16.4: Business Acumen and Tangible Skills

Traditionally, the head nurse position within a hospital unit was primarily concerned with managing clinical issues and coordination of care with appropriate staff. These roles are changing rapidly as health care and leadership roles are evolving in nursing. Now more than ever, nurse managers may or may not require clinical expertise to fulfill their duties. Instead, they require practical business skills, tools, and tactics for comprehensively managing departments and ensuring personal career success.

To be successful change agents, managers, and leaders must strive to acquire and use business skills and develop **acumen**, the ability to make good judgements in an efficient and well-informed way.

**Business Skills and Tactics**

Table 16.3.1 highlights specific practical business skills and tactics now required for formal nurse leaders and managers to fulfill their roles effectively. Where appropriate, additional online resources and links have been included for further study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Skill</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand strategic planning</td>
<td><a href="http://leads.in1touch.org/site/framework?nav=02">http://leads.in1touch.org/site/framework?nav=02</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use statistics and data to prove your point</td>
<td><a href="https://www.ahrq.gov/research/data/index.html">https://www.ahrq.gov/research/data/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Skill</td>
<td>Resources</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critically appraise published research to ensure quality and credibility of</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hqontario.ca/">http://www.hqontario.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supporting data</td>
<td><a href="http://hqc.sk.ca/">http://hqc.sk.ca/</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists">http://www.casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists</a></td>
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Communication at work must reflect an appropriate business writing style befitting professional practice environments. Table 16.3.2 outlines some of the considerations relevant to various methods of communication.

**Table 16.3.2 Business Communication Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Communication</th>
<th>Factors to Consider</th>
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| Detailed written report outlining a full plan (multiple pages, including planning processes) | - Essential to outline major changes or to provide annual status updates on services or issues.  
- Typically received by senior team members.  
- Often accompanied by an executive summary for quick reference. |
| Business case or business proposal (maximum 3–4 pages)                                   | - Preferred to present a new idea or concept that will require additional resources (i.e., funding) beyond standard budget needs.  
- Professional approach to request additional resources to support a new or expanding concept or service. |
| Outline or business brief (1–page summary)                                               | - Should be short, include only critical elements, and be personalized for particular groups receiving it.  
- May accompany a presentation or verbal update.  
- Critical element of ongoing communication and engagement of stakeholders or those affected by evolving changes that will directly (or indirectly) affect them. |
### Presentation
- Verbal and visual approach to present updates on progress or to outline details associated with new proposals or business cases.
- Avoid reading directly off slides or from handout pages. Verbal components of presentations should add additional information to handouts participants receive. As a professional presenter, you must be well versed in the content to reduce reliance on data or information on slides.
- Presentations can be a mechanism to ensure inclusiveness of multi-level stakeholders or those directly affected by an evolving change.

### Newsletter or memo (half page to 1 page)
- Helpful to convey common messaging across larger groups or across an organization to keep a large number of people updated.
- Emphasis should be placed on presenting key messages clearly to avoid assumptions or unnecessary questions being raised due to ambiguity.

### Email
- Helpful to convey common messaging across larger groups, but best suited to provide specific extracts from a strategy, plan, or brief.
- Most ideal for providing updates or ongoing information on a project.
- Helpful to stakeholders with limited or minimal interest in a project and only requiring minimal information.
- Cautious use of CAPITAL LETTERS, underlining, and **bolding** as it is difficult to convey tonality via standard email.

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### From the Field
- Educate yourself on necessary business acumen.
- Educate yourself and plan ahead, even if the future is unpredictable.
- What you do with your budget impacts others. Coordinate and share your budget plans with other similar departments that could be affected by plans you have for change, quality improvement, and enhancement in services and care.
- Focus on patient outcomes. For example, “If I make X change in care in my unit, it will result in a better care experience for the patient and shorter hospitalization times.”