



## Bridging the Gap: AONL and AllenComm Prepare Nurses for Leadership Success



# Summary:

For years, the nursing profession has faced attrition and recruiting challenges in part because experienced nurses are expected to transition from clinical to managerial roles with insufficient preparation. For many nurses, the result of the transition is overwhelming stress and anxiety. To meet these challenges head on, the American Organization for Nursing Leadership partnered with AllenComm to create a leadership training program that is flexible enough to meet the needs of individual learners and comprehensive enough that nurses become nurse managers with confidence and awareness.

**Reading  
Time:**  
15 min

## Topics:

- Leadership Development
- Nursing Professional Development
- Learning Experience Design
- Leadership Learning Journeys
- Personalized Learning

## Related Content:

- [Experiential Learning](#)
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# AONL Targets a Strategic Opportunity

The American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) has seen the looming issues clearly for some time now. Among the most challenging and stressful jobs in the United States, nursing has for decades faced attrition that necessitates regular hiring among provider organizations and recruitment into the profession by industry and government leaders.

AONL is ready to lead in addressing these issues and to bring new solutions to nurse managers and their organizations.

What AONL and other professional organizations recognized in nursing leadership development is that there is an inflection point when nurses make the transition to nurse managers. Most find it difficult to go from a clinical focus on the individual patient to a broader concentration on an entire team. The lack of readiness for nurse manager roles—managing dozens of nurses, attending meetings with hospital administration, and navigating the

relationship between the two — is a serious challenge given their importance in clinical settings.

“On a given unit/department, the nurse manager is the linchpin of a nursing team, responsible for ensuring quality patient care as well as the recruitment and retention of nursing staff,” write Toby Bressler, Ph.D., R.N., and Lauren Ghazal, Ph.D., in STAT News. “It may be helpful to think of nurse managers as the CEOs of their

respective units: They create the culture of trust and sustained excellence and performance of their nursing staff, while also working directly with patients and their families.”

It seemed clear within AONL that the profession risks losing promising nurses in manager roles when they are promoted without appropriate preparation. In partnership with AllenComm, AONL embarked on a mission to prepare nurses for the transition to leadership and to bolster up a profession that is among the nation’s most difficult and most essential.

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# Satisfaction, Stress, and Turnover

Historically, attrition rates among nurses have varied from around 9 percent to 37 percent, depending on specialty, location, salary and other factors. According to the National Library of Medicine, nearly 18 percent of nurses leave their jobs in the first year.

Predictably, nursing attrition adds significantly to hospital and clinic budgets; in 2024, the average cost of turnover for a staff RN is \$56,300, up from \$53,250 in 2022.

For nurse managers, who generally oversee a team of anywhere from 25 to 100+ nurses, stress and anxiety manifest as a turnover rate above 20 percent, on average. Several factors—size of the team, number of assistant nurse managers, level of C-suite support, appropriate training—determine whether a nurse manager may feel harried but still satisfied and effective, or overwhelmed and barely hanging on.

It's not just that attrition among active, trained nurses is high and costly (i.e., a 2023 survey showed that one in four nurses plan to leave the profession). One million nurses are expected to retire by 2030, and more than 64,000 nursing school applications were rejected in the 2023-24 cohort due to lack of educators, clinical sites, and classroom space.

*The lack of readiness ... is a serious challenge given their importance in clinical settings.*

## The Impact of the Pandemic

Isolating numbers from March 2020 to mid-2023 paints an even more dramatic picture. Estimates are that the number of RNs in the American healthcare system decreased by 100,000 between 2020 and 2021 during the initial year of the COVID pandemic. The same analysis finds that most of the attrition came among young nurses new to the profession.

# AONL Identifies Nurse Managers as a Key Group

With all these challenges, AONL identified a key nursing cohort for whom additional training and support would have the most extensive impact. What the organization heard from its members and saw in polling data showed that the work environment had to change to retain nurse managers, and that effective nurse managers play a key role in retaining younger nurses. Specifically, the “Quantifying Nurse Manager Impact” report that AONL conducted in 2023 with Laudio produced key findings:

- Nurse turnover is significantly lower on teams where nurse managers regularly have “purposeful interactions” with their nursing staff.
- The median number of direct reports for nurse managers is 46; 25 percent of all nurse managers have at least 78 direct reports.
- Among six specialties, nurse managers with more than 78 direct reports have

- higher turnover rates and higher rates of overtime use.
- Nurse managers in the top 25 percent for direct reports who had up to four assistant nurse managers had lower turnover.
- Too many assistant nurse managers in larger departments are associated with more turnover, perhaps due to structural problems or lack of role clarity.

