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## What It Takes to Be a Successful Nurse

We asked nurses around the country to share their thoughts with us on what makes them successful. Whether you're already a nurse or aspiring to be one, we hope these thoughts inspire you and give you something to think about. Feel free to share your own thoughts about what it takes to be a successful nurse in the comments below the article.

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I have worked as a critical care nurse for the past 26 years and I am recognized with the top honor at my hospital as a staff nurse V. The one thing that has made me successful is being a good listener. I listen to my patients and their family about their health, concerns, questions and I find the answers. I listen to the doctors about what they have to share with the patient and their families. I listen to my manager and administration as to what they want my role to be.

Nancy Beck

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I really do believe that an aspiring nurse can determine her own successes by making key choices to the jobs and opportunities she strives to obtain. A successful nurse begins with a well-known, accredited program. At Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, IN), accreditation is never a concern, and the NCLEX passing rate is through the roof. Good professors have been my foundation for my successes. Passing that exam is only the beginning.

I had a strong desire to work in Pediatric Intensive Care. I researched some of the best teaching hospitals and decided on Children's Memorial (now Ann Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago, IL) which is a wonderful place to learn such an extensive specialty. Shortly after, an opportunity came up to work at St. Louis Children's Hospital in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit. I loved intensive care but really wanted experience at a world renown heart and lung transplant program. The veteran nurses of St. Louis really whipped me into shape. I consider this the meat and potatoes of my experience and really what has made me as successful as I am today!

I decided to travel nurse with American Mobile Healthcare a couple of years later. I liked the idea of seeing new hospitals without the staff commitment of meetings, unit projects and unit involvement. My husband and I were housed free of charge for my agreeing to 13 week flexible contracts. Seeing so many different hospitals has truly taught me that there is no one way to be a nurse or complete a nursing task. I was able to pick up pointers from all of the nurses I have come across

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along the way. I found myself saying, "I really like how she (the nurse before me) set up these IV lines", or "wow, I can't believe how comfortable this patient looks after you positioned her like that". So, I take my repertoire of nursing knowledge, add it to my ever-growing bank of healthcare skills, and use what I can to achieve the best outcome for the patient.

I am currently enrolled as a full time graduate student at Northeastern University in the Nurse Anesthesia Program. I doubt without my incredible and eclectic nursing experience, that I would be entering such a dream degree program. I am very lucky. I love what I do!

Megan Cummings, RN

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I have two words to describe what it takes to be a successful nurse, Empathy and Passion. If you can't put ourselves in the shoes of those you care for you will never succeed as a nurse. We can all learn the clinical skills of nursing but it's understanding what it's like for our patients receiving care that allows us to provide excellent care. It also takes passion. Passion for caring, a passion to learn and teach, a passion for making a difference, and a passion for doing our best to care for others. If someone goes into nursing for the money or job security without a real passion for this work they will be miserable and misery and success don't add up.

Angil Tarach-Ritchey RN, GCM  
Caring & Advocating for Seniors since 1977  
Best-Selling Author, Speaker, Consultant  
National Eldercare Expert  
The Elder Boom Foundation

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Thank you for the opportunity to share my success with you. I have been a nurse for 30+ years in many, many different venues.

First, I believe nursing is a calling. Without a "call" to the profession, one will not be successful. Nursing it not a job, it is not a career, it is a passion. I was fortunate enough to be able to begin my career as an EMT. I worked in Admissions at a major metropolitan health care facility and was able to use those skills to assist in the triage of literally thousands of patients before I decided I wanted to be "one of them".



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Yes, I wanted to wear a white uniform and tend to the masses. Two very young nurses, Lola Selph and Terry Robinson, were instrumental in my decision to go to nursing school. I wasn't able to afford RN school in the beginning, but worked long and hard hours to be able to attend a one year practical nursing program. This was difficult as it was five days a week, but I still managed to work at a department store and a clothing store nights and weekends to pay the bills.

From there, I was able to transition into an accelerated RN program that only required three semesters of clinical experience. After the grueling year of LPN school, it was merely an exercise in endurance. Again, I worked nights and weekends at the same major medical center to make ends meet while going to school.

Nursing graduation was bitter sweet - my Mother, my chief cheerleader, my best friend, was dying. She rallied enough to attend my pinning and graduation, but succumbed to breast cancer soon afterwards. One of her proudest memories, however, was hearing me speak at the Pinning Ceremony about my experiences!

