

## From Clinician to Faculty: 10 Tips

**A**fter working for many years in hospital settings as a clinical nurse specialist, an educator, and a manager, I moved on to a new adventure—academia. During the first few years, I was engaged in teaching undergraduate nursing students in both the classroom and clinical settings, which I found to be rewarding and challenging. However, I wished to broaden my academic role, and I soon realized my options to do so would be limited without further education and a doctoral degree. Therefore, I decided to pursue a PhD degree in nursing. After earning my degree, I transitioned from a clinical track to an academic tenure track, with its corresponding expectations for research productivity, as well as the teaching and service responsibilities with which I was familiar.

Although it is still early in my academic career, I am now establishing a program of research, pursuing grants, submitting publications, and trying to maintain a balance among my research, teaching, service, and personal life. I've learned some lessons along the way that may be helpful to others facing similar challenges, and I share them here as "10 tips" for successfully navigating an academic career track. I've summarized them as "five Ps and five Ms."

### The Five Ps

*Passion.* The journey toward a robust program of research is long. Without passion for your work and your ideas, it is easy to become dispirited. Choosing an area of research in which you are willing to invest substantial time and energy exploring and discovering is critical to your

career success. In the current economic environment in which research budgets from both government and private sources are facing substantial reductions, it is vital to not lose faith in and passion for your chosen field, especially when receiving notices of rejection. However, without passion for your research topic and questions, even success will feel empty.

*Planning.* It is essential to be strategic in planning your program of research. However, intentional planning should not be limited to your research program. You also should plan—and balance—your other responsibilities, both at work and in life. For example, if you have a heavier teaching load in a given school term, you can plan grant writing for other, less teaching-intensive times. Although you may not have the time to write a grant proposal when juggling a heavier teaching load, you can still devote time to preparing your materials and resources, such as gathering pertinent articles, reading, and discussing your ideas with colleagues. Then, when the time to write arrives, you will be better prepared and able to be more productive.

Balancing your personal life with your academic life is equally important, and only you can ensure the balance. Planning ways to maintain and replenish your energy can help sustain your academic productivity. At times, you may need to devote more attention and time to personal and family needs—life happens! When such times arrive, do not be reluctant to reduce your academic pursuits but have a clear plan and resolve for resuming your academic focus as soon as you are able.

One other helpful hint: if you are not already a list maker, try to become one. Not only can lists help you to plan what to do and in what order to do the tasks, there is great satisfaction in being able to cross an item off your list after you've accomplished it.

*Pursuing.* As a new faculty member, there are many things to learn, such as a new academic culture, the academic rank and tenure system, and new teaching-learning strategies, including new technologies. Pursue learning about these areas through available materials, such as faculty and student handbooks, institutional governance documents, and published literature on teaching and learning. Take advantage of institutional resources, such as support from information technologies, instructional design services, library, and the research office staff. When pursuing grant funding, it is essential to become acquainted with various funding mechanisms, including federal and private foundation grants, as well as internal resources that may be available to support your research. Use your professional networks and try out your ideas and pose questions with seasoned faculty and expert professional staff. Look across your campus for experts, such as biostatisticians or basic and behavioral scientists, who may be able to assist or collaborate with you to provide invaluable guidance as you develop your scholarly work.

*Publishing.* Disseminating your scholarly work is essential for advancing your program of research and your academic career. Reviewers judge an investigator's track record of evidence-based publications when evaluating grant proposals of original research for funding. How-

ever, many ideas, including conceptual reviews, editorial pieces, secondary data analyses, and more, can be developed for publication. Identifying appropriate journals and audiences for sharing your work is an important consideration. At times, publishing in prestigious journals with a greater impact factor may take precedence; at other times, disseminating your work more broadly, such as reaching a clinical audience, may be the priority. In either case, in addition to nursing journals, journals in other fields may be appropriate venues for publishing. Publishing outside of nursing can help to establish and extend your area of expertise to other health care professionals and diverse academic audiences.

**Persistence.** Persistence is key. Preparation of grants or manuscripts to achieve funding or publication may take months (or longer) for completion. Persistence, by taking small steps and moving toward your goal each day, will ultimately pay off. Journal articles and grant submissions are rarely accepted or funded on first submission; therefore, using constructive criticisms of your work provided by peers, mentors, and others, will enable you to revise, polish, and improve the product, increasing the likelihood of having your article published or your grant application funded. Persistence is also essential for generating new research ideas. Brainstorming many ideas and cultivating several lines of inquiry can help to further develop your thoughts. Establish a habit and a system for recording your ideas, which you can refer to as you further develop the ideas. William Blake, an English poet, painter, and printmaker, once said, "There's no mistake so great as the mistake of not going on!" (Thinkexist.com, n.d.)