*“It may be helpful to think of nurse managers as the CEOs of their respective units: They create the culture of trust and sustained excellence and performance of their nursing staff, while also working directly with patients and their families.”*

*- STAT News*

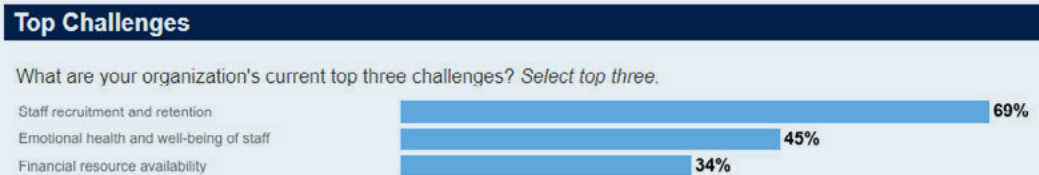
The survey results validated the predominant thinking amongst AONL leadership and illustrated the fact that management, human resources, and strategic leadership skills could make a huge difference in retention at all levels of nursing. The problem was that nurses don't get management, HR, and leadership training as part of their education. The solution was clear to AONL decisionmakers.

## AONL Taps AllenComm for Training Program

With a strong reputation for nursing programs and genuine insight into

challenges the profession faces, AONL still felt it needed a resource with an extensive background in leadership training and a strong reputation for program design customization. They turned to AllenComm to build an impactful training program around what AONL polling indicated are most healthcare organizations' top three concerns:

To make sure course curriculum was appropriately designed and met the particular needs of nurses, AllenComm conducted extensive interviews with nursing subject-matter experts (SMEs) focused on overall objectives, structure, sub-objectives, potential gaps, and associated content.



Design and development of the AONL professional leadership program was somewhat delayed by the pandemic and took about one year. The result was a 25-hour, self-paced learning program designed to prepare nurses to move into management roles and to bolster the knowledge and confidence of existing nurse managers. This on-demand component is augmented by growth planning and facilitates learning to ensure the internalization of certain concepts.

# AllenComm and Leadership Training

AllenComm provides many training programs with a variety of focal points: interpersonal skills, customer service, executive development, etc. To a greater or lesser extent, the subtext of every program is leadership development. This philosophy of teaching leadership while imparting particular knowledge and skills is what makes AllenComm both an industry leader and bellwether with regard to training program design.

Traditionally and commonly in many organizations, leadership is viewed as influence and direction provided by the C-suite, by vice presidents, and by directors and managers. Thinking more broadly, AllenComm has proven the value of investing in leadership at every level of the organization. A leading-at-every-level approach scales the value and impact of leaders, acts as a force multiplier for values and decision-making, and drives better business outcomes.

## ALLENCOMM TRAINS LEADERS FROM TOP TO BOTTOM USING A PROVEN PROCESS:

- Analyze the capabilities of the learner to align responsibilities with desired business outcomes.
- Map the journey from analysis to ultimate objective using a variety of experiential learning approaches.
- Track progress connected to business outcomes so trainees can see their improvement and know what to focus on.
- Engage learners through a host of robust learning materials.



The AllenComm approach is flexible and can meet the needs of any organization and any individual trainee. The framework approach enables AllenComm to utilize specific content and apply it to a context defined by the client's goals.

## The Transition to Practice Leadership Training Program

The end result of AONL's collaboration with AllenComm is the Transition to Practice program. Per AONL objectives, the primary target of the program is nurses transitioning from a clinical to a management focus, most of whom are 5-10 years into a nursing career.

The Transition to Practice progression guides nurses from clinical to management positions and enables associated mental transitions:

- From individual patients to a team focus
- From peer to leader
- From individual tasks to team orientation and coordination

