



## CAREGIVERS AND LEADERS DON'T ALWAYS HAVE BIG TITLES

BY TONISHA MELVIN

That work eventually led me to create my own health care business. My mother remained a key inspiration. Her sense of purpose helps ground me when the job of being a leader becomes laborious and challenging. Every leader has a story, but not every story will resonate with you. I think I was drawn to my mother's practice of leadership because it was revealed more by what she did than what she said. When you lead this way, your story will be told without you ever having to say a word.

As I entered middle school in 1988, my mother was caring for two ill family members while working a full-time job and volunteering as a sign language instructor and Sunday school teacher. She did it all while caring for her children, three nieces, her mother, two brothers, managing household finances, and being a wife.

Her example gave me an important lesson in leadership. Through her, I learned that many of society's most important caregivers, though critical in advancing the world's health and well-being, do this work without pay or a special title. Leadership of any kind often functions in this way, too.

In high school, I began preparing to become a nurse, a journey that would connect me with various leadership opportunities.

Being a nurse, I discovered, means being many things. Nurses must be good communicators, networkers, teachers, holistic healers, selfless givers, and lifelong learners.

As an introvert, I soon learned that being a nurse would be a challenging but not impossible task. I felt called to do this work, and every real calling involves sacrifice. Throughout my years as a nurse, I've taken on a variety of leadership roles, and that's meant juggling many responsibilities. My mother had shown me how it could be done. She was a model for me as I embraced roles as a charge nurse, educator, and community leader at local health care events, back-to-school events, or emergency relief efforts, triaging and performing care and patient advocacy.

By the time I finished graduate school with my second degree, I was networking with influential health care professionals who encouraged me to grow as a writer, mentor, and trainer while also serving or chairing professional boards and committees.



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provides primary and mental health care. She was named among the African American Leaders in Health Care by *Becker's Hospital Review* in 2019, 2020, and 2022 and is a contributing author of *The Charge Nurse Leader Program Builder: A Competency-Based Approach for Developing Frontline Leaders*, a comprehensive curriculum and road map for developing nurse leaders and ensuring charge nurses are trained, mentored, and supported in their roles.

**HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?** Upcoming issues will focus on themes of **car travel** and **odysseys by train**. If you have an idea for a submission, email [editor@phikappaphi.org](mailto:editor@phikappaphi.org).