In over thirty years of practice, I believe it comes down to ten things to be successful. Choosing to be a nurse is not an easy decision. Often times you don't get off on time, you work weekends, you work holidays, you are on call, someone pukes on you, someone bleeds on you, someone spits on you, and they even die on you. But - you are there for them and their loved ones in their weakest, most vulnerable moments.

To be a successful nurse you must have perseverance. You must be a patient advocate first and last. You must have a commitment to succeed, to do the best you can ever time you put on your scrubs. You must have the desire to challenge the system if you must to make sure your patient is cared for in the very best fashion. You must have empathy to deal with life's toughest challenges on a moment by moment basis. You must have compassion to know that you are doing the best you can in the moment for each and every one of the patient's that cross your path. You must have a love of people. Not everyone who comes to you seeking care is going to be clean, smell good, or even understand that you are there to help them through the situation. You must have dedication. Without it, you are going home before you clock in for that sixteen hour shift on Thanksgiving Day when you left your family having dinner that you prepared at your house. You must have flexibility. Just because the schedule said you are working in CVICU tonight, doesn't mean that is where you put your purse. Someone called in for MICU, you grab your bag and go - the patients need you. You must have a willingness to learn and a willingness to teach. Not a day or night, not a shift, is going to go by that you are not exposed to a new procedure, a new medication, or a new need for



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you to respond to a non-familiar occurrence. It is up to you as "the nurse" to explain that procedure, that medication, to your patient and their care giver. No one else is going to do it. Lastly, you must be open to opportunities. When I began my journey as a nurse, little did I know the paths I would travel. I thought I would be an ED nurse for forty years, get a gold watch, retire, and grow roses. In the meantime, I've worked in the ED, Psych, CVICU, Long Term Care, Hospice, Rural Health, Nursing Education, Nursing Administration, Nurse Recruitment, Travel Nursing, and who knows where the road will lead next!

To be a successful nurse, it takes all of the above, plus a sense of humor and a sense of self. Nursing is the best, the absolute best way to contribute to life. If we don't contribute, why do we exist??

Go Nursing!

Rebecca Brosius RN  
Clinical Liaison  
The Right Solutions | You're a nurse not a number!  
Tontitown, AR

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There are several qualities that make successful nurses. However, I believe that the one thing that makes the most successful nurse is passion.

Brittney Wilson, RN, BSN  
Patient, Nurse, and Technology Advocate

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Hard work is the key to success. Without the desire to do and learn more, nursing school clinicals are useless and subject matter in the classroom becomes tedious, overwhelming, or both. As a patient, I'd much rather have a mediocre, hardworking nurse than a smart and skilled one sitting at the nurse's station rather than answering my plaintive rings on the call light.

Secondly, a successful nurse needs common sense, as in the ability to make practical decisions and adapt theoretical knowledge in new situations. I never had that. To compensate, I worked harder at the skills I did have--technical abilities such as IV placement and the academic ability to



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get a 4.0. Once I was in the workforce for a few years, I exclusively took agency or substitute nurse jobs to force me into learning new protocols, monitors, and procedures for patients in ICUs, ERs, medical-surgical floors, and even rehab and psychiatric settings. These experiences all prepared me for my intense schooling and current role as a nurse anesthetist.

Finally, laying low at your first job is a good way to spend your first few months. No one wants to know about your fabulous accomplishments at previous clinical sites until you prove yourself to be competent.

Nick Angelis, CRNA, MSN

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To be a successful RN requires a great deal of knowledge and currently requires a minimum of a Baccalaureate degree in Nursing, organizational ability as an RN must multitask as well when dealing with many depts., health providers, and a variety of patients with multiple health problems. As an RN providing safe, evidence -based practice in caring for our patients is most important. Nurses use all their senses when formulating nursing diagnosis, accomplishing interventions and evaluating all current treatments. Nurses are with patients 24 hours a day and know their patients well. Nurses must truly care about patients and be patient all the time when caring for patients. Many RN complete their Master's degree and become Nurse Practitioners who diagnose, treat and prescribe medications for patients. There are also Clinical Nurse Specialist who teach RN's all the current treatment options available, current medications and meet all the educational needs of a particular specialty area. Nurses can progress to a Doctorate degree and serve to educate students to become the best nurses possible who will be entering a field with continued greater knowledge and requirements. The aging population needs qualified, educated, caring nurses to care for them.