## Transition to Practice: Program Focus

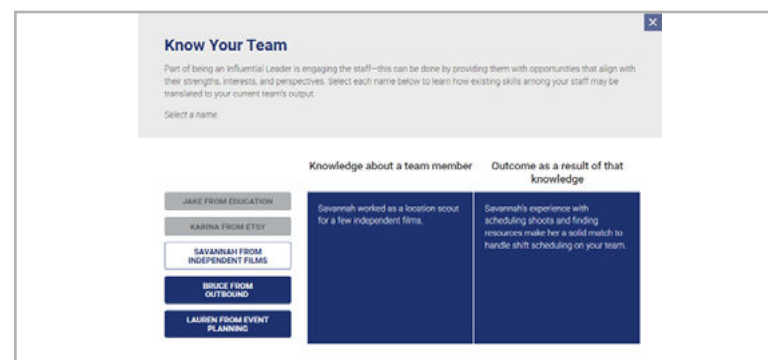
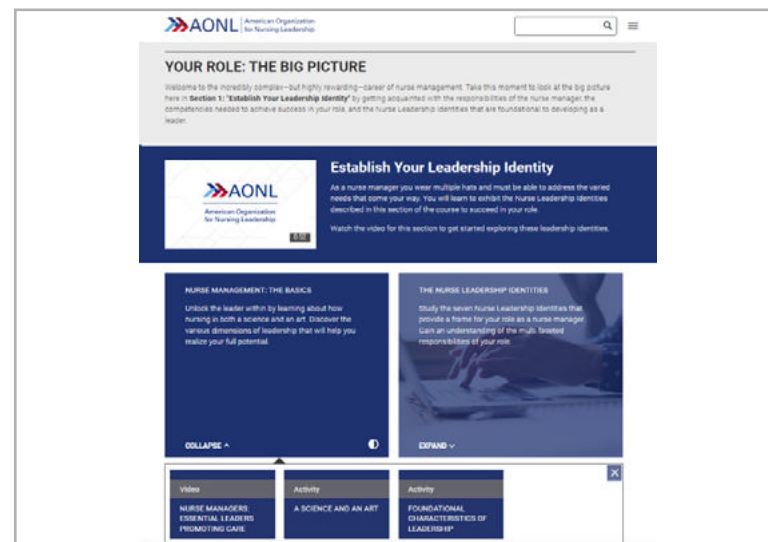
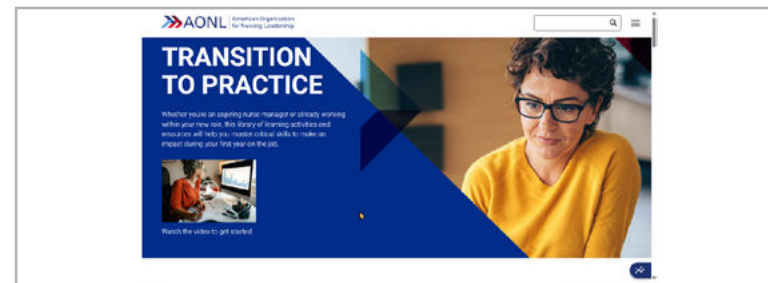
The Transition to Practice development program is a self-paced curriculum that achieves specific learning goals even though users come to the training with different levels of knowledge and experience. The foundation of Transition to Practice is AONL's Core Competency Model, established in 2006 and which includes functional knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics.

AONL wanted learners, after completing the course, to leave with specific skills and awareness:

- Discover a leadership identity within the workplace that is embodied by the nurse manager and that inspires the team.
- Develop a curriculum for leadership knowledge sets that can easily be translated to assistant nurse managers and to the team.
- Expand 1:1 clinical skills to a team-focused approach that still encompasses the individual nurse perspective.
- Operate and maintain successful departments and help identify personnel who may be ready to make the jump to nurse manager.

*“What I found was that many of the questions I have about some day-to-day work and big projects were covered in the topics in this course. I’m so glad I was able to take this course now, and I wish I took it sooner. This was fantastic.”*

*- Transition to Practice graduate*



## Transition to Practice: Program Design

On a high level, the Transition to Practice program comprises three components:

- On-Demand Web-Based Training
- Growth Planner
- Facilitated Learning

The entire program follows a train, apply, refresh approach that AllenComm has found effective in preparing busy mid-career professionals. The rationale for this approach with nurse managers was determined by three factors:

- A strong need for program flexibility
- The importance of peer support and communication
- An emphasis on different pedagogical approaches to support various learning styles and information redundancy

