

## President's Message

# The presidential partnership: leaving a trail



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The words change and transition are used frequently to describe a shift in focus or organizational necessity. However, as leaders, we know these words are not synonyms. According to the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL, 2020), "Change is defined as the situations and occurrences that impact organizations and individuals (CCL, 2020)." Change encompasses the adaptation from the previous way of doing things to the new way and should be met with flexibility. "Transition is the internal psychological process of adapting to a new situation, (CCL, 2020). While transitions can occur quickly or gradually, they address the process of "how we get there (CCL, 2020)." For the American Academy of Nursing (Academy), the psychological process and applying a growth mindset led to a strong presidential transition.

### How We Got Here

Planning for a transition is key. Transitions that are intentional lead to strong governance, create consistency, and provide purposeful growth to achieve the organization's goals and objectives. At the Academy's Business meeting on October 9, 2021, the gavel was

officially passed from the President to the President-Elect. This symbolized that a new leader is at the helm. What was not seen was the work that had been done to create this transition. It began with the presidency of Dr. Karen Cox and her vision to have a thoughtful transition that would benefit the Academy's leadership trajectory. Regularly connecting with the President-Elect to enhance the decision-making process, Dr. Cox envisioned the success of the Academy coming from, in-part, the strength of the President and President-Elect partnership. In the last six months of Dr. Cox's Academy presidency, the frequency of collaboration was increased by having the President-Elect join a weekly call between the CEO and President so that the baton handoff was seamless.

This model was followed during our tenure as President and President-Elect. In some ways, it was heightened by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As was true for many organizations, the Academy had to be nimble, responsive, and set the right priorities given the economic and social pressures. Some of these decisions had to be made quickly with the best evidence and data at the time. Having a strong partnership to vet rapid calls for action was beneficial to reinforce the knowledge carried forward for future decision making. Particularly important were the financial implications for the association in the context of COVID-19. For example, the decision was made to add the President-Elect as a member of the association's Finance Committee. The Academy President serves as ex-officio and adding the President-Elect as a member strengthened the leadership transition. The President-Elect, coming into the President's role, is better grounded in the organization's financial standing, a core tenant of good governance.

The success of a leadership transition is built on the actions taken and at the same time, the philosophy that guided the process to get there.

### Embracing a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset is more than being positive and open-minded. Organizations that adopt a growth over a fixed mindset are committed to learning and innovation. When individuals embrace a growth mindset, they believe that, "through hard work, good strategies, and input from others (Dwek, 2016, ¶ 2)," they can evolve as professionals and leaders. For the Academy's presidential transition, learning from each other was

key to a healthy leadership changeover and necessary when facing a global pandemic. The organization had to adapt, in real time, to the conditions placed upon us by the pandemic. When applying a growth mindset, organizations engage in risk-taking and understand that not all of the risks will be worthwhile (Dwek, 2016). The reward is what was learned regardless of the outcome of the original goal (Dwek, 2016).

Looking back, the Academy had to take risks. The Board knew that moving the organization's conference and induction ceremony completely virtual would be difficult, and a number of scenarios were discussed. To usher in this change, we came together as President and President-Elect to be a strong face for the organization both on screen and in empowering innovation. The Academy learned that the voice of the Fellow was a meaningful addition to our ceremony. Traditionally, new Fellows in the Academy would walk across the stage as the President or President-Elect read a few short sentences about their career, validating the Fellow's significant contributions. In 2020, we knew this was not the right model. Everyone had been feeling the heavy weight of the pandemic, and in the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, hope for the future would be a powerful way to uplift our entire community.

Hearing from the new Academy Fellows in their own words about their hopes for the future and greatest lessons learned was a resounding success. Simply stated, it was more meaningful. It gave voice to the individual and inspired those watching (over 1,000). It became the model that the organization employed again in 2021. Moreover, the ability to livestream the ceremony so that families and friends could watch the Living Legends and Induction ceremonies from anywhere around the world will be incorporated as a fiscal priority in the future. These changes, while a risk, demonstrated that the Academy was fully embracing a growth mindset.

## Focusing on the Future

The transition from one leader to the next must also be focused forward. An organization must prepare itself for unknown scenarios. Take, for example, the development of the COVID-19 vaccine. Its availability and efficacy were feasible because of decades of previous research on mRNA vaccines. A foundation must be laid even when the use or reward is not readily seen.

In the case of the Academy, efforts had been underway since Dr. Cox's presidency to evaluate and modernize the fellowship selection process. The magnitude of the project is so foundational to the honorific society of the Academy that it has continued to be a priority in both of our presidencies.

Thinking about the foundation of the organization, a thoughtful look at the Academy's governance was critical. This body of work, to review the bylaws and consider the organization's overall governance, needed time and resources. Similar to the review of the fellow selection process, it will carry on into the next presidency. What is clear in both of these cases is that preparing the organization for the future was the priority, not under whose presidency the work was accomplished. This is the mark of a successful transition. The groundwork laid sets the organization up for a better future.

Our partnership as President and President-Elect was not only a successful model for the Academy, but one that was meaningful to us both. As the torch is passed to Dr. Linda Scott, we look forward to another transition that will shape the work of the Academy. A reflection point from this discussion can be summarized well in a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

## REFERENCES

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