

Tips for elevating the image of nursing

By Karen L. Tomajan, MS, RN, BC, CNAA, CRRN

Nurses build the public image of nursing through day-to-day interactions with patients, families, and colleagues. Keep the following tips in mind as you seek to embody an image that reflects your level of education, expertise, and professionalism.

Present a professional image:

- Make sure your uniform is clean, pressed, and professional. Think about the patterns on your scrub tops—what do they communicate about you?
- Identify yourself as a professional nurse. Keep your name tag visible. Introduce yourself by your full name, and tell people you are an RN or LPN.

Communicate about your work and discuss your accomplishments:

- Prepare and practice a 30-second “elevator” speech about your role as a professional nurse. Communicate how you have made a difference for patients in your care.
- Describe your independent actions to prevent complications and save lives. Many patients and families believe that all nurses do is follow doctors’ orders. When you intervene to address a problem, let them know how your actions made the difference.
- Provide a great experience for nursing students. Talk to them about your role and your accomplishments as a nurse.

Correct inaccurate nursing stereotypes:

- When you see nurses or nursing misrepresented in the media, write a letter to the sponsor or editor.
- You can also work with the organization The Truth About Nursing (www.truthaboutnursing.org) to bring even greater attention to the issue.

Be engaged in your workplace:

- Take opportunities to participate in your employer’s opinion surveys. When submitting written comments, take care to provide suggestions for improvement.
- Participate in employee forums, town hall meetings, committees, and other opportunities to become more involved in your organization. Actively engaged nurses experience higher levels of job satisfaction, which improves their sense of well being.

Grow professionally:

- Consider joining and being active in a professional association, whether it is your specialty association, state nurses’ association, honor society, or all three.
- Develop a five-year plan for your career. Identify professional development activities that will help you learn the skills necessary to achieve your plan.
- Promote positive working relationships within your team. Avoid gossip. If you are having difficulty working with a colleague, approach that individual with your concerns, and work to resolve them. Ask your manager to assist you if you need help preparing for this discussion. You will find that resolving issues proactively helps prevent conflicts from escalating.