

# 2026 Annual PADONA Conference

Leading Emotional Intelligence and  
Mindset: Elevating the Director of  
Nursing as a Leader



PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF  
DIRECTORS OF NURSING ADMINISTRATION

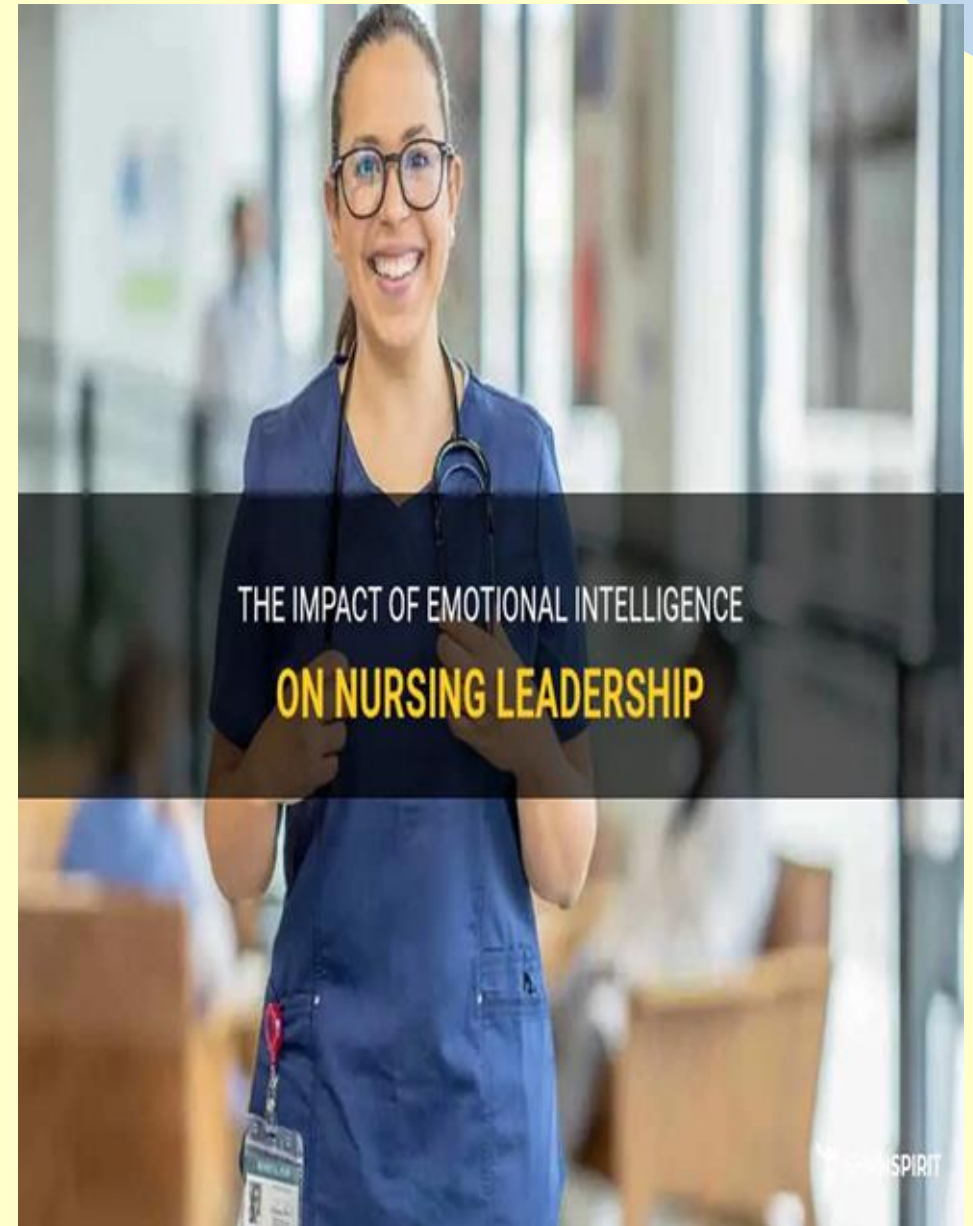
# Michelle Carter

*MSN, CNDLTC, CDP, CNE*



# Why This Conversation Matters

- Leadership in Long Term Care is emotionally demanding
- Clinical Skill  $\neq$  Leadership Preparedness
- Burnout , turnover and disconnection are signals not failures



# The Hidden Expectations of The DON Role

- Emotional Regulator for the Building
- Decision Maker under pressure and chaos
- Culture Setter for the staff to increase positive morale



