

Global Followership Conference

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE APRIL 25-26, 2024

LIGHTNING TALK: Exploring the Personal Side of Followership in Healthcare **Presented by Eric K. Kaufman, Virginia Tech**

Short Description for Session Program

Engaged followership in healthcare can be life-saving, which I experienced firsthand when my spouse was in a severe car accident. In the intensive care unit (ICU), doctors often deferred to nurses' expertise in conveying patient needs, despite the nurses lacking prescription authority. When my spouse was transferred to a new facility, I trusted the new medical team over my in-laws' concerns, which was a challenging decision regarding who to follow. In the decades since, I have noticed many followership moments, including the regularity of therapists proposing treatments to doctors, blurring leading and following. The personal accounts help make followership practical.

Abstract

In 2001, while in my early twenties, I gained a first-hand look and experience with followership in healthcare. My wife was in a tragic car accident and was air-lifted to the nearest trauma center, where she underwent multiple surgeries and was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU). There was an entire team of medical professionals caring for her, including numerous doctors representing different specialties. While I might have expected some deference (i.e., following behavior) to a lead doctor for the team, I was surprised to see how much the medical doctors followed the lead of the nurses. The ICU nurses were in the best position to observe and assess all the care and related needs of my wife. Although the nurses did not have the authority to prescribe medications and treatments, they were proactive in communicating these needs to the doctors, and the doctors trusted the nurses' recommendations/requests. After two weeks in the ICU, I experienced my own followership moment, when my wife was moved to a new facility, with a new medical care team; and there were questions about how well my wife was fairing through this transition. My in-laws, who were the legal guardians of my wife for 18+ years, were deeply concerned and believed we should take measures to get my wife moved out of the new facility and into an emergency room. However, because my wife and I were married 14 months earlier, I was legally the one who could make decisions on my wife's care. Against the wishes of my in-laws, I trusted (i.e. followed) the advice of the medical care team at the new facility. Fortunately, the situation improved, and I have a positive relationship with my in-laws

to this day (more than twenty years later). It was not until my study of the followership literature that I was able to fully understand the dynamics of leadership and followership that contributed to my wife's care and recovery. She continues to engage in therapy on a weekly basis, and the interplay between leadership and followership is apparent in the communication that occurs between doctors and therapists. Technically, the medical doctors are responsible for prescribing the therapy. However, they first prescribe an evaluation, which is conducted by the therapist and then proposes a treatment plan to the doctor, who technically prescribes the treatment that the therapist carries out. Do they see these interactions as leading and following? Do patients recognize how their own willingness to be a proactive follower influences their own health and outcomes? These decisions and roles are not easy, but they can make the difference between life and death.



The Dance of Leading & Following

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Courageous Followership

4

One Dimensional Followership

Diehard

Activist

Participant

Bystander

Isolate

Level of Engagement

Dr. David Leitner

Engaged Followership

5

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with presenter Erin Barry and moderator Sharna Fabiano

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How to AID Leadership and Followership in Multidisciplinary Healthcare Teams

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FROM THE EDITED VOLUME

Multi-Disciplinary Teamwork in the Healthcare Setting
[Working Title]

Dr. Neil Grunberg

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Slide Notes

1. Engaged followership in healthcare can be life-saving, and this lightning talk shares my personal experience with that.
2. In August, 2001, I became a reluctant observer of the healthcare field when my wife, Shevon, was in a severe car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. She was life-flighted to a trauma care center and underwent multiple surgeries. When I first saw her in the intensive care unit (ICU), she was in a coma and on life support. On the screen are a few of the headlines from news stories following the accident and my wife's recovery.
3. While a team of doctors were officially in charge of my wife's care, I quickly realized the nurses were the ones who coordinated the activity. In fact, on multiple occasions, the nurse on duty called the doctor to explain my wife's needs and request their official prescription of a medication or treatment. So, the dance of leading and following was observable between the doctors of different specialties, between the doctors and the nurses, and between the nurses, as they transitioned from one 12-hour shift to the next. For those unfamiliar with the dance analogy, I encourage you to check out Sharna Fabiano's video on "Followership and Tango." I also see connections with ballet, where the male dancer is often supporting and showcasing the female dancer, helping them to shine.
4. Many of us are familiar with Ira Chaleff's book, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders*. Among the various dimensions of courageous followership, Ira has included the "Courage to Assume Responsibility" and the "Courage to Challenge." Looking back, I can clearly see these dimensions in my role following the accident. As a young man in my early twenties, I was faced with many decisions and responsibilities for the care of my bride. Shevon's parents were supportive throughout the process, but there was one weekend that tested our courage. After several weeks at the trauma center, Shevon was moved to a rehabilitation hospital. The move occurred over a holiday weekend, which meant there were relatively few staff on site during the first couple days in the facility. Because Shevon was unable to communicate at the time, it was hard to know whether or not she was in distress, and we wondered whether she was getting all of the care she needed in this new facility. Shevon's parents checked with their friends in the healthcare field, and they were encouraging calling 911 to get her removed from the facility. However, the medical staff at the rehabilitation hospital were insistent that Shevon was being cared for properly. It was up to me to decide whether to trust and support the medical staff at this new hospital or to align with the advice my in-laws were encouraging me to take. Knowing who and how to courageously follow is stressful. We ended up sticking with the rehabilitation hospital, and it ended up being a great experience there.
5. As my wife transitioned from in-patient care at the rehabilitation hospital to outpatient care, the importance of engaged followership on the part of the patient became even more apparent. Therapists (and other healthcare professionals) had only a few hours per week with my wife, which meant her recovery was heavily dependent on following through with exercises at home. And, that meant those of us caring for my wife at home also needed to be active and engaged followers. It was important for us to ask questions of the healthcare professionals to make sure we understood what was needed. And, it was important for us to report to them what we were seeing and experiencing when Shevon was away from the healthcare facilities.
6. As followership gains prominence around the world, I am pleased that the healthcare industry has recognized the importance of followership in the success of their work. Last year, the International Leadership Association hosted a webinar on "Followership in Healthcare: How We Got Here, Where We Are Now, Where We Can Go Next." Also, among publications earlier this year, I noticed a dissertation study on "Followership of Nurses in Saudi Arabia: A Mixed Methods Study." Also, in a book on *Multi-Disciplinary Teamwork in the Healthcare Setting*, there is a chapter on "How to AID Leadership and Followership in Multidisciplinary Healthcare Teams," and it recognizes the many followership roles in healthcare, including doctors, nurses, patients, and family members. I look forward to seeing more literature in this area.