This book takes insights drawn from the Executive Nurse Fellows program established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to promote the idea of leadership development as an empowering force among nurses at all levels.

The text is intended as both a guide for professionals; leaders in schools of nursing, hospitals and other health care delivery systems, ambulatory care, long-term care, public and occupational health, and public policy, and as a text in leadership courses for students at master’s level and beyond. It presents the core competencies developed by the RWJ Nurse Fellows program--i.e. interpersonal and communication effectiveness, risk-taking and creativity, self-knowledge, inspiring and leading change, and strategic vision--as the keys to nursing leadership.

The book is organized around the program's "leadership compass," a method used in leadership skill development. The four points of that compass are:
- Purpose: the vision to lead
- People: the passion to work with others
- Process: the skills to manage change
- Personal: the self-knowledge to thrive

For each of these four points, the contributors (all graduates of the RWJ program) explore related competencies in each of three sections of the book: issues in public health, education, and service. The chapters reflect real-world experiences and are built around case studies that highlight one or two of the competencies.