

Keeping Our Organizational Values Front and Center

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In the words of the great philosophical cartoon character Calvin, created by Bill Waterson, “Just because everyone is speaking English, doesn’t mean they are speaking the same language.”

Every organization is different – different people, processes, structures, and relationships (Marcus, 2018). Therefore, the way each organization defines its values will vary depending upon its personality/culture. This is also true for the behaviors that translate these values into actions. “One of the most important elements of the high performance, values-aligned culture is a set of values that are measurable, tangible, and observable” (Edmonds, 2010). In other words, each organizational value needs well-defined behavioral parameters that clearly and specifically describe how the value is (and isn’t) demonstrated.

In the October 2018 issue of *Beginnings*, we discussed the important work of the AHNA Values Task Force¹. Using AHNA member survey data, the task force identified and defined five AHNA Organizational Values (see page 5).

Part of the process for identifying these values was to clarify how the AHNA Organizational Values are embodied through our behavior – our AHNA “way of being.” We reflected on questions such as:

- Does this describe who we say we are as individuals within the larger organization?
- Does this describe our way of being in the world and in relationship?
- Does this align with the definition of the value?
- Does this look, sound, and feel like what a holistic nurse does?

Developing clarity around our values helps us to “speak the same language.” The key to establishing clarity is mutual understanding. While achieving mutual understanding may seem superfluous to those who think we are always clear, the reality is that more often than not, “clarity is only in the mind of the sender.” It is through focused dialogue, co-creating, and establishing mutual understanding that we offer others a guide to experience and live those values in real time.

¹ For more information about the AHNA Values Task Force project, please read “AHNA Organizational Values: Guiding our Way of Being” in the October 2018 issue of *Beginnings*, pages 4-5, 32-33.

Next Steps

The AHNA Board of Directors and staff are committed to making these values real. In 2019, we will highlight one of AHNA’s organizational values in each issue of *Beginnings*. Starting in the April 2019 magazine, we will include a special section with the value’s definition and observable behaviors. When your next issue of *Beginnings* arrives in your mailbox, turn to the front of the magazine and spend a few moments reflecting on that month’s organizational value. How do each value’s observable behaviors translate in your daily work life as a holistic nurse? How do the values support your own self-care? Take some time to think how you might translate these organizational values whenever you participate in AHNA. Make it fun and meaningful to you.

Our organizational values are not simply words, but meaningful to every action and decision we make as representatives of AHNA. Values provide the guideposts and the direction for all organizational long-term and short-term decisions. As we grow and mature, our values and especially the observable behaviors will be affected, requiring ongoing revisiting, editing, and recommitting (Dilan, 2018). Values are not something people “buy in” to. People must be predisposed to holding them (Collins, 2000, para. 14). Like any new skill or activity, it takes practice and time to build a body, mind, and spirit memory.

In January at the AHNA Board meeting, we put this to practice and listed each value as an agenda item as a reminder and opportunity to reflect. We want our values to matter, therefore we must keep them front and center (Dilan, 2018). We encourage you to keep an eye out for your next issue of *Beginnings*, and join in this effort to make our values truly matter. Each value and its associated behaviors provides an opportunity to strengthen our organization and our relationships. Our ability to live and work together, recognizing our interconnectedness, is at the center of all we do as holistic nurses. From the standpoint of our organization, these behaviors will continue to shape, strengthen, and guide our endeavors – and aid like-minded others to join us.

If you would like to share your thoughts and examples of how you are using these values in your daily life, please email them to editor@ahna.org.

1. COMPASSION

Definition: Conscious, intentional action that recognizes, acknowledges, and responds towards the alleviation of suffering.

Observable Behaviors

- Demonstrates active listening in all communication.
- Acknowledges views and feelings expressed by others through words, tone, and body language.
- Waits for others to fully express their thoughts and verifies impressions before responding.
- Forgives self and others for past or current errors or hurts.
- Engages in self-reflection.
- Engages in reflective practice and language with self, individuals, and groups toward deeper understanding.
- Provides person-centered, holistic care.
- Advocates for the rights of vulnerable individuals and populations.
- Publicly advocates for the addition of holistic principles within the healthcare industry.

2. AUTHENTICITY

Definition: Courageously and consistently being transparent, honest, genuine, and present.

Observable Behaviors

- Demonstrates accountability by acknowledging mistakes and seeking to rectify the situation.
- Acknowledges and honors vulnerability as part of the human experience.

- Solicits feedback, contributions, viewpoints, and options openly with others.
- Promotes transparency by sharing rationale and intent for decisions and actions.
- Consistently aligns thoughts, words, and actions to build trusting relationships.
- Courageously stands up for beliefs.

3. INTEGRITY

Definition: The state of being whole and undivided; the congruent harmony of parts working together in a state of aligned action.

Observable Behaviors

- People do what they say they will.
- Values are reflected in policies, mission, and goals.
- Direct and immediate feedback is shared with another who has done something wrong, bothersome, or concerning.
- Opinions are requested and appreciated.
- Taking a stand even when it is a dissenting opinion.
- Offering authentic verbal appreciation.
- Owning mistakes.
- Following through on agreements.
- Resolving disagreements is a priority.
- Completing assignments and arriving at meetings on time.
- Individualized modeling “ways of being” as translation of Holistic Nursing Principles.

4. BALANCE

Definition: An ongoing, adaptive interaction of elements and forces resulting in the resilience and sustainability of a system.

Observable Behaviors

- Demonstrates open and non-judgmental interactions.
- Demonstrates ability to be responsive rather than reactive.
- Encourages innovation and creativity *through collaboration*.
- Negotiates a respectful compromise in the best interest of all.
- Promotes *and supports* self-care.

5. COMMUNICATION

Definition: A multifaceted process of connection in which messages are exchanged with the intention of fully conveying their meaning in an open and transparent manner.

Observable Behaviors

- Uses the CLEAR technique when receiving and delivering information: “Center, Listen Wholeheartedly, Empathize, Attend, Respect” (Thornton, 2008).
- Provides information and feedback through context, timeliness, cultural implications, and methods.
- Demonstrates presence through body language, vocal inflection, and silence.
- Initiates opportunities for dialogue.

This document was adopted by the AHNA Board of Directors in June 2018.

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