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Coaching and Career Transition for the Nursing Professional

By Pam Williams, ACC

Have you ever:

- ***Wanted to take the next step in your professional journey but didn't know where to start?***
- ***Found yourself suddenly out of a job not knowing what to do next?***
- ***Accepted a new position and wished you could accelerate the learning curve?***

These are all career transition situations in which a professional coach can be an integral part of a nurse's support team, whether the transition is voluntary and planned or completely unexpected. A coach is not a recruiter, but rather a supportive partner in the career transition process.

In the case of a nurse who wants to take the next step in their career journey, whether the next step is a promotion, a career in a new field or specialty or a simply a different position, a coach can help the nurse:

- Clarify short and long-term career goals;
- Explore career options through the lens of those goals, as well as their strengths, values, skills and experience;
- Provide support, encouragement and accountability through the job search process; and
- Advocate effectively on their own behalf when it's time to negotiate salary and benefits.

Coach Beverly Bitterman, MSN, ARNP, says that when contemplating a career transition, it's important to craft the questions that you want to answer about what's really important to you in your career. For example, how much direct patient care is right for you? What is the ideal work setting for your genuine job satisfaction? Is it important for you to be in a management position? Do you want to travel? How many hours do you want to work? What makes you feel fulfilled at the end of the day or week?

Once you've crafted the questions, Bitterman suggests spending time reflecting on your answers, then scheduling informational interviews with individuals who are doing the job you think you want. This step will help you test the fit between your career goals and the realities of the position.

A **job search plan** will help you stay focused whether your transition is voluntary or unexpected and provide a framework around which you and your coach can measure progress. Consistent actions, like reaching out to your network, posting your resume on web-based search engines and responding to position announcements will keep the momentum going.

Coach Marlanda English, PhD, says that one of the biggest job-search challenges is staying motivated if the *only* reward is landing a job. Celebrating small steps and successes along the way will help keep your energy level high over the duration of your job search. Another challenge, says Dr.



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English, is to remember that you are responsible for selling yourself in everything from your resume to the interview. A coach can help you hone and practice your stories so that your accomplishments come through loud and clear.

Once you've accepted a new position, a coach can serve as an independent objective sounding board and share tools and resources so you can get up to speed as quickly as possible. When Sarah*, a nurse executive, accepted a new position, she hired coach Sandy Somers, RN, MS, ACC because she wanted to leverage her skills, talents, and abilities into 'great and transformative work.' Sandy helped Sarah clarify her vision for the role and for the organization and gain expertise in nurturing and relying on her own unique strengths to increase her impact. Sarah believes that her coaching experience nurtured her own growth, provided a disciplined way of assessing her impact and dramatically increased her effectiveness.

When Alicia*, a healthcare professional, made the move from a managerial to an executive position, she knew she would be facing new responsibilities, challenges and pressures. She hired coach Jeanette Eleff, CPCC, MBA,

RN to help her navigate the unfamiliar landscape. Alicia says that working with Jeanette provided her with the tools and support she needed to improve her delegation, time management and organizational skills. Alicia learned, through her work with Jeanette, how to establish and accomplish goals, skills that still serve her well today.

Coaching support during a career transition can range from participating in a coaching group during your job search process to working individually with a coach as you settle into a new position. The Center for American Nurses has launched a new coaching program designed to help nurses connect with professional coaches familiar with the diverse aspects of a nursing career. To learn more about the coaching team, or to register for a free informational teleforum to learn more about the program, visit www.centerforamericannursescoaching.org.

**Names have been changed*

Pam Williams, ACC, is the Chief Innergy Officer and Internationally Certified Coach at Innergized! and is working closely with the Center for American Nurses.