

Precepting Anyone? Here's a List of Tips and Techniques to Help you Become the Preceptor you want to be...

With so many new nurses being hired, the role of the preceptor has gained some well-deserved recognition. If you decide to take on the role of preceptor, there are a number of skills and techniques you can use to help you become the preceptor you want to be.

- 1. Get some training:** it is best when preceptors want to take on this new role, and it is very important that preceptors get trained in order to skillfully serve their new nurse preceptees well. Understanding how people learn and the best way to transfer information are skills a preceptor must have in order to be effective.
- 2. Entering the world of conscious competence:** if you are asked or request the role of preceptor, it means that you have mastered the skill that you've been asked to teach; in fact, you probably have mastered the skill so well, you do it on automatic pilot-not thinking about the steps each task requires. And, one of the biggest challenges you may face when teaching a skill, is slowing down your thought process so you can explain the skill in a detailed step-by-step fashion to your learner; your ability to deliver your teaching in a very detailed, methodical way means that you have just entered the realm of conscious competence, which is exactly where you need to be.
- 3. Patience and more patience:** since you can do your task automatically, remember to maintain patience with your preceptee. Encourage questions throughout the learning process. Minimize your judgment regarding your learner's progress; new nurses feel quite vulnerable and when they sense judgment or impatience, they may shut down and feel that it is not safe to make a mistake or ask a question. A liberal dose of empathy is best, including trying to recall what it was like for you as a learner; think about some of the techniques your preceptor used that helped facilitate your learning and apply those techniques to your current role as preceptor.
- 4. Learning Style:** recognize and accommodate the learning style of your new nurse. Some learners like a lot of discussion, before trying out a new skill while others want to practice right away and then discuss and learn from their practice session. To understand the learning style of your preceptee, listen to what they say and observe what they do; that assessment will give you some useful information about how to tailor your approach to their learning needs. Your learning style may be different from your preceptee; that is to be expected. It is your job to enter the world of your preceptee so learning can take place. This may not be easy, but it may be the best way to achieve results.
- 5. Cultural differences, language barriers:** since new nurses are often hired from all over the world, cultural differences and language barriers are going to be part of the mix. It is best when the learner can be paired with a preceptor who shares his or her cultural and linguistic background, but that is not always possible. Start by building rapport with your preceptee. Ask questions: education, family, background, etc. And, of course, be mindful of not appearing intrusive; maintain

respect and pay attention to cues that will tell you if your boundaries are appropriate or need to be modified.

It may present more of a challenge to design a preceptorship with someone whose culture and language are different than yours, but it is not impossible. To be effective requires an extra dose of patience and an ability to surrender to the surefire possibility that misunderstandings and mistakes will be made. Through observation, you will be able to see if your learner is able to follow your directions and do what is expected.

6. Help-out, resist taking over: it is very tempting to take-over when your preceptee makes a mistake; by all means, resist that temptation, because when you take over, the learning stops. Obviously, if the mistake is potentially harmful to a patient, then stepping in should be expected. Make sure you discuss this with your preceptee prior to contact with the patient.

7. Assessment and feedback: just as you regularly perform patient assessments, you need to keep assessing the skills of your preceptee, both clinical and non-clinical skills; this assessment may not only include performing a procedure but also establishing rapport with patients. Document your findings and share your feedback with your preceptee on an ongoing basis.

8. Relationship with supervisor: establish ongoing communication with the supervisor of the preceptee. (The supervisor of the preceptee may be your supervisor, as well). Discuss the progress and any outstanding problems or concerns you have encountered, such as lateness, poor communication or lack of clinical competence. Find out if the supervisor has experienced similar problems with this nurse. If both the preceptor and the supervisor are both experiencing similar problems, this may be an early warning sign that this person may not work out.

Being a preceptor can be a very rewarding experience; it is fulfilling to teach new skills, impart information and influence the work habits of a new nurse. Enjoy the experience and know that your leadership and skills are making a significant contribution to the preceptee, the team and to patient care.

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