# What is Emotional Intelligence (EI)

- The ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions in yourself and in others
- It is a learned leadership skill



# The 4 Domains of Emotional Intelligence

- Self -Awareness
- Self Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Management



# Self Awareness: The Leadership Foundation

- Knowing your triggers
- Understanding your stress responses
- Recognizing how your mood impacts the team



# Self Management in High-Stress Moments

- Pausing before reacting
- Use the PAUSE Method
- Regulating tone and body language
- Choosing leadership over emotion

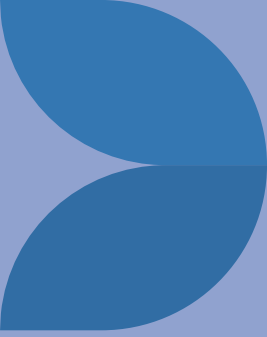


# Social Awareness: Reading The Room

- Understanding Staff Emotions
- Recognizing burnout signals
- Practicing empathy without losing boundaries



# Relationship Management



- Trust- Building Conversation
- Conflict Resolution
- Accountability



# Reflection Activity





**MINDSET**

**What is  
Mindset**



# What is Mindset

- The internal narrative that shapes leadership behavior
- Determines resilience, confidence and adaptability
- There is a Fixed Mindset or Growth Mindset



# Mindsets

Dweck, 2019

Fixed

VS

Growth

Response to:

"This is too hard..."



Challenge



"Let's do this!"

"This is rigged"



Adversity



"How can I solve this?"

"Waste of time"



Effort



"Time to work hard"

"How dare you?!"



Criticism



"Here's how I can improve"

"Meh, they only..."



Other's Success



"Wow!! Incredible!"

# Fixed vs Growth Mindset



# Fixed vs Growth Mindset In Director of Nursing

## Fixed

- “I should already know this”
- “I Can’t handle one more thing”

## Growth

- “I can learn this”
- “ This is hard but I’m capable”



# How Mindset Shows Up in Leadership

Delegation

Control

Feedback

Defensiveness

Confidence

Imposter syndrome



# EI + Mindset = Sustainable Leadership

- Emotional Intelligence guides *HOW* you lead
- Mindset determines *HOW LONG* you can sustain it



# Real Life Long Term Care Scenario

- Short Staffing
- Survey Pressure
- Staff Frustration
- Leadership Fatigue



# Practical Tools for DONs

- During a morning emotional check-in
- Do 90-second PAUSE before difficult conversations.
- Weekly Mindset Reset questions



# The Impact on Long Term Care

- Improved Staff Engagement
- Reduced Turnover
- Stronger Communication
- Healthier Leadership Culture



# Key Takeaways

- Leadership begins internally
- EI is a skill not a personality Trait
- Mindset determines resilience and longevity



# Call to Action

- Choose one EI practice to implement this week
- Identify one mindset shift you commit to for 30 days



# Q & A Reflection

- What resonated most with you today
- What will you take back to your building



# References

**Alluhaybi, A., Wilson, A., Usher, K., & Durkin, J. (2023).**

Impact of nurse manager leadership styles on work engagement: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 31(4), 5090276. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/5090276>

**Cummings, G. G., Lee, S., Tate, K., Penconek, T., Micaroni, S. P., & Paananen, T. (2021).**

The essentials of nursing leadership: A systematic review of factors and educational interventions influencing nursing leadership. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 115, 103842. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2020.103842>

**National Academy of Medicine. (2022).**

*National plan for health workforce well-being*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

**Kelly, L. A., Gee, P. M., & Butler, R. J. (2021).**

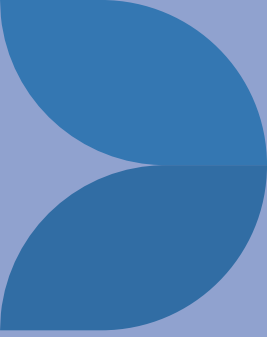
Impact of nurse burnout on organizational and position turnover. *Nursing Outlook*, 69(1), 96–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2020.06.008>

**West, M., Bailey, S., & Williams, E. (2022).**

The courage of compassion: Supporting nurses and midwives to deliver high-quality care. *The King's Fund*.



# The Emotionally Intelligent DON Checklist



# Thank you

My Contact Information

Michelle Carter

[mcarter@srcare.org](mailto:mcarter@srcare.org)

[carter@mcbnurse.org](mailto:carter@mcbnurse.org)

412 377-2451

