

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1988

Nursing Life[®]

...For the personal side of nursing

R I G H T - T O - D I E I S S U E S

"DO NOT FEED"

Who should make that decision?

**IF YOUR HOSPITAL
SUES YOU**

**BETTER
TIME MANAGEMENT**

**DRUG AND
ALCOHOL ABUSE—
Occupational hazard?**

2,000 nurses respond to our
national survey, page 42

Earn C.E. units:

**LATEST
C.P.R. TECHNIQUES**



REACHING YOUR CAREER GOALS:



ONE STEP AT A TIME

BY PATRICIA J. HOULIHAN, RN, BSN, MS

TO GET AHEAD in nursing today, you'll need more than seniority. You'll most likely need a BSN, continuing education courses in your specialty area, appropriate skills for the job you're seeking, and a competitive edge on the other candidates.

But even more important,

you'll need a strategy for achieving your goals. As a professional, you need to *plan* your career. Without a coherent strategy, your "career" may turn out to be little more than a series of jobs—and you may wind up feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

So how do you develop a career strategy? Begin by outlining your general goals. For example, a few years ago I sat down and thought about my general, long-term goals. After a great deal of thinking, here's what I wrote:

- Improved self-awareness
- Increased job satisfaction

Getting ahead takes more than experience and skills. You have to plan each career move. Here's how.

- Increased self-esteem
- Recognition for accomplishments
- Personal control over career development.

Working toward those goals helped lead me to professional achievement and personal satisfaction—the ultimate results of any successful career strategy. Now it's your turn.

Step 1: Personal and professional assessment

The first step in developing your career strategy involves self-evaluation. Using the "Skill Inventory Worksheet" on the next page, review your personal and professional development so far.

Start by assessing your personal attributes. Are you motivated, quick-thinking, organized, technically adept? Do you work well with others and enjoy public speaking? Now, list the skills you've acquired as a result of these attributes—for example, leadership skills, decision-making ability, and so forth. Then analyze these skills to see which general job categories—such as "independent practice" or "structured environment"—seem to suit you best.

Next, assess your formal education and related skills. Don't forget to include less obvious skills, such as the ability to do library research and work with groups.

Then consider your job experiences. Think carefully about all the requirements of your past positions. For instance, did you present staff development courses, supervise others, write departmental procedures, and so on? Such responsibilities probably helped you develop communication and management skills.

Finally, consider your career enhancers—activities that help broaden your skills and show future employers you're committed to achieving your goals. Career-enhancing activities include:

- working on hospital committees
- participating in professional associations
- speaking in public (such as a talk on a health-related topic at a community center or a speech at a statewide convention)
- writing for publication (such as your hospital newsletter or a national journal)
- taking continuing education courses.

After you've assessed your skills, go back through the worksheet and underline the ones you most enjoy using. Then list at the bottom of the worksheet those skills that you need to develop further and those that you'd still like to acquire. For each skill you want to acquire, list two ways to do that. For instance, if you want to acquire management skills, you might take a business course at a local college or volunteer to chair a hospital committee.

Step 2: Setting goals

Now, write your short-term and long-term goals, based on your attributes, skills, expectations, and personal likes and dislikes. To keep your goals realistic, consider any factors that might affect your ability to achieve them. For example, do you have family obligations that might limit the time you can devote to special projects at work or to continuing education?

Naturally, short-term goals are easiest to develop. Just be sure they help you reach your long-term goals. (If they don't, revise them.) After you've written down specific goals, you're ready to go after them.

Step 3: Marketing yourself

Getting what you want from your career involves marketing yourself. To do this effectively, you'll need to survey the job market, introduce yourself to prospective employers, and sell your knowledge and skills during an interview.

1. *Surveying the job market.* Contact people you met in school and in your previous jobs. Through them,

you can learn about any current openings or personnel or program changes that may lead to openings at various institutions. You might also tell your contacts about the kind of job you're looking for, just in case they hear of something that may interest you.

If you don't already have a network of contacts, develop one. How? Become active in your professional association or join a voluntary agency that's related to one of your interests—for example, the American Cancer Society or the American Heart Association. These agencies usually have close ties with local health agencies and always have health professionals on their advisory boards.

Besides using your personal contacts, read the classified sections of newspapers from cities where you'd like to work.

