

Opinion

A positive attitude can make the most of OR orientation

Remember that old song that tells us to “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative”? It emerged around the time of World War II and helped people keep their spirits up when times were tough. The words sound simple enough, but it can be a real challenge to put this positive attitude into practice. Making only positive statements for just one day is difficult for many who have fallen into the habit of allowing what is wrong to overshadow what is right.

No matter what the setting may be, emphasis on the positive fosters a better attitude in all who are present. We need positive staff members in the high stress atmosphere of the OR.

Nurses learning to scrub and circulate in the operating room may have education and experience in other areas of nursing but may begin their OR positions with little of the knowledge and skills they need to meet the demands of this specialty area. Add this to the high level of stress inherent in the OR setting and it is easy to see that a positive approach to learning is necessary. Preceptors who use a positive, constructive style of teaching find it especially effective for themselves and their learners.

I recently completed an operating room orientation program, and I am often asked for my opinion of its quality, what I found effective, and what I would like to see changed. Above all, my positive attitude and the positive attitudes of my preceptors helped me learn more and stay interested longer than other learning methods I had experienced.

Both preceptors and learners can use positive thinking to their advantage.

Tips for the Preceptor

The following tips are simply reminders of common courtesy. You will find they have special application during OR orientation.

Know yourself. If you enjoy teaching, preceptorship is for you. If you do not want to teach, speak up. Explain the situation to your supervisor. It is a poor teacher who teaches against his or her will. This creates an unpleasant situation for both teacher and learner. If you work in a teaching hospital and are uncomfortable with the teaching role, it may be wise to consider working in a different setting.

Know your learner. Knowing a few facts about your learner will help you choose the teaching style or approach that will be most effective. You can learn while you teach. Although you may have a thorough knowledge of the operating room, a new nurse coming from a different clinical area can broaden your horizons. Insights gained from other areas of nursing can enhance your understanding of the holistic nature of patient care.

Always compliment something. No matter how inexperienced a learner may be, there is something to be praised. A simple statement such as, “You did that very well,” can make a novice’s day.

Make suggestions for improvement in a positive way. Statements such as, “Let me help you get that organized,” or “Let’s go through the names of these microinstruments together,” promote unity between preceptor and learner and can decrease the stress of the learning process.

Show respect for your learner. Remember the simple “please” and “thank

you.” When you discuss a case with other staff members, remember to include the learner in the conversation. This offers more understanding of the procedure and helps the learner feel like part of the team.

Avoid criticizing other preceptors.

A learner may have several preceptors and may see tasks done in various ways. This may confuse a beginner. Emphasize the basic standards and recommended practices and point out how they can be upheld by each method.

Show appreciation for the learner’s position. You were not born knowing how to scrub and circulate. Share a few of your own learning experiences.

Tips for the Learner

The learning process may be a tense time for someone new to the OR. These tips can help make the process more enjoyable.

Be considerate of your preceptors.

They are human beings and have the same fatigue, stress, headaches, and personal problems as everyone else. You can avoid adding to their troubles by being an attentive and forgiving learner. Remember to say “thank you” even if it was a hard day.

State your purpose clearly.

Communicate openly to let your preceptor know your learning goal for the day and how much assistance you expect. This will lessen the frustration of receiving too little assistance.

Do your homework. Know the procedures you will be doing ahead of time, if at all possible, and read about it. This will give you a solid base to build on, and you will be able to ask intelligent questions. Procedures must be done in a timely manner, and your preceptor does not have time to be with you every minute. Do your part.

Be assertive. Learn to ignore minor irritations and childish comments, but speak

up against personal insults or any form of harassment from anyone. Report such incidents to your supervisor. You do not have to accept abuse just because you are a new employee or are in a learning phase. Your prompt action will ensure a positive atmosphere for you and for future employees in your OR.

Give something back. Your preceptors have added your orientation to their existing work load and have taken extra time to explain procedures and answer questions. Compliment what they do well and thank them for their efforts. They need praise and recognition too.

Be flexible. Things can change quickly in the operating room. If your assignment is changed abruptly, accept it and learn from the experience.

Always try to be pleasant and positive. Even the worst situation can be eased considerably by a calm, constructive attitude. New people often set the tone for change in established institutions. Bring a positive attitude with you.

Conclusion

It takes cooperation between preceptor and learner to make the operating room orientation a success. If you set the tone, others will certainly follow. Whatever your role, your positive attitude can lead the way.

Learning or teaching to scrub and circulate in the OR are unique experiences. Your own attitude and that of your preceptor or learner will be the major determining factor in the success of your program. With a positive, flexible outlook, obstacles to orientation can be overcome. Accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative in your OR orientation program.

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