NURSE EDITORS are an elite group. While representing less than 1 percent of all RNs, they are the primary gatekeepers of nursing knowledge. They shape the future of nursing by deciding what will be published and not published, when it will be published, and who their advisors will be when making those decisions. By their actions, editors support or change the status quo, advance or impede professional growth and development, and decide what you will and will not be able to read.

Nurse editors are generally responsible for the acquisition, development, and publication of information that is relevant and useful to their journal readership. Work-related activities have one goal—making the editor’s journal the most credible, well-respected, interesting, innovative, and informative publication available to readers. Accomplishing this goal and responsibility is a multifaceted process. Primary and ongoing editorial tasks are:

- matching a manuscript’s content to the expertise of one or more manuscript reviewers,
- reading the manuscript in light of the reviewers’ critique and various selection criteria,
- selecting which manuscripts, among the many submitted, will be published,
- developmentally editing the selected manuscripts,
- communicating publication decisions to authors and reviewers,
- reviewing revised manuscripts,
- scheduling manuscripts for publication,
- submitting manuscripts to production, and
- overseeing editorial content, quality assurance, and improvement processes.

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Soliciting, evaluating, editing, and publishing manuscripts are the core of editorial work. However, doing the core work well requires the application of a broad knowledge and skill base such as the following:

- creating a system to keep on the cutting edge of the readership’s evolving role responsibilities and work as well as trends and issues in society, health care, and nursing and how they might affect the journals’ readership;
- establishing and maintaining relationships with process stakeholders—authors, advisors, manuscript reviewers, readers, production personnel, the publisher, and knowledgeable people in the field;
- establishing the journal’s visibility and image in the nursing community through high-quality content and professional activities;
- establishing and maintaining processes to acquire, assess, develop, and publish manuscripts;
- maintaining the quality of editorial content during the production process through interface with key production personnel such as the publisher, production editor, designer, typesetter, and advertising, circulation, sales, and permissions staff;
- being a colleague, mentor, teacher, cheerleader, or coach to authors, staff, advisors, manuscript reviewers, and correspondents;
- contributing to the advancement of nursing through scholarly work and involvement in professional associations;
- developing and implementing new products and programs for the readership;
- evaluating and improving processes;
- developing and maintaining information management systems; and
- managing the editorial office.

It was only after mastery of the technical skills of editorship that I, as editor in chief of *The Journal of Nursing Administration* (JONA) and *Nurse Educator*, started to realize the leadership obligation inherent in the role.

**The Making of an Editor**

My work as a nurse editor started 15 years ago. As my doctoral studies wound down, I started looking for part-time work, planning to return full-time to nursing after graduation. I took what I thought was temporary work in January 1981. I responded to an advertisement in the *Boston Globe* for an “assistant to the editor, nursing education.” This ad appealed to me for several reasons; the most obvious being my superior qualifications for the job! After all, I had just written a lengthy dissertation (that certainly took care of the editor part); I had earned a doctorate (that seemed to qualify me to be an “assistant” to anyone), and I had taught in a school of nursing (the nursing education part).

Blissfully ignorant but fully confident, I had my first and then second interviews and got the job as an assistant editor for the journal, *Nurse Educator*. Being a fast learner, I quickly learned I knew next to nothing. However, my nursing education actually gave me the basic skills I needed to be a successful editor. In nursing, I had learned how to deal with people; how to teach, motivate, and set goals; how to assess, diagnose, plan, implement, and evaluate the work at hand; solve problems and think critically; gather, coordi-
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nate, and deploy resources; and care for people. These skills, easily applicable in any setting, facilitated my entry into health care publishing and made me a valuable employee. When I received my doctoral degree, I did not go back to work in a health care institution. I had found the work I loved; I was a nurse editor.

Fortunately for me, the publisher of Nurse Educator was also the publisher of nursing books, national conferences, and The Journal of Nursing Administration. Within two years, as one of the few nurses on staff, I was editor in chief of JONA and director of the editorial and marketing department. With responsibility for all types of products for two markets—nursing administration and nursing education, I learned about production, circulation, advertising, marketing, sales, human resource management, and finances. Soon thereafter, my two journals were bought by the J.B. Lippincott Company. I was asked to stay with the two journals.

Personal Traits

In retrospect, I think that there are certain personal traits that make being an editor professionally and personally rewarding: a love of reading and an excellent grasp of English grammar, composition, and spelling. A large part of an editor’s job is reading professional literature to keep up to date and see what the competition is doing as well as reading manuscripts submitted for publication. Manuscripts have to be edited for grammar, clarity, and conciseness and authors must be helped to express their ideas in the best way possible.

