

## Succeeding in your New Nursing Position

Congratulations!! You've not only been offered a nursing position, you've also accepted one. Your hard work has paid off! The uncertainty that you've felt since your first day of nursing school has been replaced with excitement and relief—or is that anxiety? Probably some of each.

Before you worry too much about your new position and whether or not you'll be successful, don't forget your most recent accomplishment--You completed nursing school! There aren't many people who could do what you did—attend classes, participate in clinical rotations, study, volunteer, and work, not to mention managing your personal responsibilities. It's an enormous achievement. Sure, you have a lot to learn in your new job, but you also have a great foundation from which to start.

You are now entering the next phase of your career—adapting to your new role as a professional nurse. What will it take to succeed? Can you define success for yourself? How will you know if you have succeeded? How can you make a smooth transition? This guide will help you in this process.

### Keep it in perspective

Remember, your new job will probably be but one position in a long, successful career. Sure, you want to make the best decision and land in a place where you'll feel satisfied, appreciated and appropriately rewarded, but, you must realize that you will probably be changing jobs at some point. In fact, the US Department of Labor predicts that US workers will have 7-10 jobs in two or more careers. That said, don't think of your new job as the last one you will have. Rather, it's one where you will learn how to be a successful nurse--developing new skills as you become clearer about what you want in your career. In this position, your goal should be to establish yourself as a nurse. After doing so, you'll be able to make better choices about future opportunities.

### Know what you want

It's always helpful to know what you want--it makes deciding easier. Hopefully, you've already done that in your job search. That is, you've identified what you would like in your first position—experience you'd like to gain (general or specialty), location, type of facility, hours, benefits, and so on. If you haven't clarified what you are want, begin to describe it now. It will help you in your first meetings with your nursing supervisor.

Complete the following questions:

What do I want to learn in this position?

What do I hope to gain?

- Experience
- A network of nurses and other health care professionals
- Others

What areas of nursing do I want to develop? How can I do that in this position?

How can I contribute to this organization? Describe the skills and qualities that make me a great nurse.

What obstacles may prevent me from achieving my career goals? How can I overcome them?  
What resources do I have?

- Not knowing the geographical area
- Feeling unprepared
  
- JHU nursing alumni at this facility

How long do I plan to stay in this position? Why?

How does this position fit in my long-term career plan?

Now you have a foundation that helps you understand what you want from this position. Take a look at these questions regularly to help you decide if you are still achieving your career goals. From time to time, review your responses. You'll find as you get more experience, your goals may change and become clearer to you.

What does it take to be a successful nurse?

One of the challenges of nursing is that it requires skill sets that at times seem contradictory. You need to have great people skills, but, must also be comfortable using sophisticated technology. You have to be able to comfort your patients and their loved ones but, at times, discuss some very difficult situations with tact and honesty. The National League for Nursing (nln.org) offers this list of questions to help you define those skills. (from J. Katz: Majoring in Nursing, 2000)

- Are you an independent, creative person?
- Can you think problems through logically?
- Do you find satisfaction in helping other people?
- Do you like math and science? Have you gotten good grades in basic math and science courses?
- Can you express yourself effectively in speech and in writing?
- Are you intrigued by machines and have an interest in how they work?
- Do you work well with your hands?
- Do you work well in emergency situations? Do you have common sense?
- Do you meet new people easily? Do your friends say you're a warm, friendly person?  
Do you prefer working around others rather than alone?

Take some time to evaluate your skills in each of these areas. Think of examples in your clinical rotations where you used them. You can apply what you learned there to the experiences you'll have in your new position. Remember, successful learning includes applying new knowledge in similar situations.

### Before You Start Working

If you are moving to a new geographic area, you'll have lots to do before your first day, including:

- Finding a place to live
- Opening a bank account
- Arranging utilities (gas, electric, phone, cable)
- Transferring car insurance and title (if out of state)
- Purchasing renter's insurance
- Registering to vote
- Applying for your nursing license
- Purchasing uniforms
- Learning your way around (finding the grocery store, parks, library, religious organizations, drycleaners, gym, car mechanic, etc)

Give yourself some time to get your living situation settled before you start your job. Setting up your home will take time, and you may not have much left once you begin work. Besides you'll want to use your free time to learn about your new location, get involved in hobbies, and meet new people.

Contact your human resources office for help; they probably have most of this information already available and can save you hours.

