



John O'Connor

McKnight's LONG-TERM CARE NEWS

'I do not have a job. I have always had a mission.'

July 26, 2020

Ask about a favorite teacher, and you're likely to hear about a committed grade school instructor, or maybe a memorable high school coach. Perhaps even an inspiring college professor.

My favorite teacher is still going at it, as she has been for more than five decades. She's Leah Klusch.

Many readers will surely recognize the name. Leah regularly presents during our webinars, and is frequently quoted in our news stories. She often speaks at industry events, and even runs her own business.

It's probably safe to say this whip smart, life tested, straight shooting workaholic with a heart of gold is a true original.

You can learn a bit more about her career and contributions in [today's McKnight's 40 for 40 installment](#). But that brief article hardly does her justice.

I recently asked Leah a few questions about her professional journey. Her replies provide some real insight – and if I may say so, lessons.

Q: So how did you get into this line of work?

A: In 1967, I took a job in a small town nursing home, less than two years after I got my degree in nursing, working with a friend from college. I was exposed to the "standard of care" at that time. Oh my, such misery and no oversight.

The elders had very little care. Woke up my nursing soul and I began to formulate education to improve caregiving, assessment processes and documentation formats. That has driven much of my career for over 53 years. It has carried me forward into the many areas for focus and understanding. Every day I am still looking for new topics to bring to my audiences.

Q: What contributions make you proud?

A: I am very proud that I have been able to bring my personality, mission and interactive style to the professional audiences throughout the country over these many decades of consulting and teaching. I do not have a job — I have always had a mission — a dedication to excellence and person-centered individualized care. I am proud that I bring professionals a unique interactive learning experience that builds their understanding and knowledge base with accurate up to date facts and processes.

Q: Where do you find inspiration?

A: The elders that need care — and the operational and clinical professionals who dedicate their skills and resources to provide high-quality care. I am inspired to study and prepare high quality accurate materials that are practical and easy to implement. I want to be part of their delivery team that results in great outcomes, personal satisfaction and operational stability. The smiles of the elders in the facilities I visit, the improvements in quality of care and quality of life that are evident when clinical and operational teams are informed.

Q: Any advice for those just getting started?

A: There are many experienced operational and clinical leaders in our field who can help you to grow and develop your skills. Work in our industry can be exhausting and exhilarating at the same time. Your days will always be filled with unplanned issues and focus — so you need to be flexible and prepared the moment you arrive to serve the elders. Know the structure of the regulatory requirements and teach your staff every day. Most importantly, never let your tasks overcome your empathy. Ours is a very unique responsibility and most rewarding.

In the words of Leo Buscaglia: "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." He was a friend and mentor of mine — and had this right!

John O'Connor is Editorial Director for McKnight's



July 26, 2020 McKnight's 40 for 40: Leah Klusch

John O'Connor

Editor's note: As part of the 40th anniversary of McKnight's, McKnight's Senior Living and McKnight's Long-Term Care News are recognizing 40 notable newsmakers. Each week, the brands will highlight a new, high-profile leader from the past four decades. Previously published installments of the series are posted here.



McKnight's Long-Term Care News has been serving the market for 40 years. Some might consider that a rare achievement. Leah Klusch might see it as a good start.

For more than five decades, this nurse from the Buckeye State has distinguished herself as a speaker, educator, consultant and occasional consigliere. She is the executive director of The Alliance Training Center in Alliance, OH.

Thanks to her tireless efforts, many thousands of long-term care professionals now do a better job of doing their job.

"Her faith, optimism, energy, diligence and just plain goodness motivates us all, especially nurses, administrators and caregivers," said John Sheridan, retired founder of eHealth Data Solutions (which is now part of The ABILITY Network Division of Inovalon).

Klusch has been quoted frequently in *McKnight's* news stories. She also has presented at more than 20 *McKnight's* webinars on a wide range of topics. These include the Minimum Data Set, the Patient Driven Payment Model, PEPPER (Program for Evaluating Payment Patterns Electronic Report) reports, compliance, competencies, operational strategies and improving quality care.

Less than two years after earning her nursing degree, Klusch was hired to work in a small town's nursing home. She was appalled by the resident suffering and minimal oversight that prevailed. But rather than make an exit from the field, she decided to make a difference. Klusch soon began developing educational tools that improved care delivery, assessment processes and documentation formats.

"That has driven much of my career for over 53 years," she noted.

The journey may have been a bit more winding and arduous than she originally anticipated. But the payoffs have been rewarding as well.

"I do not have a job – I have always had a mission – a dedication to excellence and person-centered individualized care," Klusch said.

Added Sheridan: "She is an example who seeks to make doing the right thing always something all in LTC do and know."