Enjoyment of complexity, change, and multitasking also helps in enacting the editor’s role with a minimum amount of stress. Ongoing problem solving for an editor ranges from the macrolevel (developing and communicating a vision and strategic planning for manuscript acquisition) to the micro-level (copyediting, proofreading typeset pages, and monitoring deadlines). One has to enjoy the excitement that comes with juggling a wide variety of activities every day; doing a million things at the same time, finishing one thing, but starting two more, figuring out how to improvise when what you need or want is not available. Working as a nurse certainly cultivated these natural leanings!

Another personal trait that complements an editor’s work is curiosity about why things are as they are. An editor has to be inquisitive, wondering why is that? so what? who cares? how can it be better? who’s the expert on this? Anything I read or hear, I ask myself how it will affect nursing administration, nursing education, the profession. This questioning process, stemming from curiosity, tends to increase the potential of producing a high-quality, relevant product for readers.

The last important personal traits are liking people and caring about what happens to them. These attributes, which led most of us to choose nursing as a career, are strong motivators to do “what is right” when dealing with people, be they staff, patients, or authors. They contribute to my feeling that the most rewarding part of an editor’s work is
helping others achieve their goal of getting their ideas published. It is a happy and exciting part of the work. Countering this is the equally difficult task of telling authors I am rejecting their manuscripts, knowing a manuscript is often the symbolic heart and soul of an author. When rejecting manuscripts, I try to help authors view publishing as a process, not a one-time event. I put myself in the author’s shoes (and I have been there many times), giving advice and making the experience as positive and developmental as I can.

Every encounter with an author or a colleague holds the promise of being fun, challenging, and rewarding. I appreciate the opportunity to meet and know the best and brightest people in nursing. I always learn something and try to give others something in return. I do not feel entitled to anything based on my position or tenure. I expect to earn others’ respect through my work and my treatment of them. While I certainly have had my bad interpersonal relationship moments as an editor, I am genuinely enthused about life, my work, and nursing; this attitude is more often than not returned by the people I encounter.

My philosophy about being an editor is simple. Without my journal, authors have no vehicle for disseminating their ideas; without authors, I have no product or journal. I have great respect for the time and effort that authors put into their written work. I am thankful that authors send their material to my journals and share their ideas with me. I appreciate and encourage a collegial relationship in which we both give and take. I’ve discovered that I can accomplish this goal best through the help of others—those who are on the front lines (my readers), those who provide administrative support and resources (those at corporate headquarters); those who shape my thinking through their advice, writings, and workshops (my advisors, authors, and those I meet while traveling); and those who financially support the enterprise (subscribers and advertisers).

Leadership Lessons

It turned out that learning the mechanics of being an editor was easy; learning and implementing new work processes were manageable. What was more subtle and difficult to deal with was the role of editor as leader. No one ever mentioned that role; the editorial job focus can very easily be on the concrete tasks necessary to edit and publish a manuscript. As I analyze why, as editor, I am perceived as a leader in nursing, textbook descriptions of leadership and its attributes come to mind. In the early days of my editorship, I was a leader by “association.” Power was vested in the role. As “the one in charge” of two well-known, prestigious professional journals, I found that people much more knowledgeable than me would ask for advice. Eager to have their ideas published, authors would defer to just about anything I wanted.

While I had professional knowledge and self-direction from experience in a variety of nursing jobs, I did not have expert knowledge about the publishing industry or the publishing process. Fortunately, the publisher who first hired me decided my background and personality, plus the referent power of the editor’s role, would suffice until I learned the skills of publishing and editing. In addition to mentoring and teaching me about publishing and the role of editor, this publisher believed in me. I was challenged beyond belief—given little victories and little failures, but always led to believe I could do the job.
However, there was another side to this person as leader; that side was arbitrary, unilateral, dictatorial, often with no compassion. I saw the double-edged sword of power and learned a little about leadership—what I wanted and did not want to be noted for. I saw how a primarily transactional style of leadership works. While the high end of that style (networking, affirmation, and doing and calling in favors) has a definite value, the general style of transformational leadership, with its emphasis on personal and professional values, was more personally suited to my temperament.

