

INTRODUCING

Nurses on Boards

Linda Burnes Bolton, DrPH, RN, FAAN

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Why were you invited to serve on the Case Western Reserve University Board?

Leadership is a practiced art. When board nominating committees are seeking new individuals, your track record of what you've been able to contribute to society in general and not just to a specific organization is important. Practicing leadership across different venues leaves a very visible trail that others can see and that makes them wonder, 'Is it possible we could engage this individual on our journey?'

I was invited to serve on the Case Western board after former Congressman Louis Stokes recommended me to the university's interim president. At the time, Case Western was reeling from some not positive changes. My track record of helping educational, health care and social institutions, and governmental entities reach their express goals is what made them seek me out even though I'm not from Ohio and didn't graduate from Case Western Reserve University.

Congressman Stokes and I had previously worked together, while he was in Congress, on a variety of initiatives to close the gap in health disparities, improve public health and ensure that health care systems in the U.S. are more inclusive in caring for people of color. We have a great deal of mutual respect for each other, the same set of core values.

How would you describe your main focus on the Case Western Board?

I'm co-chair of the Academic Affairs & Student Life Committee, which is charged with looking at how students and faculty work to achieve the institution's goals and how their work affects the Cleveland community. We focus on how this university can be used as a resource to improve the status of our region from a health and social perspective. Case Western has done a fabulous job of engaging the very diverse community in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.



AT A GLANCE

Cedars-Sinai Health System – Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer

American Organization of Nurse Executives – President

American Academy of Nursing – Past-President

National Black Nurses Association – Past-President

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – Member, Board of Directors

Case Western Reserve University – Trustee

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My ongoing focus on diversity at Case Western and throughout my career isn't about counting how many people of particular backgrounds are present in a given setting. Instead, it's about accountability for opening the door wide so everyone can come in and have an opportunity to be part of the work we're doing. It's about making room at the table for diverse voices in the dialog about the allocation of resources.

You have served on several boards. What have you found most valuable about these experiences?

The many opportunities to learn and grow, the breadth of board members' experience and expertise, the networking and the ability to make connections and introductions. These interactions are an important part of how business gets done.

Any insights you would like to share with nurses who are interested in new board or leadership roles?

If you are invited to serve on a board, make sure that organization's work is important to you. If it's not important, you'll just be a person sitting in a seat. You won't reach into yourself to do your very best. Ask the person who invites you, 'What do you think I can contribute? Why are you asking me?' Consider that person's response, and reflect on whether you have the time and the will to meet the commitment they're asking you to make.

Some people are wary of a board role if they're unfamiliar with areas such as finance, policies and procedures. You can learn about those. Find out whether a board has educational programs or mentors for new members.

Who has most influenced your interest in board service and philanthropy?

My number one (influence) is my mother. She was always engaged with her church and often actively served on three or four different committees. As the oldest of twelve children in my blended family, I wanted to make sure my sisters and brothers knew that besides their father and mother, they were loved. I learned the value of people helping people.

I have always given to others ever since I was twelve years old. That's who I am. The amount is not what's important. It's the gift, the expression of love and caring. What drives me is the need to feel that people know they are loved and cared about.

Many board positions include an expectation of personal philanthropy. How have you met those expectations?

Board governance also comes with an obligation to give or get. You either give personally, or if you don't have the means, you get other individuals organizations to give on your behalf. You don't have to have financial resources to be on a board. If you think that organization's work is important and you want to be part of it, there are other ways to contribute.

Recently, I made a \$100,000 capital campaign commitment to Case Western's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing because its goals are aligned with what's important to me. The university has a new vice president for Inclusion, Diversity and Equal Opportunity. And the School of Nursing is working to increase the number of African Americans, Latinos and men who graduate with doctoral degrees.

That's not my first major gift. Here at Cedars-Sinai, I endowed two scholarships, one in my mother's name and another in the name of a physician who was a dear friend. I have also established an endowment at the National Black Nurses Association.

The theme that connects all this is supporting organizations whose missions are aligned with my own 'true North,' my core value of caring for people.

Written by Jessica Stein Diamond