### On-Demand Web-based Training:

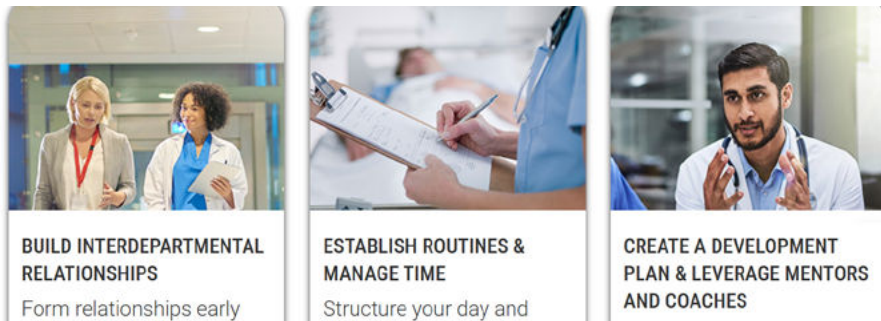
AllenComm understood well from early communications with AONL that time is of the essence for nurses and flexibility is of primary importance. With this in mind, AllenComm designed a program that enables participants to work at a pace that is comfortable for their schedule and learning needs. The entire program is learner-driven and can easily flex to meet the needs of a variety of users

The introduction to web-based training (WBT) is a landing page that displays groups of discrete learning experiences that learners can bookmark to create their own curriculum and learning flows. In total, learners spend 15 hours on WBT, with each learning journey in a format and flow they can choose for themselves.

*Learner experience design (LXD) focuses on the learner experience rather than the content. The goal is to provide personalized, flexible learning journeys based on a sequence of targeted experiences.*

Participants either complete activities in the suggested sequential order or go directly to specific information for just-in-time learning. The available topics include both skills and values,

including financial management, human resource management, accountability, leadership, diversity, etc. A comprehensive search function allows participants to use WBT to research the most important topics for their situation.



Within the WBT, Transition to Practice employs a development model for New Nurse Managers that focuses on essential observable behaviors or Learner Transformations (LTs):

- Create a strategic growth plan by reflecting on experiences and partnering with others
- Build a culture of excellence through assessment and collaboration with others to promote a culture of accountability excellence
- Lead and develop a team that is empowered to act independently and collectively
- Manage staffing and budget to maximize patient quality care outcomes with ensuring unit financial stability
- Improve unit performance by leveraging data, knowledge, and expertise

In designing the program for new nurse managers, AllenComm considered their time limitations, required skills, and other factors. To ensure flexibility and efficacy, the hybrid program comprises both a stand-alone offering in an on-demand format and a facilitated option either developed by AONL or used as content in other AONL courses. By offering both self-paced curriculum and a facilitated option, AONL drives growth (Learner Transformation) by helping participants build confidence and a full menu of management skills:

- Communicate effectively
- Collaborate
- Analyze data
- Manage resources
- Interpret budgets
- Strengthen competencies

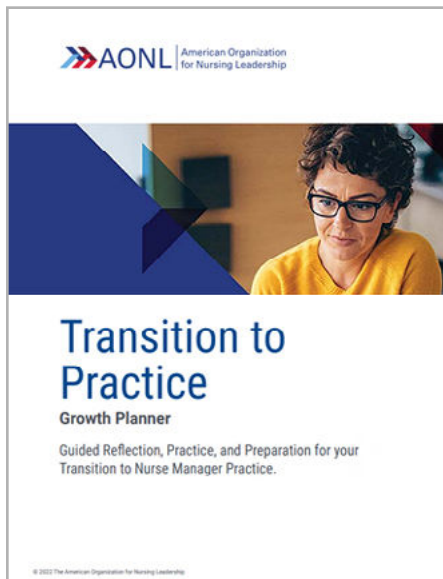
The skills development AONL and AllenComm built into the WBT clearly illustrate how important additional training is to nurse managers.

## Growth Planner:

The Growth Planner is an interactive PDF with up to ten hours of job aids that enhance the online experience through reflection, application exercises, tools, and resources. Learners carry the Growth Planner with them as they practice learned new skills in a real-world setting.

Insert a graphic for Growth Planner here.

With the Growth Planner as a guide, nurse managers map out important contacts throughout the organization—from maintenance personnel to human resources. For example, graduates of Transition to Practice say that contact with the finance department in their organization, which they rarely needed as clinical nurses, proved valuable as nurse managers.

