

## Are you the 'New Kid on the Block'? How New Nurses can Build Relationships with their Senior Counterparts

Being the new nurse on the unit is quite a learning experience. With attention focused on learning policies and procedures, it is also important to take the time to build solid relationships with the men and women who know all of the short-cuts—experienced nurses. Here are four steps to maximize your success at building new relationships.

### **1. Make a personal connection:**

Following the introductions and formalities of orientation, find an opportunity—perhaps during down time, to learn about the other nurses on the team. It doesn't have to be in a nosy, intrusive way, but in a way that demonstrates genuine interest in who they are and their experience. Try asking some questions about family members, namely a spouse, partner or children as an entrée into conversation. Next, find some areas of common ground in your conversation in an attempt to bond with another colleague. Be aware of questions that appear too personal or off-putting to the other person; if you sense discomfort in your colleague, then adjust your approach to questions that don't require a personal response. It is all trial and error; your genuine interest and demeanor will make up for any problems in your approach.

### **2. Show appreciation:**

Be conscious of showing appreciation to someone who has been helpful to you; there are a variety of ways of showing appreciation. First, think about what would be of most value to the person you are appreciating. Taking this step might feel like quite a stretch since appreciation in a busy medical environment is often unexpected. It is usually more common to hear what you haven't done correctly over what you've done well. Therefore, showing genuine appreciation can actually be a nice surprise and a reminder to others that appreciation is a welcome form of communication. There are various ways to tell someone you value him or her.

Verbal appreciation: be specific when you deliver verbal appreciation; this type of feedback may encourage more willingness to lend a hand without being asked in the future.

Gestures of help: appreciation may also be expressed by helping out the team member who has helped you. You may not need to say anything beyond, "You helped me, and I owe you one". This example of reciprocity may be a great way to establish a working relationship that is based on mutual help.

**3. Demonstrate your desire to learn from others:** be proactive; ask your more senior counterpart for advice. Initially choose someone who appears to work efficiently and who is approachable. You may want to start by asking them how they would respond to a particular clinical situation or ask for tips on organizing your workload. Getting an experienced colleague's input may be a real asset to you, and the development of some good work habits can begin to take shape. Remember, people like to feel useful; they want to know they have something of value to contribute, and they are more likely to share what they know when their knowledge is sought after and appreciated!

**4. Relax your assumptions about 'the nurse from hell':** you may have been warned about or observed a particular nurse on the team who has been labeled as someone to avoid. While you may want to consider the warning, try not to be overly attached to that assessment. There may be some very valid reasons why this nurse has been branded as difficult or unapproachable. If you choose to approach 'the nurse to be avoided', your first attempt may be to simply comment on something that he or she does well; that gesture might succeed in eventually building a new relationship; it just may take a lot longer. The more allies you have, the more manageable your workload will be, and your job satisfaction will increase. Trying to cultivate a relationship with someone who appears distant or aloof may not be your first choice, but it is important not to write off any potential allies, since building good relationships with as many colleagues as possible, will help you in countless ways. It is not just a nicety; it is a necessity.

Staying conscious of building and maintaining relationships are one of your prime responsibilities as a nurse. If you are fortunate to work on a well-functioning team whose culture is welcoming and inviting, then building relationships may be easy and fun. However, if you enter a team that is not high functioning, then your relationship building skills will be just as important as cultivating a good bedside manner with your patients. They may not have said much about this in nursing school, but it may be the most important thing you do to as a new nurse.

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