### The Five Ms

To fully realize the five Ps (Passion, Planning, Pursuing, Publishing, and Persistence), it is imperative to garner support from funders, mentors, and networks and to effectively manage ourselves, which leads to the five Ms.

**Money.** Identifying and securing sufficient financial support for your work is critical for a successful career in academic nursing. External funding can be sought to support your research, which is especially important in research universi-

ties. If you are a newly minted, doctorally prepared faculty member, you should try to negotiate some workload time to jump start your scholarship productivity. Pilot studies are important to establish your program of research, but money is also needed to support your time and conduct these studies. Inadequate financial support, combined with too many pilot studies running concurrently, can be an overwhelming and exhausting experience for a new faculty member. Pilot studies supported by internal seed monies can help to establish your program of research, but larger grants will eventually be needed to support your time and the costs associated with larger research projects. Your school or institutional research office, as well as development staff, can be helpful partners in identifying sources of government, foundation, and corporate support. Take advantage of them.

**Mentorship.** Mentors are invaluable for professional growth and career development. Seek advice from experts and experienced faculty members in your areas of interest. Some professional organizations offer structured mentorship programs, which provide opportunities to cultivate new skills and gain valuable career advice. Rarely can a single mentor address all of your mentoring needs; therefore, identifying several mentors to guide your work and development in various aspects of academic life, such as teaching, research, and professional advancement, is advised. Mentoring offers opportunities to learn and grow from the expertise and experiences of others. Mentoring also provides an opportunity for you to give back, through expressing gratitude to your mentors, sharing your own knowledge and experience with your mentors, and paying it forward by committing to be a mentor to others in the future. Cultivating and tending these important professional relationships will help to ensure they will endure as long-term relationships that are fulfilling to both you and your chosen mentors.

**Making Connections.** Thanks to burgeoning technological advances, it is now easier than ever to connect with experts and colleagues in your fields of interest, regardless of where they are located. Conferences offer another way to connect with colleagues with similar interests. By seeking out and engaging colleagues who

are doing similar work, you may encounter any number of opportunities—both planned and serendipitous. Developing and cultivating such relationships can lead to fruitful opportunities for collaborative work, funding, and dissemination of your scholarly work. Further, connections beyond your own institution and community are essential when it comes time to seek promotion and tenure, as nearly all universities require supportive references from experts in the field.

**Managing Time by Managing Yourself.** Each day offers a finite amount of time. You can manage time to your advantage by managing yourself and the discretionary time available to you. Distracting yourself with tasks that are easier or more appealing can waste valuable time that could be better spent on your scholarly work. Even a small amount of time—a disciplined 30 minutes each day focused on research or scholarly writing—adds up quickly. Such short intervals can be used to read an article, write a few sentences or paragraphs, search for funding opportunities, or have a purposeful, focused conversation with a mentor or colleague. Avoid time traps such as personal disorganization and distracting time wasters.

To protect both time and energy, also learn how to say no strategically. Although it is necessary for your career advancement and work satisfaction to be collegial and accept a reasonable number of committee or other service assignments, it can become too easy to fill up your calendar with unproductive activities that detract from other important work and compromise achievement of your career goals. Furthermore, becoming cognizant of how long you spend on each project and taking precautions to ensure that one project does not consume all of your time is crucial to good time management and self-management. Learning to prioritize tasks and responsibilities, delegating when appropriate or necessary, is essential. Try to touch each paper or attend to each e-mail only once if possible, and do not simply move papers from one pile to another or allow messages to accumulate without taking action.

**Maintaining Physical and Psychological Well-Being.** Managing stress and maintaining well-being are essential in-

redients for a successful faculty career. Work is an important part of life, but not the only part. Maintaining focus and perspective, while not becoming consumed by your work, should be a daily reminder to yourself. Exercising regularly, scheduling time to unwind, and devoting attention to the people, events, and activities that nurture your mind, body, and spirit will help you to sustain and renew your energy and motivation for both work and life.

These five Ps and five Ms are offered as helpful hints for novice faculty members just launching an academic career, and they are important reminders for seasoned fac-

ulty members who may feel stalled or frustrated in this era of increasing demands on our time and energy. Although not a cure-all, these 10 tips can help you to reframe your perspective, renew your passion, and restore your satisfaction with choosing a career in academic nursing.

### Reference

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