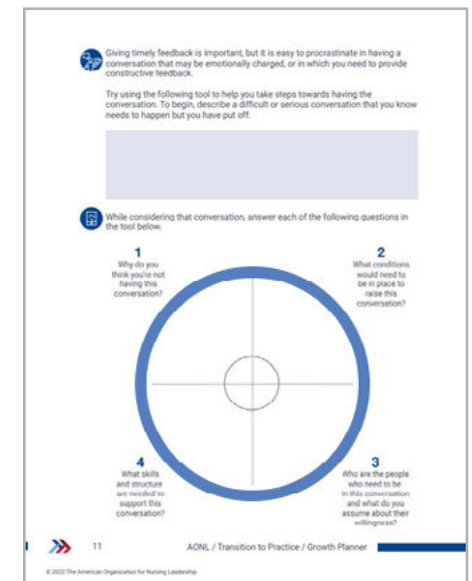


Because the Growth Planner enables nurse managers to apply their learning, they can confidently step into their new nurse manager roles within the learning framework. The Growth Planner also serves as their guide after they complete all training activities.

## Facilitated Learning:

Beyond the WBT on-demand program, AONL and AllenComm created a parallel program to further assist new nurse managers in their development by connecting them with their peers. Two interactive programs based on the core of the WBT content bring nurse managers together to share experiences, support one another, and learn more about the job.

1. In the five-month live program, participants meet in person or virtually once a month to discuss content and application. Program faculty expand on key content from the on-demand course, e.g., finance and conflict resolution, and facilitate discussions of situations nurse managers face.
2. Additional on-site training is offered by AONL and through large organizations that want to provide the program at their facility using faculty trained by AONL. A two-day training program and course resources equip the faculty to provide a program consistent with AONL standards



The second option is not required for participants of the on-demand Transition to Practice program but it does benefit participants who choose this option.

## Transition to Practice: Managing Change

Transition to Practice was provided as a resource for new nurse managers; it was not mandated. This led to two major obstacles:

### 1. Balancing Training with

Responsibilities: Because nurse managers are pulled in many directions and time is precious, AONL used the curriculum to create facilitated training that provides deeper engagement and support from peers. Additionally, AONL and AllenComm designed the course to integrate into nurse managers' busy schedules by having all modules visible on the home page, providing a search function and learning queue, and including the Growth Planner.

2. Resource Management: Creating the program during the pandemic and launching when hospitals were experiencing severe financial constraints due to COVID was a challenge. Additionally, prospective participants found it difficult to make a personal financial investment in the program. In response,

AONL and AllenCom developed the organizational model with AONL-trained local faculty. This program started in January 2024 and the response from managers has been positive.

Given the extreme burden that the COVID pandemic put on healthcare generally and nurses specifically, AONL and AllenComm feel that positive feedback and noteworthy registration rates suggest the program is finding a receptive audience and realizing the intended objectives.

*"This is a great course especially for a new nurse manager. I believe an organization will greatly benefit sending all new nurse managers to this course."*

*- Nurse after finishing Transition to Practice*

# Transition to Practice: Program Results

On-demand participants have one year of access to the course, which has only been available for 1.5 years. The facilitated program is five months long (also with one-year access to the on-demand portion) and has only been offered completely twice.

*Are you a nurse who is interested in moving to nurse manager and wants additional preparation? AONL would like to tell you more about the Transition to Practice program. Visit the AONL website for more information.*

Overall, the response of trainees to the program has been positive. When asked to respond to the statement, "As a result of this program, I am better equipped to succeed as a manager," 92 percent said they strongly agree.

In terms of self-reported confidence in their role as managers before engaging in the program, 10 percent said they were very confident and 33 percent said somewhat confident. After taking the program, 42 percent of trainees described themselves as very confident and 45 percent said somewhat confident.

## On-Demand WBT Program

The feedback to date from program participants validates AllenComm's philosophy and design approach. As the participant comments below demonstrate, Transition to Practice is achieving AONL's original goals of preparing nurses for the segue to leadership.

Participant comments:

- What I found was that many of the questions I have about some day-to-day work and big projects were covered in the topics in this course. I'm so glad I was able to take this course now, and I wish I took it sooner. This was fantastic."
- "From being a floor nurse and not having any knowledge of being a nurse manager, I feel like this has given me a good foundation to effectively start to grow in my new role."
- "Course was extremely comprehensive. Providing key concepts every nurse manager needs and applying theory and concepts to everyday practice examples."
- "I enjoyed the modules and being able to complete the growth planner as I went through the program. This allowed me to reflect on the modules and what I was learning."
- "This is a great course especially for a new nurse manager. I believe an organization will greatly benefit sending all new nurse managers to this course."
- Facilitated Program

- The facilitated program evaluations also showed positive results based on participant feedback.
- 91% agree or strongly agree with the statement, "As a result of this program, I am better equipped to succeed as a manager."
- 91% agree or strongly agree, "I have an increased level of confidence in my abilities as a nurse manager as a result of attending this program."
- 96% agree or strongly agree, "Learning with a community of peers helped me feel supported in the challenges I face as a manager."

