

# Presidential leadership

## Lessons and insights for the profession from ANA's past presidents



**OVER** the course of my career, I've had the privilege of interacting with the best and brightest in our profession. The session I moderated at the June American Nurses Association (ANA) Membership Assembly in Washington, DC, now moves to the top of the list of my most memorable and inspiring events. It was a panel discussion with eight of the past ANA presidents whose terms of office spanned 1978 to 2014. These remarkable nursing leaders offered worldly wisdom, lessons learned, and reflections on exceptional experiences that framed their tenures in office. Their cumulative experiences serve as an invaluable repository of nursing and American history.

I'm in respectful awe of these unique leaders, some I know very well and some I don't. I must admit that before our discussion, I had limited understanding or appreciation for their specific backgrounds, how they became so involved with ANA, and what they would alter if they could go back in time. Here's a sample of their insights into what was, what is, and what could be.

### Lead by example

Several of the past presidents joined ANA right out of nursing school. At the time, you weren't considered a professional unless you belonged to your professional association. But being a member wasn't the only point. Being visible, building and nurturing relationships, and promoting the profession were important behaviors then, just as they are now. All of the former presidents noted how important it is to be good role models, to lead by example, and to be hopeful and positive, because nurses are looking up to you.

### Be prepared

Everyone understood their role includes influencing and shaping the profession. To fulfill that role, paying attention to the details, doing your homework, and taking nothing for granted are keys to success.

### Use strong interpersonal skills

Being grateful, communicating often, paying attention, and listening carefully are skills the past presidents use every day. Listening carefully can't be overemphasized, even to feedback you may not want to hear; you need to listen to have a balanced view and drive good decision-making.

### Business as un-usual

Business as usual no longer fits this fast-paced world, and that includes questioning the status quo. To position the profession for the future, try new models and new ways of doing things. Don't worry about failure, because failure can inform later successful efforts. Stay nimble and responsive to new opportunities. Be a risk taker, even with your own success in jeopardy, for the good of the profession.

### Influential leadership

No matter what role or position you are in, you are a leader and you influence those around you. Leadership is all about influence, and every one of us can learn how to be more influential leaders. These leaders understand that fact.

I firmly believe that we have much more to learn from the legacies of those who have reached the summit of nursing leadership and achievement—ANA president. For their service, for their vision, for their passionate voices, which to this day still drive the profession, I am eternally grateful. I hope you are, too.

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Editor-in-Chief



Lillie Gelinas (top left), with past ANA presidents: Top row (l to r): Mary Foley, Virginia Betts, Karen Daley, Rebecca Patton. Bottom row (l to r): Lucille Joel, Barbara Blakeney, Barbara Nichols, Beverly Malone.