



From Head Nurse:

Simmering to Bring out that Special Taste

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I am willing to work with you to close that one meter gap.

“Today, if you were my daughter, what kind of people would I want you to seek help from at work?” Our nursing motto has always been to treat patients as if they were our own family. I asked myself, “Would I be able to treat my colleagues as if they were my own family?”

When I first started working, newcomers called me “Sister”. Now, I am at the stage I can be called their “Mom”. How should I train them? I treat them as my own children, my own siblings, and my blood relatives. I keep that mindset as I mentor the new nurses as they get accustomed to the packed intensive care unit.

Because they are my family, I sometimes tend to raise my voice. I feel sorry for them; sorry to see them spending the best time in their lives unable to soak up all the knowledge. What a waste if they are not able to learn, grow and see the colors of life through their own experiences. I have always appreciated the beauty of an ancient Chinese saying, “Love well, and whip well.” The whip is intended to help them avoid the same mistakes in the future. Inevitably, our words may sound unforgiving.

Nursing work needs to be mistakes-free, so it is a very rigorous exercise. Compared to other professions, the life and death scenarios bring another level of perfection and



mindfulness. Nursing needs to be done carefully and precisely. If there is a personal error that resulted in direct or indirect harm to the patients, it will be something that one will never be able to forgive oneself. When people are confronted with life and death, there is bound to be pressure. The demand from senior nurses is to ensure patients are safe and protected. If it benefits the patient, then “One must learn.” How quickly can we reach a mutual understanding is a challenge for personal development. The ability to respond to critics is to have a positive attitude.

Similar Background, Mentoring People and their Souls

I was once ranked in the “lowest percentile” in my class, so I understand the feeling of “abandonment” and the principle that “slow birds fly slow.” The truth is that academic grades are not necessarily good indicators of how an individual will perform in



the workplace. I was there when the Tzu Chi Hospital first opened. Over the past thirty years, I worked at the ER, the medical ward, urology, pediatrics and many other medical departments and surgical units. I became a head nurse in 1995. My cross-departmental experience provides me a different perspective when it comes to the duty of mentoring newcomers.

Before new recruits arrive at the units, I would examine their personal files because I know people from different backgrounds will perform differently. Are the new recruits' education focused on the clinical side or on theoretical collegiate materials? What about their family background and their family members? Are they raised by single-parent, grandparents, or in a healthy household? Are they the first born, second child, or the youngest? Genders, ethnicities, health condition..., the list of items to review is on and on.

With a good understanding of their background, I can customize a mentorship program for each of the new recruits. I may pair them with senior nurses who have similar background such as graduating from the same school. They may both be non-native residents, or they may have similar ethnicity or personality, etc. With common background, senior staff can connect and foster empathy with the new recruits to better understand them.

The Head Nurse is Always at her Office Waiting for You

I know it is intimidating to walk into the head nurse's office. However, I tell my staff that they should let me know when things happen. "Because I believe you must be afraid when you run into problem you are unable to overcome, then if you trust me, I hope you can share with me the problem you are facing." Each time, through interaction, I learn more about everyone's needs so I can better assist them.

Take Yu-Mei as an example; for a girl her age she has great interpersonal skills. Her extra curriculum activities while in school also prepared her for the role. I reasoned that she has potential even if it may take some additional time to narrow the gap from one hundred meters to ninety-nine meters. Even if there is only one meter left, I am willing to work with her. I always tell the new recruits that the most important thing is you are willing to change yourself. The society will not change for you, so you must adapt and change yourself to be able to deal with anything.

I also share some "Do and Don'ts" with the new recruits. The senior staff may ignore you, but you must acknowledge them. You must show your appreciation every time they teach you something. If you are sweet to them, they will be willing to teach you their skills. "Politeness will get you everywhere." You must also have a respectful attitude. When

senior staff is criticizing your work, don't rush to defend yourself. The senior staff may be caught up in the moment; your explanation will only aggravate the situation. Even if they misjudge or misinterpret, don't see it as oppression. I see your grief. The most important thing is to focus on the moment but take the effort to write a note to the senior staff to explain your position afterward. I like to spend time reminding the new recruits of these unwritten guidelines.

To assist new recruits in adjusting to the unit, I leverage my research of their background to select the appropriate mentors and make sure that I am there to support them. I tell myself that to be a manager, I not only need to fulfill my job duties, but under the Tzu Chi environment of great love,

I also need to foster compassion. I hope when my staff thinks of the unit it warms their hearts and they see it as their family. Have I treated my colleagues as my own family? Am I willing to welcome them with an open mind? To me, these are the core values. No one should think you are incapable, not before you abandon your effort, and no one can make judgement about your abilities.

Flying slowly if you are the slow flying bird is a phenomenon. For those who start early they arrive early and may reach their dreams sooner. But the ones flying slowly will still reach their destinations someday. It maybe a little later than the rest of the group but they tend to gather more experience along the way. If you are on an airplane, your view is only the cloud. If you travel on the train, you will be able to enjoy the beautiful view: the blue sky, the massive ocean and all the scenery along the way. To coin a professional term in the nursing practice, this is what we call "Simmering." Low heat, to simmer, will bring out the taste of sweetness.

