



What the Gray Haired Never Shared

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For some reason, it is likely that no one with gray hair ever sat you down and shared with you some secrets to longevity, productivity, and career success in medicine. Why we in medicine tend to “eat our young” remains a mystery to me. If you have seen the movie *300* or read the book *Gates of Fire*, you understand that we tend to act very “Spartan-like.”

I am not advocating a certain manner of practice, nor am I suggesting you should sacrifice quality of life in return for career achievement. Rather, this column is meant as food for thought about whether or not your behavior and actions are limiting or enhancing your career aspirations.

Over my 22 years of medical practice, I have been a student, a resident, an attending, an employee, an independent contractor, an employer, and a practice owner. Some of the observations I will share here should be the things you digested at the dinner table along with your meatloaf while you were growing up. Others I learned early in my career by observing or through my own trials and errors. And a few of them are ones that I probably need to occasionally be reminded of.

Unfortunately, over the years, I have witnessed more than a few perfectly competent providers derailed by not adhering to modes of behavior that have nothing to do with violating the Hippocratic Oath or applicable laws and employment practices.

The following aphorisms are what I would tell someone who asked me how to be a team player, and practice conscientious, high-quality urgent care medicine while also advancing their career. They’re then broken down into examples of what I mean; when you read these statements, mark each statement with a “T” for true or “F” for false and see how you fare.



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Practices want hard-working, efficient, reliable providers to care for their patients. Are you giving that impression?

- I show up for work before the start of my shift, I am never late, and never ask to lock the doors early.
- I don’t call in sick unless I am in the hospital as a patient. Medicine is a profession and professionals do not leave their patients, their team members, or the business exposed.
- If I am forced to rearrange my schedule, I take it upon myself to secure coverage.
- I do not make patients wait for me.
- I do not take personal, non-emergency calls during the work day.
- I never answer a cell phone in the patient’s room.
- I apologize for the wait when I enter a patient’s room.
- Before leaving a room I ask the patient if there is anything else I can do for them and thank them for coming in.
- I take the initiative to follow up on patients who I am afraid may fall between the cracks.
- I do not stay late simply to get overtime pay.
- I embrace and comply with company policy, even if I don’t understand it or agree with it. If I have a concern with a policy, I use the appropriate channels to address it.
- I understand that every patient should be valued and that his or her time is important.
- I seek out others and ask what I can do to perform better.
- I can treat more than one patient at a time.
- I am not technologically challenged.
- I ask the staff to initiate treatment while I am taking care of other patients.
- I complete the chart during the encounter, as opposed to after the encounter or at the end of the shift.
- I use ancillary testing appropriately to support my actions and documentation.
- I can multitask with the best of them.
- I return patient or pharmacy phone calls promptly.
- I don’t use the Internet inappropriately at work.

Practices want competent providers to care for their patients.

- I keep abreast of journal articles and I attend CME events to stay at the top of my game.
- I am very aware of the “high-risk” rule-out diagnoses and I treat and document appropriately.
- I am not afraid to consult my peers on patient care issues.
- I respond to quality concerns appropriately.
- I address patient complaints and concerns in a timely, thoughtful manner.
- I give patients informed consent prior to performing procedures or tests which are inherently risky.
- I do not get hostile or offended when a patient makes a choice to not follow my advice.
- I advocate for my patients.
- I learn how to perform procedures typically within my scope of practice, as opposed to sending everything to the emergency department.

Practices want appropriately dressed providers to care for their patients.

- I dress conservatively within the practice’s dress code while in the clinic or at the office.
- I understand that “casual dress” does not mean jeans, sandals, and a t-shirt.
- I understand that how I look and dress reflects on my judgment.
- I don’t walk around the office without shoes, in shorts, or tennis shoes.
- I am clean shaven, have no exposed tattoos, and I do not have visible piercings, save conservative earrings.

Practices want team players. Are you?

- I volunteer for assignments and pitch in before being asked.
- I help my teammates. I am not above taking vitals, cleaning and dressing wounds, putting a sheet on a bed, or helping someone to and from their car.
- I occasionally bring breakfast or buy lunch for the office.
- I check and answer e-mail in a timely manner.
- I have been known to carry around a coffee mug or wear clothing with the practice’s name on it.
- I have attended, and even organized, practice social events, community service events, or athletic teams.
- I don’t engage in malicious gossip.
- I don’t shy away from the tough, dirty, whiny, patients.
- I don’t avoid rooms containing more than one patient.
- I don’t make a big deal about every perceived slight. If upset, I go to the source to inquire about it.
- I don’t complain about the amount of work, the number of patients, or the pace because I understand that the patients pay my salary.
- I am not passive-aggressive—saying or agreeing to do one

thing and then doing another.

Would you want to work with someone like you?

- I am cheerful, optimistic and can maintain a cool head and good sense of humor even when the chips are down.
- I don’t swear or tell offensive jokes.
- I don’t share unnecessary personal information with my coworkers.
- I say “please” when I ask for help and “thank you” after I am helped.
- I demonstrate empathy and compassion by my personal interactions with patients and teammates.
- I help others without being asked.
- I am a good listener.
- I shower before work, brush my teeth after lunch, use deodorant, and carry breath mints.
- I don’t smack my gum or chew with my mouth open.
- I leave my personal crises at home.
- I share interesting articles with colleagues.
- I demonstrate the adage, “I went into medicine because I care about and want to care for people.”

Practices want well-rounded providers who behave appropriately in social situations.

- I never drink to excess at any company function.
- I dress appropriately for company parties.
- I am a good sport about attending company events.
- When I am talking to a coworker at an event, I don’t ignore their significant other.
- I don’t criticize the location, food, or music at company events.

Practices want providers who interact appropriately with staff.

- I never snap or yell at staff members.
- If I have a criticism, I discuss it in private with the person.
- I generally refrain from blaming someone for a mistake, even if it is true.
- I always remember to ask teammates how it is going, if they need help, or what I can do to assist them.
- I understand that my employer is extremely worried about sexual, religious, and racial harassment so I am very careful that my behavior reflects that,
- I am quick to compliment teammates.
- I don’t make the staff preface every question or comment directed to me with my title.

I will guarantee the following: If you answered “T” to the vast majority of the preceding statements and you are actively working on the ones where you answered “F,” you are very successful, in high demand, and should be well paid for what you bring to the practice. ■