### Remember, work is not college.

You are in a transition—moving from student to professional—and will have to adapt in new ways in order to succeed. Your new position will be much different than your years as a student or your previous employment. More will be expected of you, with less guidance and support. The expectation is that you will succeed and do so largely on your own. Certainly, you are well-prepared clinically, but you must also be able to perform professionally. You will use skills beyond what you learned in your classroom and clinical rotations. The following describe some of the major differences between college and the first year of work:

#### **College**

Frequent, quick, concrete feedback

Personally supportive environment

Few significant changes

Flexible schedule

#### **First year of work**

Infrequent and less precise feedback

Less personal support

Frequent and unexpected changes

Structured schedule

Frequent breaks and time off

Limited time off

Choose your performance level  
(A, B, C grades)

A-level work required all the time

Adapted from Holton, E. in Gardner, et al. (1998). *The Senior Year Experience: Facilitating Integration, Reflection, Closure, and Transition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### What does it take to succeed in a new position?

The knowledge you've gained in your academic program has prepared you well for your nursing career. But it takes more than that. Emotional intelligence (EQ) has become an important component in career success. It is defined as:

The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. It describes abilities distant from, but complementary to, academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ (Goleman, 1995, p. 316)

The following is the Emotional Competence Framework which is organized into two competencies: Personal Competence and Social Competence. Briefly assess yourself to identify your strengths and weaknesses in these areas.

### **Personal Competence**

#### **These competencies determine how we manage ourselves.**

Self-Awareness: Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions

Emotional awareness: Recognizing one's emotions and their effects

Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits

Self-confidence: A strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities

Self-Regulation: Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources

Self-control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check

Trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity

Conscientiousness: Taking responsibility for personal performance

Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change

Innovation: Being comfortable with novel ideas, approaches, and new information

Motivation: Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals

Achievement drive: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence

Commitment: Aligning with the goals of the group or organization

Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunities

Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks

## **Social Competence**

**These competencies determine how we handle relationships.**

Empathy: Awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns

Understanding others: Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns

Developing others: Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities

Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs

Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people

Political awareness: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships

Social Skills: Adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others

Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion

Communication: Listening openly and sending convincing messages

Conflict management: Negotiating and resolving disagreements

Leadership: Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups

Change catalyst: Initiating or managing change

Building bonds: Nurturing instrumental relationships

Collaboration and cooperation: Working with others toward shared goals

Team Capabilities: Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals

(From Goleman, 1995)

Each of these competencies are essential nursing skills. Can you think of examples when you had to use these skills? How did you do? Did you accomplish what was expected or needed? If so, congratulations. If not, you have an opportunity to learn from that experience and apply it to future situations.

Making a great impression

Your first days in your new job will be filled with learning the environment, meeting new staff, and taking care of patients. Much will be expected of you. To succeed, consider the following suggestions:

- Your focus should be on your new job. In the first few months, learn everything you can about your job and organization. Don't plan to have much time or energy for much else.
- Get to work early.
- Come to work everyday.
- Be courteous, friendly, and helpful.
- Learn the culture of the organization.
- Focus on learning the position and understanding the culture---not on making significant change.
- Ask lots of questions, but not over and over again. Keep a small notebook for the information you're gaining.
- Learn where things are.
- Listen a lot—you'll learn even more.
- Find a mentor. Who is perceived as successful in your department? Who is doing a great job? What can you learn by observing him or her?
- Create positive relationships with your co-workers. The Society for Human Resource management conducted a survey that identified the causes of performance problems in the workplace. They found that, in more than 65% of the time, problem employees could do the job and were motivated, however, they had difficult relationships with co-workers. Another study, by the Bureau of Vocational Guidance at Harvard. found that for every person who loses a job because of poor quality work, two more are fired because they can't work effectively with other people.
- Be willing to work extra hours or shifts.
- Once you are familiar with the day-to-day operation of your position, volunteer for projects that will help you gain more experience.
- Join your local professional nursing association and get involved.
- Keep your personal life to yourself. Remember, your supervisor is not your friend, so don't seek support for personal problems from him or her.
- Being positive, mature, and able to work well with others can create new opportunities for you. If you are late, complain a lot, or are perceived as lazy, you may find yourself with fewer opportunities in the long run.
- Don't get hooked up in any cliques. Stand back and observe in order to understand the dynamics of the unit.
- Don't gossip.
- Hygiene is everything—clean uniform and shoes, neat hair/nails, etc.
- Don't jump in too quickly. Observe. Listen. Ask for clarification.
- Ask for feedback.
- Know thyself—your strengths and areas of improvement. Work diligently to achieve what has been asked of you.
- Respect the experience of others.

#### What to do when you know what to do

Eventually, you will become familiar with your position and all it requires. You'll find that you are more efficient and effective. What can you do to continue to contribute in your organization?

- Help others that follow after you. You learn best by teaching.
- Participate in professional and personal development opportunities both in the organization and outside.

### Summary

You are embarking of an experience that you may have never thought possible even one year ago. Beginning your nursing career is a milestone. This position will create a foundation for successful professional development. Preparation, commitment and persistence will enable you to achieve your goals and move forward. Good luck!

For further assistance on managing your career, schedule an appointment to meet with the SON career consultant by calling 410-955-7548.