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A Dean's Journey: Revitalizing a School of Nursing

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Background: The School of Nursing, located within a small university residing in the northeast region of Pennsylvania, was joined with the School of Pharmacy and governed by the Pharmacy dean. The School of Nursing struggled with declining morale, mediocrity, identity, and attaining stellar board scores. The President decided that change was necessary and separated the schools, thus creating an independent School of Nursing. The task for the School of Nursing was to develop its own identity and flourish within the university and community. A search was conducted and a new dean emerged to lead the school.

Process: The process for change revolved around creating an organizational structure that would stimulate faculty, staff, and student productivity, increase overall morale, and create sustainable program growth. Faculty, students, and curriculum were analyzed separately and collectively within the context of the school and university. The first year focused on communication, conducting a SWOT analysis and extensively interviewing faculty, staff and students. A combined hierarchical matrix organizational design emerged and faculty and staff began functioning under the new structure.

Results: Four years later, the organization structure remains in place and the School of Nursing redefined its committee structure, process for evaluation, and the role of faculty and staff. The school is now endowed for 3.3 million dollars, increased its profile of programming, and has grown to approximately 1000 students between undergraduate and graduate departments. NCLEX-RN pass rates dramatically increased to above 90% for the past two years and Nurse Practitioner certification pass rates are consistent between 95 and 100% depending on the program. The School of Nursing has increased its national visibility, prestige, and university support.