Grow Stronger by Getting Over the Near-Miss Events

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"Is Ching-Wei available?"
"No!" (Answered Ching-Wei)
"I see how it is now! You are ignoring me!"
"Please wait, Head Nurse! I am busy now!"

I noticed that Ching-Wei was scurrying between the nursing station and the patient rooms, occasionally slowed down because I had called her, and making phone calls for patients who needed attention from other departments with a sense of urgency yet remain courteous. After she took care of everything, she stopped by my office to check on what I needed earlier.

Who would have thought this seemingly frazzled newcomer had surprisingly become a very efficient and competent patient care nurse. She just completed her first year here. At the beginning she broke down and cried because she was not able to handle all these patients. Now, after being

mentored by senior staff, she went from being panic to much calmer and confident. Occasionally, she still shows anxiety and stress but compares to her self-deprecating coined term of "caterpillar" earlier, she morphed into a beautiful butterfly.

Learn from Mistakes but Not Being Held Back by Other Mistakes

She used to be afraid to talk in the managers' offices, previous manager and I included. Once the office door is closed, I noticed she started to show unease. After further discussions, I realized that during her first two months on the job she had made three mistakes in handling medication. One was an incorrect dosage, one was opening the medication without scanning the bar code, and the third was giving medication without required penicillin pre-screen. Those were all errors because of rushing. Although no harm was done to the patients, these cases traumatized her with guilt and self-doubt. Owing to her subconscious labelling, every time when she was called to the manager's office she thought something was wrong. I tried to explain to her that the errors were warnings to us. Not only can they expose our professional shortcomings that we should improve, they also alert others to avoid the same mistakes. Yet she still wasn't able to overcome the emotional obstacle. It was not until one day when a more senior nurse told her that remembering mistakes is important, but not let them hinder our progress is even more so. She gradually began to let go of her attachment and grow from these experiences proactively.

As we continue to recruit new graduates, Ching-Wei becomes the more senior level staff. She shares her mistakes and experiences when she talks to the junior nursing staff. She passes on the advice and guidance that she had learned from her mentors to comfort and encourage newcomers. This is the true meaning of paying it forward.

A Sense of Accomplishment and Gratitude of Teaching

After over ten years of clinical experience, I progressed from a junior level nurse to a supervisor and now an assistant nursing manager. From being a member to becoming a leader, I have led many direct reports, witnessed their growth to become team leaders or even mentors for other colleagues. The sense of accomplishment and gratitude is indescribable.

Of course, I also ran into roadblocks in my teaching career when nurses I supervised quit. This was a big blow to my confidence but after some consideration and adjustment of my teaching style and soliciting junior staff's feedback on clinical assignment, I was able to improve the teaching curriculum,

find ways to better communicate and see things from others' perspectives. Although mentoring junior staff is time consuming and requires a lot of extra administrative logistics, the rewards are substantial. For example, after the initial trial period, junior staffs usually write thank-you cards (handmade) as a token of appreciation. This is a simple gesture but it truly resonates with me. In return, I give three-in-one colored pen because they also helped me grow.

Adjust Emotional Loss; Learn to Be a Manager

After becoming a manager, I spent most of my time in the office and felt the isolation. I missed the time when I was a unit supervisor who knew everything first hand - all the gossips, like who had a fight with their boyfriend, who was mad at the their family or who spent too much money, etc. When I went from a coworker to a manager, there seemed to be a little gap in terms of our relationship. I had to hear some secrets or side stories second-hand or the last to know. Many colleagues feared that talking to me would take me away from my busy schedule. These kinds of emotional loss were quite immense. Of course, how to manage people who were once my coworkers take time and we all need to grow and adjust accordingly. Therefore, this is my biggest difficulty and challenge now.

As a new manager, I need to be trained in different administrative areas. Luckily, when I ask for help, senior managers or directors at all levels are willing to assist with patience. Coworkers from the same units have also been very understanding. Every time I am in a bind, they remind me to relax, do not stress out. They tell me that I am the best! It may seem like a simple gesture or a little encouragement; they have huge impact on me. This unit is like a big family, we all care about each other. We encourage each other and grow together.