

Staying on the Cutting Edge

By

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Staying on the cutting edge becomes easy when you consider the following perspectives. Have you ever felt that healthcare is unique and unable to use ideas from other industries? Think again. We could achieve more if we listened to others.

Critical paths are an example of an information transfer from other industries. Critical paths are often considered by healthcare professionals to be a new idea of the 1990s, but they were used in the military and engineering for over thirty years before we adopted them in healthcare.

My question is this: Why did it take over thirty years for healthcare to adopt such a good idea? If healthcare leaders and clinical workers had networked with those in engineering and the military and with others using critical paths, healthcare agencies could have enjoyed the benefits of this very useful technique much sooner.

Why don't we transfer information between disciplines more often? If nurses would ask other professionals how they solve their problems, we could adapt some of those ideas.

Are you willing to analyze your attitude and behavior and make the necessary changes? It may be easier than you think, and the rewards are great. People who continue to grow and evolve through their whole lives experience the most happiness.

The Value of Intellectual Capital

Intellectual capital is one of your organization's most valuable assets. And it keeps on growing if managed well. We live in the information age.

You, as a new nurse, are part of your organization's capital. How you develop your skill sets will determine how much value you have to offer. If you use this currency well, your facility will become intellectually wealthy.

Intellectual capital includes:

- Work experience
- Specialized training
- Natural aptitudes of employees
- Non-nursing experience
- Creativity

Lifelong learning

Our world has changed, and so have the rules of the game. People who are lifelong learners have more job choice and variety. In the past nurses could achieve this by working for the same organization for long periods of time. Now, lifetime employment is rare. Since the number of skills that you are able to exercise determines your job security, you are accountable for your opportunities. It is an internal not external issue.

- Be proactive. Anticipate and embrace change rather than waiting to be forced. Rapid changes of census and acuity make cross training a fact of life. You have two choices.
 1. Embrace cross training, and earn to do it well. (+)
 2. Or, complain each time. (-)
- Brainstorm with your peers to identify emerging trends.
- Identify certain skills that have a particularly high return for your effort:

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Advanced Cardiac Life Support certification, IV certification, adult learning theory, CPR instructor certification and communication, leadership and management skills.

- Empower yourself with effective communication.
- Learn everything that you can.

When an opportunity to learn a new skill surfaces, volunteer right away. Accepting free training is always a smart decision. Become multi-skilled as soon as possible.

- Expand your 'people skills so that you can function as an effective team leader. Listen to your team members with sensitivity
- Notice superb team leaders, and observe how they interact with their team members.
- Read publications from both healthcare and non-healthcare industries. Broaden your perspective by exchanging information between disciplines.
- Capitalize on diversity.

Critical thinking

- Ask "Why?" when you do something new.
- Then ask, "Does it make sense?"
- Think about ways to accomplish your work more simply while still achieving good results.
- Ask yourself if you have considered all of the possibilities. Talk with others to determine if they see situations differently.
- Cultivate an appreciation of novel thoughts and perspectives.
- Become a role model for personal and professional growth.
- Believe in yourself. Expect resistance from the status quo. Learn not to take negative feedback personally.
- Network (Network everywhere).
- Cultivate an appreciation for other people.
- Develop expertise in small talk.
- Find good role models and learn from them.

- Limit your TV time and use that time for reading instead.
- Keep books in your car and read while you wait for appointments or when picking up your children.
- Read for 30 minutes every morning.
 - That adds up to over three hours of reading every week. And it makes your day more focused.

As experienced patient interviewers, nurses already possess communication skills. They just need to reconfigure those communication skills to make them more versatile.

Keeping up with new information, patient data, and best practices are all ways to use education wisely. To stay on the cutting edge, use intellectual capital, lifelong learning, and critical thinking. Maintain a curious mind and be willing to learn from other industries. Then you will be able to add value to your organization and, at the same time, create a variety of career choices for yourself.