Dr. Carol Caico, PH.D., C.S., N. P  
Assistant Professor, Nursing  
Senior Coordinator

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I decided to volunteer my time, effort, money, and nursing skills to Mercy Ships because they stand for what I believe in...why I became a nurse. I wanted to become a nurse to be able to care for my patients as if they were my family! To be able to give them individualized, skilled, loving care they deserve as human beings, as Christ would do. "Matthew 25:40~ And the king answering, shall say



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to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." How then could I treat my patients with anything less than what I would do for Jesus. If He has blessed me in my life to be able to provide free care to the African people, and He has worked out all the details that I am able to leave my 5 children, than how can I say no.

It takes compassion and love to be able to do what I do and deal with all the human suffering I see. I gain my strength to continue to do this for the last 23 years from God, "Corinthians 13:13 So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

To be able to offer my patients the best and most advanced care, I feel it is essential to continue learning the latest information being published and to attain certifications in the specific field I practice in. Then I am able to give my patients my whole self in caring for their needs.

You don't just give patients what they ask for or just what they need you always give them more than that ...treat each patient as if it was Christ in that bed and put aside the smell, blood, dirt, and the undesireableness of that person, and give them only the best. That is truly how I feel I can care best for my patients as if they were my own family. It is always challenging being a nurse but it is always fulfilling. I never regret going into nursing and living my ministry helping people. As one of the Corporal Works of Mercy, caring for the sick, I am fulfilling my calling in life. With all the politics involved in caring for the sick today we have to put it all aside and remember that people come first and this is why I am a nurse! In the end you always get more out of it than what you put into it. To God give the glory!

Geralyn Costello

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The nurse holds the "lynchpin" role on the health care team. RN's are the "eyes on the ground" closet to the patient. Because they must create superb communication channels and relationships with physicians, the patients and family, as well as other health team members, they require a cadre of intelligence abilities and skills. First the obvious, IQ, then emotional intelligence, as well as spiritual intelligence (SQ). Since health care is one of the most demanding and dynamic fields, learning just begins with school. Nurses should advance their education through degree programs, beginning with college. Nurses must have great learning agility, the openness and willingness to learn new information and practice new skills. This learning agility brings confidence as a great nurse must be calm under pressure.



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Many skills can be taught, but the aptitude for compassion and courageous decisions, as well as the constant desire to learn, cannot. In addition, I look for individuals with a moral compass, who can discern when ethical decisions confront the team, and address them. And finally, we hope to find nurses are leaders. Leadership is the ability to influence behavior and is best accomplished through relationships. If the nurse creates these strong relationships, he/she can partner to plan with the team and the patient/family, serve as a translator between the team and the patient, and influence the course of the health episode.

As you can see, I have high expectations for nurses. Nurses have been rated number 1 in the Gallup Poll for honesty and ethics in all professions for over 11 years. If you want to read more about what I think nurses should do, you can see it live in new book, *Death Without Cause*.

Pamela Triolo, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Author, *Death Without Cause - A Medical Mystery*  
Houston, TX

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What did it take to become successful in the profession of nursing? I could probably sum the answer up in one word, 'perseverance'. It helps to be intelligent; however, if an individual isn't driven to study hard and obtain the competencies to make them proficient and capable of practicing as a nurse, he/she will not be successful. You can't cram. You can't cut corners and practice in unsafe manners. You need to be proactive, knowledgeable, empathetic and safe when providing care.

My nursing faculty taught me to critically think. Patients have multiple needs. As nurses, we have to be able to assess and prioritize as we care for patients. And we need to LISTEN. What is the patient telling us? What is important to that patient. Listening is a huge part of communication, one of the major core performance standards of professional nurses.

I'm going to share an example of what it means to be a successful nurse. Most of my career, in addition to being a nursing professor, has involved patient care of moms and newborn babies. One of the most difficult experiences in that specialty area of nursing involves the death of a newborn. One day I had a patient come in to give birth to her baby. This was her fourth child. She and her family knew this baby had congenital problems that were not compatible with life; however, they had chosen to carry the baby to term and give birth to the baby knowing she would probably die shortly after birth.



