

Nurses Need Coaches Too

Athletic coaches are used in sports to lead a team to victory. *Executive coaches* are used in businesses to either correct underperformance or sharpen skills. *Life coaches* help people with relationships, careers, family and financial issues. *Nurse preceptors* can integrate these coaching functions to enhance their preceptor role.

What Do Coaches Do?

Coaches use many tools to accomplish a task. Goal setting is often the foundation for a coaching relationship. Coaches support the individual team members to enhance and achieve the goals of the team. The coach guides the process by assessing the goals periodically and providing feedback on the progress toward accomplishment of the goal.

Build Coaching Relationships

1. *Get to know each other. Create rapport.* Building a relationship between the preceptor and the orientee requires skill and patience. When we take the time to get to know someone, it shows we care. During this step, you are establishing yourself as a good listener.
2. *Establish the rules and discuss mutual expectations.* Establishing the ground rules allows both the preceptor and the orientee to understand expectations and discuss specific concerns and fears about the relationship. This can be accomplished with a formal or informal learner contract that reviews the responsibilities of each person, as well as the confidentiality agreements needed to establish a trusting relationship.

Nurse Preceptors Bring Out the Best in Orientees

In sports, a good coach is dedicated to bringing out the best in his players to help them become effective members of the team. The goal of coaching is to guide, inspire and empower the athletes to realize and develop their potential. The nurse preceptor as a coach guides the orientee to be an integral member of the health care team. Nurse preceptors function as coaches when they do not supply the answers to their orientee; but instead help the orientee discover the answers.

Qualities of a Good Coach: Implications for Preceptors

1. **Knowledgeable:** To teach effectively, the coach must have a deep understanding of the fundamentals, as well as advanced skills. New nurses seek input from preceptors when they are uncertain about how to handle a situation. Your role as a coach is to strengthen competency.
2. **Willing to learn new strategies or seek new information:** Coaches continually learn and develop new training techniques. Nurse preceptors role model their willingness to stay up-to-date with new research and trends in nursing practice. What do you do to keep current as a preceptor?
3. **Motivator:** Successful coaches motivate with positive attitude and enthusiasm for the game. Nurse preceptors work to maintain enthusiasm.
4. **Able to individualize and adapt styles as needed:** Coaches adapt game plans based on assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses. Nurse preceptors learn to individualize their plan based on the skills of the orientee. Paying attention to an orientee's emotions, strengths and weaknesses is the responsibility of the nurse preceptor.
5. **Effective communicator:** Coaches explain ideas clearly. Effective communication means setting defined goals, listening carefully, giving direct feedback and reinforcing key points. The preceptor who communicates well will have increased credibility, competence and respect.
6. **Leads by example:** Effective coaches adhere to the same rules they set for their players. Nurse preceptors lead by role modeling the right way to perform job responsibilities.
7. **Educator:** The coach is always an educator, with a goal of making the orientee a self-sufficient, competent and reliable member of the team. The nurse preceptor as coach and educator gives the orientee the tools to be successful, and guides the orientee in the process to build new skills.
8. **Evaluator:** A good coach reviews the game tapes in order to modify future game plans. Nurse preceptors must remember to provide appropriate feedback and evaluation to improve practice.
9. **Focus on Team Work:** Coaches rely on teamwork to achieve success. Nurse preceptors instill the value of teamwork throughout the nursing orientation.

References: Megginson, D., & Clutterbuck, D. (2005). Techniques for coaching and mentoring. Oxford: Elsevier.

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