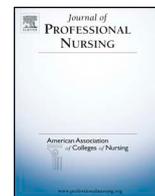


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Editorial

When Your Paper Clips Get Rusty, It Is Time for Reflection



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On October 1, 2018, I retired from my position as Dean of the University of Utah College of Nursing after completing my five-year term. I have now entered the “pre-ferment” phase of life, which has presented me with wonderful new opportunities. I will continue as the editor of the *Journal of Professional Nursing* as well as serving as a consultant for schools of nursing who need help with preparation for accreditation, development of new programs, and revision of curricula. In addition, I can devote more time to my passion of helping nurses learn to write for professional journals through offering talks and workshops. It is so refreshing now to focus mainly on how to give back to a profession that has given me so much.

One of my first jobs in retirement has been to clean out my home office and purge documents and materials no longer needed. Doing so was a phenomenal trip down the memory lane of my 40-year career in academia. For example, I found my original offer letter for my first teaching job—a full-time, 12-month position at the University of Maryland School of Nursing starting in January 1980 at a salary of \$17,200. I was thrilled to have the job and the great salary! My first assignment was to teach a critical care nursing January term course with Dorrie Fontaine. Dr. Fontaine currently serves as the Dean of the University of Virginia School of Nursing and has been a lifelong friend. She is now preparing for her retirement and the next phase of her life.

In my treasures, I found transparencies for the overhead projector, carbon-paper copies of documents, 35-millimeter slides, documents printed on dot-matrix printer, photocopies of pages from the Cumulative Index to Nursing, and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) books in the library. Perhaps most surprising and sobering was the number of documents held together by paper clips that had rusted! My how times of changed in how we do our work, but the basic core of caring for our students and colleagues endured the test of time.

People have asked me to reflect on those accomplishments for which I am most proud. That is an easy question because, by far, I am most proud of all the students I have taught and mentored and faculty I have guided. There is no greater reward in one's career than to know

you have helped shape the professional lives of many students and faculty. All my publications, presentations, awards, grants, and acknowledgements pale in comparison to the joy of having mentored students and faculty.

At one of my retirement parties, a new faculty member asked for advice for someone just starting an academic career. I have been thinking a lot about that question and here are some reflections that I hope will be helpful:

- Find a mentor. Observe and analyze those you admire and seek their wisdom. Especially watch how they deal with failure. Create your own board of advisors as you may need one mentor to help you with teaching and another to guide you in your scholarship. Also, establish a network of peers outside your organization that you can call upon for help.
- In time, commit to be a mentor for others.
- Love what you do and if at some point you realize you do not enjoy a faculty position, don't stay and spew toxic fumes throughout the organization. Instead, move on and find something that sparks your passion.
- Commit to lifelong learning. Make a conscious effort to move outside of your comfort zone and learn something new every year. Never stop learning. Read journal articles, books, and national reports. Attend conferences in your field of nursing but also in higher education.
- If you attend a conference, aim to meet at least five new people per day. Exchange business cards and continue to build your external network.
- Early in your career become familiar with your school's criteria for promotion and align your goals with them. Set realistic goals for each year using your school's promotion criteria as your guide. Set a stretch goal every year that gets you out of your comfort zone and enables you to learn something new.
- Know your organization's strategic plan and goals and determine ways that you can contribute. Consider how your goals connect to the organization's goals.
- Seek honest feedback from your peers and your supervisor and learn how to use the feedback to improve your performance. If an annual evaluation is not built into your system, ask your supervisor on an annual basis for feedback about your performance and for guidance in setting future goals.
- Celebrate your accomplishments. Don't always compare yourself with others. Instead, rate yourself based on goals set.
- Take risks. You may be unfamiliar with how to publish, give presentations, or write grants. Learn how to do these professional activities but also understand that rejection is part of the learning cycle.

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- Consider your legacy. What would you want it to be? What will your students say about you when you are gone? What will your colleagues say about you?
- Remember, everything you teach students will be outdated in just a few short years. Focus on teaching students how to be effective professionals, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners.
- Surround yourself with positive thinkers. Associate with optimistic people. Avoid the negative moaners in your institution. Remember, simple minds talk about things, mediocre minds talk about people, and great minds talk about ideas. Find great-minded people in your organization and align yourself with them.
- Learn how to gracefully challenge the status quo. You are going to frequently hear “this is the way we have always done it.” Remember, we have very little evidence to guide our academic processes and there is never just one way to do things. Develop a tolerance for ambiguity.
- Take care of yourself physically and mentally. Strive to achieve a work-life balance. Cultivate hardiness. Learn techniques that work for you in managing your stress. Be attentive to your nutrition, exercise, and sleep. Find ways to recharge your batteries.
- Get involved in a professional organization at the local and, eventually, national level. You will learn so much by interacting with others who bring to the table different worldviews.
- When you are ready, serve on committees of the school of nursing and eventually aim to serve on university-wide committees. You will learn a great deal about how the organization operates and how others approach problem-solving.
- Learn your organization’s policies so that your decisions and actions are in alignment with the policies.
- Be a leader and a role model for a culture of civility.
- Get involved in scholarship activities. Ask to join a team of authors. Find a mentor who can help prepare you for a poster or podium presentation. Set time in your schedule for scholarship. Never make the fatal mistake of waiting until your “to do” list is done to engage in scholarship activities because your “to do” list will never end.
- Aim to understand your school as a whole as well as the complexities of your university. Even if you are involved in only one program or serve on only one committee, make a point of gaining an understanding of all programs and other committees that help your school run successfully.
- Get to know faculty and staff in other schools or departments. They can teach you new worldviews and alternative ways to think and problem-solve.
- Invite more experienced faculty to your classes to give you feedback on your teaching. Be willing to truly embrace their feedback and avoid being defensive when they give you suggestions for improvement.
- Develop an area of scholarship and commit to disseminating your work through publications and presentations
- Learn how to explain your work to the lay public. Be ready to work with your alumni and advancement office to interact with donors and explain to them the highlights of your work.
- When you find yourself resisting change, stop and ask yourself why. What are you afraid could happen?
- Let go of irrational thoughts such as: I will be liked by all my students. I can do it all even though I am new. If I make a mistake it will be disastrous for me.
- Celebrate your accomplishments. Take time to savor what you have done well.