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We spent the first hour getting to know each other in addition to the typical nursing activities required with a hospital admission. I listened. How was she feeling? What was important to her related to the labor and birth of her little baby? What could I do to help her and the family during this precious, memorable and difficult time? We planned it out together. They wanted a lot of time baby, not a brief few minutes with a trip to the morgue. I told her she could have as many hours with the baby as she and the family wanted. I asked her if she had considered bathing the baby, dressing the baby, in addition to just holding the baby. You know, those are activities that we, as mothers, take for granted; but with a newborn that dies, a mother may never even once do these routine acts of love. We crafted moments in time that could become precious memories. That's what a successful nurse does. We take time from the documentation, the nursing tasks, the everyday rush of a nursing unit and we make that patient and her family feel as if they are the most important and loved people in the world. Even with the myriad of demands on nurses these days, we can still make that happen in special circumstances such as this.

Lastly, I would mention that initial nursing education is just the beginning. We are in a healthcare profession that is constantly changing. So, in order to excel, we must continually grow in our knowledge base. This requires attendance at conferences, reading of nursing journals, networking with other nurses and membership in at least one nursing organization related to our area of practice. Because of my professional area of practice, I belong to AWHONN - The Association of Women's Health, Obstetrics and Neonatal Nurses. This is the international specialty nursing organization for nurses who practice their profession with pregnant women, women across the lifespan and newborns.

Joan E. Edwards, PhD, RNC, CNS  
Associate Professor  
Director - Center for Global Nursing Scholarship (CGNS)  
Fulbright Scholar 2011-2012 - Indonesia  
Texas Woman's University - Houston Campus  
This response provided by [The Expert Institute](#)

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The key to being a successful nurse is to find an environment where you fit. Do not work in an environment where nurses are cutting corners or practicing outside the scope of their license. Your license is too important. Lastly, if you see something, say something. Your job is to protect your patients. If you see something that is not conducive to excellent patient care, then say something in



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a constructive way.

Lorie A Brown, R.N., M.N., J.D.

Empowered Nurses, LLC

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This month marks my 10 year anniversary as a nurse and I have loved every moment. I've done Cardiac care in an acute setting, community education and home hospice. Two years into my career my desire to care for the underserved propelled me to Africa with work with Mercy Ships on their hospital ship, the Africa Mercy.

In the United States, my idea of success was navigating a 12 hour shift with no major mishaps and all scheduled medication being given on time and correctly. While competence is always a worthwhile pursuit, my patients on the Africa Mercy taught me something new. Competence must be combined with an ability to connect with our patients. What separates "good" nurses from "excellent" nurses is the capacity to empathize, be present in the moment. Your next task is never as important as the person in front of you.

There is nothing that can replace the human connection. Why do many of us compulsively check our Facebook pages for the latest updates? Or feel we can never be far from our phones? Because people matter and we want to feel connected to them. Our patients are no different. Take the time to introduce yourself, make eye contact, and shake your patient's hand. Acknowledge that they are human.

Nicole Austin RN/BSN

Nicole volunteered with Mercy Ships from 2006-2008 on the Mercy Ships' hospital ships Anastasis and the Africa Mercy. She currently works as a Medical Recruiter at the International headquarters for Mercy Ships in Garden Valley, Texas.

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Many medical professionals have a lot of trepidation with pediatric hospice because the patients are especially fragile. You have to be exact, so a lot of people won't do it, or are nervous because the psychological and medical ramifications are often greater. If you're motivated to work with patients and families, and come in with heart, soul and drive, families will open up, tell you what they want and need and allow you to learn, as well as teach.



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It's such an honor to be invited in the homes and you can feel it. Families have to trust to let you in and be with their sick children, especially those who may have had bad medical experiences, so it's a big deal to be invited in.

Burnout is very real in hospice, especially for those who work in pediatrics. But having a team to debrief with and discuss personal emotions because you can't separate them is so beneficial. It's also important to set boundaries, which I didn't initially do. Some visits take three hours and you never want to rush care, but you need to create personal time in your life...to refresh and renew.

With this job, I expected a lot more tears and sadness. Instead, I've found a lot of beauty, love, peace and joy.

Elizabeth Macqueen RN, MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care