



From Good to Great: A Guide for the Urgent Care Provider



It's easy to think that all the steps we physicians and advanced practice providers must take before we are professionals make us great. After all, doesn't everyone admire our impressive signature with its collection of professional certifications at the end?

Not so fast. Greatness is not conferred or bestowed by degrees or certifications, and often it isn't officially recognized. Instead, greatness is practiced, like yoga or karate. It is never a final achievement; it is a perpetual pursuit.

That sounds like a lot of work. Isn't being good at what we do good enough? Perhaps not. Being a health-care professional inherently involves making sacrifices. There are easier paths to the comfortable incomes we enjoy, and most of us were afforded plenty of career options by our academic achievements. Yet we chose our professions for their service orientation, in which we are sworn to protect the interests of our patients ahead of our own. Many of us were pursuing greatness when we graduated from our training programs, energized with idealism and energy. But then for most of us, that pursuit was crushed under the weight of student loans, regulatory burdens, hospital mandates, and new families to attend to and support. The greatness train got derailed by the plodding monotony of clock-punching.

Where does the way out begin? Start with the recognition that greatness is a worthy pursuit, one that requires commitment and sacrifice, sometimes without an immediate return. Then acknowledge that it mandates exposing the ego to vulnerability in ways that may not seem sensible at first. A few ground rules:

- **Don't take shortcuts:** There will be many temptations, but making a commitment to do all the little things right is requisite for greatness.
- **Prepare for pain:** If you are looking for a pain-free path to greatness, you will be looking for a very long time.
- **Be ready to be resilient:** Others will be threatened by your pursuit. Frankly, that's because you are making them look bad. But if you need affirmation for everything you do, you are not ready.
- **You gotta have faith:** Believe in the merits of the journey, rejecting doubt.

- **Remember that you will never get there:** As Buddha said, "It is better to travel well than to arrive."

What active steps can we take toward greatness?

- **Make every case a learning opportunity:** Even the simplest illnesses have differential diagnoses. For example, most urgent care providers can diagnose the flu. But what about the flu mimics? What other entities can present this way? What are the red flags for these bad actors? Greatness is about a relentless focus on what we don't know, creating challenges where they don't normally exist.
- **Seek and embrace feedback:** Feedback opportunities are the building blocks of greatness. Without them, we become overconfident in our proficiency. In urgent care, we can get feedback from our patients and our colleagues alike. That feedback can help us confirm or modify a suspected diagnosis and refine our practice.
- **Commit to continuing education:** Lifelong learning is mandatory for greatness. Skip the "derm cruise" and focus on professional development in urgent care. Seek opportunities that offer more than just continuing medical education credits.
- **Above all, be humble:** Greatness does not come to those who have an answer for everything.

It is probably apparent by now that pursuing greatness requires time and energy, two of our most precious resources. With all the strain already on these resources, it may seem counterintuitive to use more of them. Yet we must balance the strain with a more purposeful commitment of time and energy. Such mindfulness will help us regain control of our careers and, more broadly, of our lives. The rewards of this sacrifice are surprising. ■

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