

Taking Charge

WHAT Do I Do WHEN ...

Work Life... Am I a nurse or a slave?

S i t u a t i o n:

I'm a nurse in a major metropolitan hospital and I take pride in my work. I love helping people. What I don't like is the condescending attitude of some of the doctors, patients and even some families. Some days I feel like I'm treated more like a slave than a nurse. A few weeks of that and I'm ready to find a new profession. Any suggestions?

A n s w e r:

You haven't been too specific on what someone else said that you interpreted as "condescending" so all I can offer you are some general guidelines.

Let's say you're in a patient's room and Dr. X says, "We need to do a blood test." You know the "we" means you or someone else. You know darn well that the doctor isn't going to draw that blood himself. It's his way of stating what procedure is required.

Of course most of us like to be asked to do things, not told to do them. If you expect a certain doctor to be more polite, you may just be setting yourself up for a disappointment. Also look at wants and needs. You want people to be nice, what you really need is your emotional stability whether those folks are nice or not. If it's a missing "please" that bothers you or a kinder tone of voice you're looking for, the fact is, it may not come.

Some doctors are people who practice medicine – they're human being first. Then there are those doctors who are their title first and foremost. Just like other people in positions of "authority" – police officers or lawyers – they are what they do, and right or wrong, it becomes a major part of their personalities. Either way – they are average. Like in any other segment of society some individuals are kind and some are more abrupt.

Another possibility is that you are the only one around when doctors, patients or family choose to ask for something, whether or not it's your direct responsibility. You may know who is supposed to do a certain task, they may not. And even if they do, they're more than likely going to ask the first person they see. Since you're in a high visibility position, more than likely it's going to be you. Face it, there are usually more nurses parading through a ward on a regular basis than doctors.

Let's shed a different light on the situation. Have you ever thought of the possibility that doctors ask you to do something because they know you're competent? They know they can count on you to follow through, and follow through correctly? Or that patients and family ask you for whatever because they think of you as the "nice" nurse? That they feel comfortable asking you because you're always kind?



Face it, we all gravitate toward kind, sympathetic, compassionate, sensitive individuals when we need help whether we're at the department store or church – certainly when we're having physical problems serious enough to be hospitalized.

The only way to hold down your stress and keep from feeling like a slave at the end of a shift is to handle each incident as it comes along. You may be trained as a nurse, but there's a little bit of actress in each and every one of us. Let your light shine!

The next time something irritating or frustrating happens, rather than show you're upset even in a minor way, immediately think to yourself – “This person's not wrong, they're average,” or be more direct and silently say to the other person, “You're not wrong, you're average.” Add some humor if you like, “Senorita, you're not wrong, you're average.” A word of caution about making it amusing, don't use a derogatory term like “hey jerk...” because you'll be fueling the fire instead of eliminating it. And while you're thinking that little phrase to help you settle down, put a little smile on your face.

Use this tactic for an entire shift and I guarantee you'll be less likely to be replaying your “bad” day on the ride home from the hospital. Why spend time thinking about the job when you're officially done with your day? You can put your mind to better use.

Use the method for an entire week and you'll see a marked difference in your attitude. Who knows, after a few months, you may find that you really enjoy nursing again.

Remember, you're doing it for you, not for them!

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