Building the Foundation of Your Career

By Leah Connor

Every long-term career needs building blocks. These building blocks need to be carefully planned out so that a career can become a reality. A career is defined as “an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person’s life and with opportunities for progress” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2014). A career is created through hard work and dedication. Hard work and dedication are needed to make a career strong enough to push it along the pathway of success.

Many people ask themselves several questions before choosing a career. What am I passionate about? Would I want to do this forever? What am I good at doing? It is important to ask yourself these questions because when you are doing something you are passionate about, you do not mind working hard at it. Becoming a registered nurse can be a long and difficult journey filled with many ups and downs. The pathway to a career as a registered nurse requires hard work in school, career planning, and personal sacrifices.

When you are planning a career in nursing, it is important to understand the role of a registered nurse and the basic requirements of the career. In the article, “Measurement of Students’ Perceptions of Nursing as a Career,” the researchers reported that, among young adults, there are many false beliefs about the basic requirements for becoming a nurse (Mautina, 2010). Therefore, it is important to do your research to fully understand what being a nurse really means.

A nurse’s major priority is the care and well-being of the patients. Registered nurses work with physicians and other healthcare professionals involved in the patient's treatment. Nurses assess, plan, teach, treat, and evaluate patients. It is important for a nurse to teach patients about their conditions in order to improve their ability to follow the treatment plan. For example, a nurse may assess a patient with insulin-dependent diabetes and find that the patient is unable to self-administer insulin due to a knowledge deficit. If the nurse teaches the patient how to effectively administer his or her insulin, the nurse can improve the patient's adherence to treatment and overall well-being.

Being a nurse can be a rewarding career, but to achieve the goal of becoming a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science in nursing degree, or an associate degree followed by an RN completion degree, you must draw up a plan. Research the nursing schools you are interested in attending and know their requirements for admission. According to Roderick (2009), you must begin planning your educational path early because highly selective colleges have earlier and more complicated application deadlines and requirements than less selective colleges. More selective colleges may also have specific standardized testing requirements. A potential student must know what these requirements are and take the required tests early enough to gain understanding and experience, especially if retesting is offered. Once admitted to a university that has the desired nursing program, you have to maintain an acceptable grade point average (GPA) to be accepted into the nursing school. Therefore it is important to stay focused on the end goal and work hard. Getting accepted into a nursing program is only half the journey. When starting a nursing program, you must be determined to finish. Envision yourself at the finish line.

It is imperative for a nursing student to practice good study habits. You must review the class material daily. Procrastination can be your downfall. To survive to the end, you must live and succeed test by test. This is where the hard work comes into play. Hard work is needed throughout the construction phase of your journey to build a strong foundation of knowledge. Living and succeeding test by test can decrease your stress level and keep you focused on achieving the overall goal one step at a time.

The first semester of nursing school consists of fundamentals, such as the nursing process and a review of systems. These fundamental blocks build the foundation for the following semesters. Each semester in school you build blocks on top of blocks. Each block is needed as the foundation for the next block. It is important to study the material taught in class each week in order to retain what you have learned. (Continued on page 28)
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Students who consistently only study the night before a test during their first semester may be able to make acceptable grades on their exams, but the content they learn will only be in their short-term memory. Then, when it’s time to apply that content in the following semester to learn new content, it will be more difficult, time consuming, and stressful.

You cannot afford to slack off for even one semester. Each semester is needed to sustain you through the subsequent semesters.

Living and succeeding test by test is filled with challenges and demands. Challenges include late nights of studying, reading for countless hours, and studying for days. And they call for timeliness and organization. With hard work, it is possible to overcome the difficulties of challenges and demands. Like the great Martin Luther King Jr. once stated, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (DrMartinLutherKing.net, 2015).

When planning for a career you have to be personally accountable for your actions. Your success in college and beyond depends on your actions and character strengths. In an article in The New York Times, author Paul Tough wrote that the students who excelled the most academically in high school were not necessarily the students who had the most success getting through college. The students who ultimately had the most success were the ones with optimism, persistence, and social intelligence. Tough (2009) also noted that successful students were able to recover from a poor grade and commit to do better on subsequent tests. These students achieved their goals by staying focused on studying, hoping that in doing so they could persuade professors to give them additional help when needed. According to Tough (2011), research conducted by Angela Duckworth determined that the people who accomplished great things combined a passion for a single mission with an unswerving dedication to achieve that mission, whatever the obstacles and however long it might take. She called this quality “grit.” A nursing student must possess “grit” to have the most success in navigating their educational career and also their future career as a nurse.

Student nurses must make the necessary sacrifices to study to be successful on each exam. The word *sacrifice* is defined as "the act of giving up something that you
want to keep, especially in order to get or do something else or to help someone” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014). Your future nursing career is based on how well you are able to live out this definition of sacrifice during the time you spend building the foundation for your career. Anything that’s worth doing can come with many sacrifices. As an example of sacrificing for a future career, parents who are in nursing school must sacrifice spending time with their children to spend long hours studying. This time away from their children may be very difficult; however, in the future, the hours spent studying will be worth the sacrifice because they can earn the opportunity to better provide for their children. Sacrifices are an integral part of nursing school.

It is normal for the beginning of a person’s career to be filled with many questions and concerns, but choosing a career in nursing can be a rewarding decision. A nursing career is for a person who has compassion and receives personal rewards through helping others. In a study described in the Journal of Nursing Scholarship, the term emotional work was applied to the work done in the nursing profession, indicating that “emotional work is a central part of the care nurses give to patients” (Arelia, 2013). The study found that nursing students’ experiences are often characterized by emotional strains such as stress, ambivalence, disgust, frustration, and conflict. According to the study, to be effective in the nursing profession, a person must be able to deal with people, be able to separate their emotions from the work, and be self-motivated (Arelia, 2013).

Choosing to build a career in nursing can be very difficult and filled with many trials. Vince Lombardi believed in working through difficult times. He said, “The dictionary is the only place that success comes before work; work is the key to success, and hard work can help you accomplish anything” (Lamoureux, 2015). As students build a foundation in nursing they must remember that, as they are building, the previous brick greatly affects the stability of the next brick. In the process of building a career, the key to a strong foundation is to know the work involved, plan properly, and to have good study habits so that you can work hard to learn the content, be willing to make sacrifices, and develop the grit necessary to get through the process. These things are all worth the achieved goal at the end of the road—a career as a professional registered nurse.

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References


