

Retention is the Name Of The Game: The Nurse's Role in Getting Some Job Satisfaction

There are a number of compelling reasons why nursing is a profession people often love to leave: lots of stress, sicker patients, arrogant doctors, cynical team members and a high patient to nurse ratio. Having spelled out the difficulties of being a nurse, there are still thousands of men and women around the globe who wish to pursue a long career in nursing, and their reasons are just as compelling: a commitment to caring for sick patients, life-long learning, a secure job, terrific benefits, and in some regions, an impressive retirement plan. If your choice is to pursue a career in nursing, here are some strategies to build your level of satisfaction in an imperfect clinical environment



1. Enter the field with your eyes wide open: knowing that there is a substantial chance you are or will be working on a unit where the stress is high and the demands even higher, think about how you are going to manage in that type of environment. If you are not sure as to how you will function in a highly stressful, demanding environment—day after day—start to create some coping strategies that will keep you from succumbing to the stress. The more prepared you are with ideas and strategies for shoring up your coping mechanisms, the less unpleasant surprises and disappointments will adversely affect you.

2. Attitude: it all starts with attitude. Enter your new setting with a 'good' attitude, meaning a desire to connect with colleagues and patients, some of whom may be very different from you. Part of a good attitude needs to include acceptance: an ability to let go of expectations that have little chance of being met. If your attitude is to work with the available resources, advocate and participate in making change whenever possible—letting go of the rest, you have just helped contribute to your longevity as a nurse.

3. Flexibility: be prepared to have your best-made plans changed. If you are too attached to what you should be doing, rather than what you need to be doing to serve patients, that is a recipe for dissatisfaction. Expect that your careful planning at the beginning of the day is going to change depending upon what is happening on the unit. It is wise to respond to the changes, without spending a lot of time critiquing why you were asked to do something that wasn't a part of your plan.

4. Assertive communication: although it may feel mystifying and difficult, assertive communication needs to be part of any retention or personal sustainability plan. Assertive communication can help you on the road towards workplace satisfaction. Examples of assertiveness include: asking for help, expressing your opinion and letting others know how you feel and want to be treated. If you don't know how to be an assertive communicator, request a class from your manager that could be delivered to the team: not only will you benefit from learning these new skills, your teammates will also receive the benefit too.

5. Boundaries: nurses who experience less burnout are often able to set good boundaries with patients and colleagues; since nurses tend to want to help (a good thing), implementing clear boundaries is often not an easy task. It takes practice, and lots of it. Being able to say "No" without hanging on to guilt may take some

doing. If boundaries are a struggle, find someone on your team who appears comfortable with setting boundaries and enlist his or her support on your journey to set some limits.

6. Notice and let in the joys of the day: within the challenges of an intense workload—including too much paperwork—consciously let some joy into your day. While that might sound a little hokey, it is extremely important. Helping to manage a grateful patient's pain, engaging in a satisfying interaction with a colleague or enjoying a good joke from a team member are a few examples of how to extract some joy from a very busy day. If work is just about the drudgery of completing task after task without appreciating any parts of the process, expect burnout to set in. Experiencing joys, big or small, is all about sustainability.

These are a few high priority recommendations to support your longevity as nurses; when you put yourself in the 'driver's seat' and actively find ways to decrease stress and frustration, some job satisfaction will become a more likely outcome.

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