

Leader to Honor

Roxane Spitzer, PhD, RN, MBA, MA, FAAN

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RA: You have had a stellar nursing and hospital administration career—please share with our readers your journey.

RS: My journey was never intended to turn out the way it did. The first time I entered a hospital to see my mother when she had a baby, I felt like I belonged there. I was all of 10 years old, and my desire to be a ballerina was not going to happen. I loved the order, the caring nurses, and believe it or not, even the cap in those days; a symbol

that time. After graduation, I went directly into a staff nurse position on a medical surgical ward. (The staff wanted to see how the college wonder would practice.) I then practiced in the medical intensive care unit, and within 1 year, became the evening manager of the unit and then the evening supervisor. That was an amazing job; I learned how to clinically respond to whatever needed to happen, including the unusual events requiring some administrative knowledge.

It is my privilege to interview a great nurse leader, mentor and colleague; Dr. Roxane Spitzer. Dr. Spitzer has had a long and stellar career leaving her “footprint” on the profession of nursing and healthcare administration. She has mentored many nurses as they progressed on their career track. I know you will enjoy hearing about her and hearing from her leadership journey as she answers my interview questions.

that later seemed to me to be one of subservience. My goal was to enter a diploma school in New York City and practice immediately after. That was not to be: I had an extremely strong mother who insisted I go to college for nursing; this was a total oddity at

Fortunately, I had my first mentor who showed me the ropes. I loved cardiac nursing and was admitted to Adelphi, my alma mater, to become a clinical specialist in that area. Circumstances again changed my direction. With 2 small boys to support, one of my good friends told me that a hospital was looking for an assistant director to the director. I readily accepted for financial reasons, and my career moved into a totally different arena: the management realm.

I became the director of nursing 6 months later at a rather young age with no formal management experience. There I met through a book the man who was to become my mentor in later years. Peter Drucker's book *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* became my management bible, and I read it from cover to cover and referred to it for guidance. It was a Godsend to me. It made my leadership career. I went back to school after having my third child and received my masters in nursing service administration and returned to the hospital that started it all. At the age of 40 with

always a taste of the gypsy in me, I decided I did not want to live and die within 40 miles of where I was born, so I accepted a chief nursing officer position in a small town in Illinois that looked close to Chicago on the map. How little we native city New Yorkers knew about anything west of the Hudson River. So, when the dean of University of Illinois came 1 year later to recruit me to the Chicago campus, I felt rescued.

This was my second mentor, Dean Helen Grace; she literally pointed me in the right direction. I couldn't have been more grateful. I learned so much there, and to this day, the mentoring and support of my Chicago colleagues will always have a special place in my heart. I had tremendous experiences there, including:

1. Organizing a move from 3 separate hospital areas into a brand-new building. It went smoothly, and we all had a good time in the process.
2. Learning to manage and work with 3 separate unions
3. I was delighted to be invited on a People to People tour with the

American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE). I had joined the organization while in New York with my first position, knowing I needed the guidance and support of other colleagues. The trip was eventful in many ways. I was recommended to Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles as they were recruiting a new director of nursing.

When I stepped off the plane, I fell in love with California; I accepted the position, and with a remarkable team, turned around the nursing service. This was not without incident. We had a union drive because of some radical changes that were necessary to create equity among the staff and a new model of care delivery.

My CEO Stuart Marylander became my third important mentor. He supported me throughout some painful changes, and we did prevail against the union. I believe with my staff we designed the first executive nursing council, at least in the literature. I was young and full of what was then innovative concepts and had a fabulous team, including Linda Burnes Bolton, who

has more than surpassed me. I did have the support of my peers and CEO to make some radical changes.

I always loved to write and developed my speaking skills, and felt it important to share with others what worked and what did not. I had a keen interest in the business and finance end of health care, wanting to establish both an effective and efficient nursing service, and wrote a book on productivity and several articles. I became known for my financial ability as a nurse, although many of my peers in nursing did not support this at that time. With the backing of Cedars-Sinai, I earned an MBA and a PhD under the mentorship of Dr. Peter Drucker at Claremont University in California. What a remarkable experience, and what a great man and mentor.

My goal was to become a CEO as I wanted to experiment with organizing multidisciplinary teams to share work and erase the previous isolationism that prevented nursing (often due to nursing in those times) from participating in problem sharing and solutions within and as a part of the whole organization. I was fortunate to become Cedars-Sinai's first woman vice presi-



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