



Richard Hader Visionary Leader Award

2021 Visionary Leader Runner-up Brandon "Kit" Bredimus

By Joe Tye, MBA, MHA

The following manuscript is one of the runner-up entries submitted to Nursing Management for the Visionary Leader Award in recognition of Brandon "Kit" Bredimus, DNP, RN, the CNO and vice president for nursing at Midland Memorial Hospital in Midland, Tex.

The extraordinary challenges of the past 2 years have tested healthcare leaders as they've never been tested before. The postpandemic era will call for a new breed of visionary leaders. As the CNO at Midland Memorial Hospital (MMH), Dr. Brandon "Kit" Bredimus is an exemplar of this type of leader.

When Kit was promoted from a clinical nurse role to director of emergency services at MMH in 2013, patient satisfaction for the department was in the bottom 10% and employee engagement was well below the 50th percentile. Kit implemented a patient experience training program and staff communication tool that increased patient satisfaction to above the 90th percentile within the first 4 months, where

it has remained ever since. The training program was subsequently implemented across the hospital and shared on the national level through conferences and articles. Employee satisfaction in the ED has been maintained above the 90th percentile among Magnet® organizations to this day. Nursing turnover has been reduced by 50%, even as patient volumes increased by 25% over the same period.

To be an effective coach and leader, an individual must first be open to being coached and be what author Ira Chaleff calls a “courageous follower.” Working with his predecessor Dr. Bob Dent (2016 recipient of the Richard Hader Visionary Leader Award), Kit became an avid student of leadership and human motivation. He was one of the first certified values trainers who teach a course on values-based life and leadership skills for all hospital staff. When Dr. Dent left MMH for another position, this preparation made Kit the obvious choice to move into the CNO position. And because Kit had been so effective at coaching his ED team, his assistant director was seamlessly promoted into the director role.

Among his many awards, Kit was honored as one of 20 Texas Nurses Association (TNA) Year of the Nurse Award winners for making a difference in creating a caring culture, supporting health and wellness in the community, and supporting his frontline staff. His nomination came from both his professional

peers and nursing staff in recognition of his advocacy and dedication.

Kit not only advocates for nurses across his organization but also on the state and national levels. He currently serves on the board of directors for both the Texas Organization for Nursing Leadership and the TNA. The local newspaper, *Midland Reporter-Telegram*, named Kit a 2017 “20 Under 40” awardee and a 2020 “Newsmaker of the Year” for his work on keeping the community informed about the latest recommendations for COVID-19. Nationally, Kit was recognized by *Modern Healthcare* as a Rising Star in Nursing. He was also awarded the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) Pamela Austin Thompson Early Careerist Award and named to the 2019 class of AONL Young Professional Voices.

Leading by example and leading through crisis

When Kit became a values trainer, he committed to teaching values not only in the classroom but also through personal example. Over the next several years, he committed to an exercise and diet regimen that helped him lose 150 lbs; he now jokes that he’s half the man he used to be. He completed his DNP degree, obtained multiple board certifications, and began speaking and publishing at a national level. Following his example, many MMH team members have achieved significant personal goals, including advancing their

education, taking charge of their own health and fitness, and participating in professional organizations.

In J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic book *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf the wizard shows up where he is “most needed and least expected.” During his first year on the job, Kit was called upon to provide stable leadership through a series of disasters. His leadership reflected a compelling blend of management effectiveness and human compassion. He consistently shows up where he’s most needed and least expected. He was in his new role for less than a week when a fire broke out in the hospital. His team safely evacuated 127 patients and implemented a recovery plan that resulted in no injuries to patients or staff. Three weeks after the fire, a mass shooting event brought multiple victims to the hospital. Kit was highly visible both in the hospital and the community, meeting with the governor and other state representatives to make certain nurses were the face of the crisis response. He provided direction and emotional support for his team, including counseling and mental health support.

The biggest challenge came with the outbreak of COVID-19. Kit and the Center for Advancing Professional Excellence (CAPE) team took the lead in preparing the hospital for the influx of seriously ill patients. Within a few days, negative pressure rooms were established, and temporary walls erected to create anterooms.

Labor pools were mobilized, and immediate attention was given to ensuring that adequate supplies of personal protective equipment were available to those who were most in need.

Unlike other hospitals in the region and in the rest of the country, MMH decided not to resort to layoffs and furloughs. Instead, they developed creative ways to deploy people in non-traditional settings. When elective surgeries were canceled, the CAPE team organized a sewing room where nurses and technicians learned how to operate sewing machines to make face masks. The team scoured the world for supplies, ordering

internationally as far away as Australia and the UK. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, MMH achieved its highest national nursing survey satisfaction scores, scoring above the 75th percentile in all domains. In a 2021 survey of the medical staff, 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that MMH nursing staff provide excellent care, and 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the hospital had responded effectively to the COVID-19 crisis.