Two encounters in my early days as editor also gave me lessons in leadership. The time arrived when I wanted to telephone a few of my editorial advisors for some editorial advice. However, I was really nervous. How could I possibly call people whose textbooks and articles I had read as a student, whose research protocols I had implemented in practice, who were great and venerable “famous nurses”? Who was I to dare impose on their time? However, the “dictator” I mentioned in the prior paragraph was looming in the background as a bigger and more immediate threat than my famous advisors; so, I made the first call. Advisor after advisor was welcoming, friendly, helpful, and supportive. I learned a leadership lesson about accessibility, networking, mentoring, expert knowledge, professional collaboration, and making assumptions. My journals’ “famous nurse” advisors were wonderful people, working hard to advance the profession of nursing through their work; most important, they made time in their busy work lives to be involved in activities that allowed them to share their expertise and help others. I realized authors who submitted their work to me viewed me as I had viewed my advisors—with deference based on stereotyping.

These types of experiences led me to another fork in the leadership road; my style would be collaborative and developmental. I would use my role to showcase, through the pages of my journals, the creative and innovative work of those on the front lines. I would be the expert in the process; those in the field would be the experts in the content. As a team, we would shape the direction of nursing.

Another turning point in my leadership development was getting bad advice from an advisor about a trend. An advisor recommended not publishing one of the earliest articles written about diagnosis-related groups (DRGs). Since the article was well written and my instincts told me DRGs were going to be “hot,” I discussed the negative review with the advisor. I let the advisor talk me out of accepting the article. Within months, it was obvious that DRGs were here to stay. This incident was (and is) never far from consciousness. From it, I realized several more things about leadership.

1. Just because people have positional leadership and power does not mean they are right.
2. Never make a decision based on one person’s advice.
3. Instincts come from vast reserves of your experience and knowledge; ponder sources of “gut feelings” and know when to trust them.
4. The buck does stop at your door. No matter what rationale you use to make a decision and how it turns out, you are accountable and responsible for it.

To be a leader, you have to be prepared to ask forgiveness rather than permission, to
The buck does stop at your door. No matter what rationale you use to make a decision and how it turns out, you are accountable and responsible for it.

take risks and view mistakes as invaluable learning opportunities.

In looking at the role of editor from a leadership perspective, I see universal elements that are common to all leadership roles. Any leader must be able to

- create, articulate, and implement a vision;
- plan strategically for the enterprise’s future;
- design systems to meet goals and accomplish work;
- communicate effectively with many stakeholders;
- develop mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships;
- work through and with others to accomplish goals;
- deal ethically with others;
- have a passion for the work;
- develop and mentor others;
- effect change;
- advocate for and advance the profession; and
- feel a personal sense of accountability and responsibility for the enterprise.

For nurses who would like to get involved in editorial work, I suggest several approaches. Since you need knowledge about the process, get involved by writing manuscripts for a variety of publications. Even if your work is continually rejected, you will learn a great deal about the system, elements of good writing, and editor-author relationships. Volunteer to help the editor: review manuscripts, report on a conference, write a book review. Work on institutional or association newsletters. At trade shows, introduce yourself to editors and express interest in getting involved. Ask friends who are published authors or editors to teach you the process and to alert you to editorial opportunities.

When an editorial position becomes available, often the job is filled by an internal candidate—the associate or assistant editor, a member of the editorial advisory board, a manuscript reviewer, or an active member of an association that publishes a journal. Having volunteer experience and knowledge of processes and procedures will make you a viable candidate. Likewise, publishers are always looking for potential new journals. If you see a market niche not being served, call nursing journal publishers and get their requirements for writing a “new journal proposal.” Develop and become editor of your own journal!

The Future

As in health care, the publishing industry is rife with change, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Editors and publishers of health care information grapple with declining revenue bases, shifting customer demographics, increasing competition and costs, new ways of gathering and disseminating information, new product mixes, strategic alliances, and increasingly sophisticated technology. Among these, I see the editorial role of the future influenced most by technology. We will be experts at using computer technology; all activity related to producing a journal issue, including market research, will occur through electronic communica-
tion. We will increase the speed at which new information is acquired and disseminated. We will form partnerships with sources of information—be they institutions, networks, individuals, communities—that are on the leading edge of technological communication. We, as editors, and our journals will be instantaneously accessible to our readership and the public. Our real-time response to our readers’ need for information will be the distinguishing mark of excellence.

Through editorial leadership, as well as management skill, editors seek to improve the role effectiveness of readers through the products produced. While being a good editor requires technical competence and attention to detail, being an effective leader at the same time requires excellent communication and interpersonal skills, ability to see the big picture, active involvement in professional activities, and enthusiasm for life and work. The attributes for leadership success are those that inspire, empower, encourage, motivate, and stimulate others. Leaders do not make themselves leaders; followers make leaders of those they admire and respect. With the support of followers, leaders in nursing—be they editors, administrators, managers, or staff nurses—have the mandate to transform their corner of the world.