 10th anniversary with AONE, I went back and looked at my calendar for year 1 and compared it with year 10. It was amazing how many people and organizations we worked with 10 years

later, and I know that it has continued to grow. The breadth of AONE's influence was far greater than I ever anticipated.

BD: If you could change one thing about AONE or nursing leadership, what would it be?

PT: For nursing leadership, I would wish for more leaders to find their voice and get involved with the health care transformation that is occurring in every arena. Nursing has so much to offer, but we can't wait to be invited to tables, we must bring our own chair, and join and lead the conversations.

BD: Why are you so passionate about the AONE Foundation and the fellowship programs?

PT: I am passionate about the work that the Foundation does, especially regarding the fellowships. The nurse manager fellowship is identifying nurse managers and helping them develop their leadership capacity so that they can step into more and more leadership roles. They are our future. I learn from each session and am convinced that the future will be in good hands. Each class stands out for their intelligence, passion, insight,



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