Participants in the facilitated cohort also completed a pre and post self-assessment to measure improvements in manager competencies and confidence levels. The following table details results demonstrating strong alignment between key concepts in the program and improved efficacy on survey questions (100-point scale).





The data table on the next page shows improvement in every area nurses were asked about, which translates into a more confident, satisfied nursing workforce. The survey results also clearly support the efficacy of the AllenComm training program and the philosophical approach underlying it. AllenComm's goal with every client is to create measurable improvements using leadership training that meets the particular needs of a group and its individual members. AllenComm's goal with every client is to create measurable improvements using leadership training that meets the particular needs of a group and its individual members.

## Key Concept: Building Collaborative Relationships and Identifying Key Resources

I can rely on my organization to provide the resources needed to be effective.	From 54.2 to 77 percent = <b>22.8-point improvement</b>
I can count on others to give me the guidance I need to complete work assignments.	From 65.26 to 83 percent = <b>17.7-point improvement</b>
I can rely on my peers to help solve problems.	From 67.37 to 79 percent = <b>11.6-point improvement</b>

## Key Concept: Building Individual and Team Strengths

I can coach followers to assume greater responsibilities for leadership.	From 62.4 to 79.5 percent = <b>17.1-point improvement</b>
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## Key Concept: Leading the Team as an Optimistic Innovator, Caring Advocate, and Influential Leader

I can determine what leadership style is needed in each situation.	From 62.74 to 80 percent = <b>17.6-point improvement</b>
I can think up innovative solutions to challenging leadership problems.	From 64.74 to 79.5 percent = <b>14.8-point improvement</b>

## Key Concept: Leading the Team as an Optimistic Innovator, Caring Advocate, and Influential Leader

I can energize my followers to achieve their best.	From 68.9 to 80 percent = <b>11.1-point improvement</b>
I can inspire followers to go beyond their self-interests for the greater good.	From 65.8 to 80 percent = <b>14.2-point improvement</b>
I can utilize the forms of rewards and punishments that work best with each follower (AONL instructs them to consider this as "motivators" instead of rewards and punishments).	From 62.6 to 79 percent = <b>16.4-point improvement</b>
I can think up innovative solutions to challenging leadership problems. I can think up innovative solutions to challenging leadership problems.	From 64.74 to 79.5 percent = <b>14.8-point improvement</b>

# Proven Efficacy and a Future Template

Many healthcare facilities and systems don't sufficiently prepare new nurse managers to be successful. The transition into this very complex role leaves nurse managers feeling isolated and overwhelmed, and it may result in burnout and attrition.

From the initiation of the training project with AllenComm, AONL made clear that nurses leaving the profession was the primary challenge they wanted to address. AllenComm embraced this objective and did considerable legwork at a granular level to identify specifically why nurses choose to leave and how it can be prevented.

What AONL embraced and what AllenComm feels most proud of in the Transition to Practice program is the effort to diversify the curriculum so that learning is available to all nurse managers on their own schedules. Especially when emerging from a pandemic,

Transition to Practice must meet nurses where they are and give them the opportunity for better training without asking them to turn over their lives. The feedback we've received confirms that

AONL and AllenComm hit the mark by including both on-demand personal training and group facilitated training.

The efficacy of AllenComm's approach to training goes well beyond the AONL partnership. In another industry with a different group of professionals, on-demand and facilitated training may also be the best approach, but they also may not be. The benefit of a relationship with AllenComm is that we don't start designing a program until we know the details of our prospective learners' goals and lives. AllenComm believes that time is usually wasted by applying a learning program without understanding the audience. For this reason, we are one of the most trusted names in professional training and have the experience and resources that enable us to lift learners above the mundane into a

*"We've seen excellent results from our partnership with AllenComm, and we're honored that Transition to Nurse Manager Practice has been recognized as one of the best association professional development programs of the year. Even better, our nurse leaders are measurably more confident and more capable as a result of the innovative design. We're proud that the program not only has the right content for these leaders—it's also designed to be flexible and fit into their busy schedules."*

*Amy Trublood,  
Sr. Director Leadership Development,  
AONL*

role animated by purpose, camaraderie, and mutual support.