2. *Introducing yourself to prospective employers.* Most likely, prospective employers will meet you through your resume first. So make sure your resume accurately reflects your strongest selling points. To keep it strictly professional, include only pertinent career information—avoid listing such things as your marital status, number of children, husband's occupation, recreational interests, and so on.

You can organize your resume several ways, but the most common formats are the chronologic and the achievement-oriented. Using the chronologic format, you'd list your education and work experience in reverse chronological order; using the achievement-oriented format, you'd list your achievements in descending order of importance. (continued on page 16.)



SKILL INVENTORY WORKSHEET

RELATED SKILLS

1. Personal attributes

2. Formal education

3. Job experiences

4. Career enhancers

Skills I'd like to develop further:

Skills I'd like to acquire:

How I'll acquire them:

1. _____

1. _____

2. _____

2. _____

1. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

2. _____

Speaking Out

RESEARCH ARTICLES: JUST WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

Writing an effective resume will take time, but it's well worth your effort. A professional-looking resume improves your chances of being called for an interview.

3. *Selling yourself during a formal interview.* You can shine during an interview if you do some advance preparation. For example, find out the name and title of the person who'll be interviewing you and the requirements of the position you're seeking. Then determine how your skills fit the job. Also, make a list of questions you think the interviewer might ask you and prepare your answers. Make a list of your own questions for the interviewer, too.

During the initial interview, don't haggle over salary. But if the interviewer asks you directly what salary you expect, give him a salary range rather than a specific figure.

An ongoing process

Formulating a strategy to help you achieve your career goals is an ongoing process. So periodically, take time to reexamine your attributes, experiences, knowledge, and skills. Evaluate your level of personal satisfaction and professional achievement, too. Depending on what you find, you may need to revise some of your short-term and long-term goals. But that's okay. As long as you're committed to a satisfying career and are following a plan, you're surely on the road to success. ⊕

Patricia Houlihan, a former head nurse and nurse-educator, is president of Biomedical Communications Enterprises, a communications consulting firm for healthcare professionals in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She's also a freelance medical writer.

A student nurse issues a declaration of war... against jargon and obscure statistics in research articles.

BY JOY MARSH, SN

I HAVE A PROBLEM with nursing research articles. I can't read most of them. The language and statistical references are so obscure in some that even after a semester of statistics, I still can't interpret the findings. I'm beginning to think that researchers aren't writing to help nurses, but just to impress each other.

I have visions of one researcher phoning a colleague to congratulate her on having her latest study published. "I really enjoyed your article," she says. "You used so much statistical jargon, I hadn't the foggiest notion what you were talking about."

If this dialogue seems farfetched, think about the last research article you read. Were you able to follow it from beginning to end? Or did you skip to the "discussion" at the end to try to understand what the author was saying? How can you possibly apply the findings to your practice if you can't even understand them?

As a student in a bachelor's level nursing program, I'm expected to enrich my class work and clinical experience with researchers' current thinking. That's certainly a valid expectation, but I often have trouble fulfilling it. Let me give you an example.

Recently, I read an article about behavior models that nurses might use to determine which patients are most likely to comply with their care regimens. Here's how the researcher explained the

factors affecting compliance: "Two variables, feelings and social expectations, influenced a person's desire to comply with his treatment, $R = .245$, p is $< .02$."

I had no idea what 'R' meant, so I hauled out my statistics textbook and looked it up. No listing for 'R.' The closest thing I found was a multiple correlational 'R,' but it had a subscript of 1.23. If I can't verify the researcher's terms, how can I understand her findings or, more important, trust them?

To help make research articles more accessible to the average nurse, I have two suggestions. First, include in your article a key explaining the statistical terms and how they apply to the study. That way, the reader can easily understand what the numbers mean and how you arrived at your conclusion.

Second, eliminate obscure language and jargon from your article. As nurses, we know the importance of using common terms to increase understanding. After all, we're constantly translating "medicalese" into simple language for patients. That's the only way we can clearly explain disorders and procedures and ensure that the patient complies with treatment. Certainly we should expect our research writers to be just as clear.

A researcher can do the most careful study possible on the most important and interesting topic in nursing. But if she doesn't explain how she conducted her study and then present her findings clearly and logically, who will benefit from her hard work? ⊕

Joy Marsh is a nursing student at Grand Canyon College, Phoenix, Ariz. She expects to graduate in December.

I'm beginning to think that researchers aren't writing to help nurses, but just to impress each other.