Leadership advocacy

When the pandemic hit its peak, MMH was overwhelmed

of the surge. Local headlines read “MMH Chief Nurse, Mayor, at Odds Over Enforcing Mask Mandate” and raised a public debate on the course the city should take. Kit’s outspoken advocacy for public health and protecting his team helped rally support across the state and achieved national media attention. Unfortunately, he and his family also received death threats from an antimasking faction, but this only increased his determination to be straightforward, honest, and candid in his communication.

When frontline hospital staff experienced an alarming increase in threats of violence related to COVID-19 policies,

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elastic from places as far away as Singapore. The sewing room operated around the clock, ensuring that night-shift staff members could remain gainfully employed throughout the pandemic. By the time the sewing room was disbanded, more than 10,000 face masks were manufactured and shared with the community.

Kit was also involved in coordinating a nurse-led mass vaccination program, becoming an exemplar of efficiency and drawing patients to Midland from across the country and

with patients with COVID-19. Exhausted staff members were often appalled upon leaving the crisis zone of their hospital only to find masses of people out and about with no concern for masking, distancing, or other precautions. When mayors of the local Midland and Odessa communities refused to enforce a state-wide mask mandate issued by the state’s governor, Kit went to the city council. There, he forcefully made the case for masking and physical distancing mandates, especially because Midland was experiencing the worst

Kit again went to the community with an urgent plea for civility. In both a letter to the editor of the local newspaper and a video message, he described the challenges his staff members were facing and reminded his fellow citizens that these frontline workers deserved to be treated with “West Texas friendly” in honor of the commitments and sacrifices they were making. The uncivil and abusive behaviors were countered with a renewed passion from community volunteers and an outpouring of support.

Servant leadership

Kit's commitment to servant leadership goes well beyond his role at MMH. In addition to their four children, he and his wife Heather have cared for 13 foster children in their home, usually fostering several kids at a time. Kit has a passion for helping children and serves as a court-appointed special advocate for foster children in the region. He's also on the board of directors for St. Ann's School and volunteers with the Basin Dream Center for Orphans and several other local nonprofit organizations.

Kit prioritizes mental health services and started a program to help screen and stabilize patients experiencing a mental health crisis. The team has grown from one person based in the ED to six full-time staff members who serve both inpatient and outpatient populations and as a resource for MMH staff. Kit became certified as a qualified mental health professional with the local mental health authority, helping unfunded or special population patients in the hospital access expedited screening and placement in a behavioral health facility. He also evaluated, implemented, and promoted the mental health first aid course at MMH, training in 2 months over 60 hospital staff members, from nursing to housekeeping, in identification and intervention for those experiencing a mental health crisis. The classes are still ongoing and open to any hospital employee or community member.

A "culture of ownership"

Kit has been a leader in the MMH "culture of ownership" journey since it was launched in 2017. This culture was clearly reflected in the way MMH managed its COVID-19 response. As one example, at the height of the COVID-19 surge, a bus carrying 50 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) nurses and technicians showed up unannounced and unexpected. Because the MMH team was so clear about their cultural expectations, within the first day almost all of the FEMA staff were productively utilized, and a few were told that they would need to volunteer their services elsewhere.

In the conclusion to his article "Changing Culture to Drive Nurse Engagement and Superior Patient Experience" in the October 2019 edition of the AONL publication *Nurse Leader*, Kit described the ultimate benefit of MMH's commitment to a "culture of ownership" as follows: "Most importantly, many of the staff have gone on to enrich their personal lives through being authentic to their values. In addition to improving their work performance, some nurses went back to school and earned advanced degrees. Others got themselves out of debt or lost a significant amount of weight with healthy living. The rallying cry for the ED is 'proceed until apprehended,' which is about being empowered to take the initiative and get things done. Shifting the staff mindset from fear of retribution to ownership leads to more awareness of how

personal values and behaviors affect the patient's experience of their care. When someone can reflect on how their values incorporate into their actions, they are more likely to do the right thing as a result."

A vision for the future

Kit believes that organizational excellence begins with a foundation of professional excellence at the personal level. By tapping into their personal values and passions, a person's true purpose is found. He works tirelessly to promote an engaged, empowered, and enlightened nursing workforce. He's committed to providing unparalleled resources and access to educational support, professional development, and personal enrichment. Despite the pandemic, and partly because of it, Kit believes that the current time presents a significant opportunity for the future of the nursing profession. In his multiple articles, interviews, and video posts, he highlights that the pandemic has shown the value of nursing like nothing else ever could. He sees this moment as an opportunity for nurse leaders at all levels to articulate how essential nursing is and encourage and promote nurses to decision-making roles and areas of influence. In this, Kit is leading by example. **NMI**

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