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## The 10 Steps to Success as a Student Registered Nurse Anesthetist

I am writing this from the perspective of being a nearly graduating student registered nurse anesthetist (SRNA). If you ask a hundred people what it takes to be a successful SRNA, you will receive many different answers. Throughout those answers, however, you will find some commonalities. I am sitting here just a couple of months away from graduating, and I want to share what I believe are the most crucial steps to being successful. I want to preface my statements by saying this is truly just my perspective, adapted from what I have learned during my whole life and my life as an SRNA.

### 1. Realize that you must take ownership and responsibility for your own education.

Your education is more important to you than anyone else, and that should reflect in your actions every day. One example of how to demonstrate this importance is to show up on time and prepared. Actively seek out opportunities to grow your skills and enrich your experience. Do not wait for opportunities to come find you. The expense for this education is enormous, so take advantage of every opportunity to learn. Put the extra work in, and learn as much as possible. Do not pay attention to the clock on the wall to see when to go home. Go home when the learning has been maximized for the day. When you show a great work ethic and desire to learn, the providers you work with will notice. Once you have been noticed, these providers are more likely to seek you out when learning opportunities arise.

### 2. Read the textbooks and focus on the basics.

It is inevitable that you will encounter a provider who is reading current research that may contradict what the assigned textbook says. These contradictions provide an interesting opportunity to explore different perspectives. Respect these different perspectives, and appreciate the knowledge that is being presented to you. Although this will further your knowledge overall, you

need to realize the textbooks are where you gain foundational knowledge. It also just so happens that foundational knowledge is what is on that little quiz the National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA) administers after you graduate.

### 3. Keep the perspective of positivity.

A positive attitude will set the stage for success. There are many times that you will feel uncomfortable and make mistakes. Making a mistake is expected, but making the same mistake repeatedly is not allowed. Learn from your mistakes, and get better every day. Strive for perfection, but be willing to accept your mistakes as the learning opportunities that they are.

### 4. Keep an open mind.

Remember that this is the best opportunity you will ever have to be exposed to so many different techniques and perspectives. Approach each technique with the willingness to listen and really learn it. You have the opportunity to decide later if you wish to incorporate it into your practice. Embrace the experience as it presents itself, and keep an open mind to other perspectives. There truly are many different ways to provide a successful anesthetic for the same patient. Even when you have developed a great anesthetic plan, be willing to adjust to another way.

### 5. Start humble, be humble, and stay humble.

As time progresses through your program, you will start to feel as though you are really getting the hang of things and are ready to take the next step. The next step is not being arrogant and feeling as though you do not have more to learn from the clinical experience. The most experienced and best anesthetists will tell you that they are still continually learning. The obvious conclusion is you should be learning more as well.

**6. Approach every day as if you are the only provider for the day.**

Plan your anesthetic as if you are the only one making the decisions. It will not be long before you are the one making the decisions. If you have not trained yourself to think independently, you will have a more difficult transition into practice.

**7. Be specific and conscientious with your words.**

What you say and how you say it are extremely important. Try to avoid saying phrases such as “at my last site we did it this way,” and “this is how I normally do this.” You are not viewed as a peer with experience just yet. Such phrases will raise eyebrows and may lead to a difficult conversation centered on why your very small number of experiences does not equate with a right to speak as though your opinion has weight. How do you answer a question about your experience? Explain that your experience is limited, and then describe what it includes. It is appropriate to share your experiences, but do not represent your experience as a basis to make decisions upon too early in your education.

**8. Be specific and deliberate with your actions.**

Organize your workspace so that you are able to move efficiently. Think through the steps you will take and anticipate the next move. Inefficient and wasted movements make you look as though you do not know what you are doing and increase the levels of anxiety of those around you. A phrase I learned during a course I attended in the military applies well here: “Slow is smooth, smooth is fast.” You are never able to place an endotracheal tube into the esophagus fast enough to make it correct. Do not rush through your movements to move faster. Strive to be the tortoise not the hare.

**9. Hope for the best, but always plan for the worst.**

Having a plan is what saves time when things go wrong, and they inevitably go wrong. I use the acronym PACE when I make my plans. The letter “P” stands for primary, “A” for alternate, “C” for contingency, and “E” for emergency. Use any method you like, but make sure you have a plan and multiple backup plans at all times.

**10. Learn how to get comfortable being uncomfortable.**

This is a new field for you, and it is very demanding. You are a novice and will make mistakes, be unable to answer questions posed to you, possibly even feel clumsier than you ever have in your life before. These examples are just a few of the ways you will feel out of your element. Embrace the newness and be willing to step out of your comfort zone so that you can push yourself to gain more knowledge and experience. Do not shrink from the challenge, but face it head on.

**11. Think outside of the box.**

Those of you paying attention will notice this extra one. I assure you I was specific and deliberate with this for a reason. Do not get so laser-focused on doing things one way, because that is how cookbook anesthesia is conducted. Be willing to look outside of the situation to determine what the best approach is to taking care of your patient.

**Plan, Reflect, and Stay Positive**

These steps are by no means all inclusive and should be looked at as a broad general approach towards the challenges SRNAs face throughout their education. Remember not only to plan for the day ahead, but also to reflect upon the day afterward. You will miss many lessons if you do not take the time to truly acknowledge your mistakes and successes throughout a training session. This reflection period creates a process to recognize your weaknesses, attack them, and make them strengths. Eventually you will have far less weaknesses than strengths and be a competent and capable provider.

A positive outlook and a good plan are crucial to success in our role as anesthesia providers. This success is coming very soon in my journey. I hope what I have written helps you to achieve a similar success. I look forward to becoming an independent provider myself and am excited to meet you all out there. It truly is a small world, and I am sure I will work with many of you during my career and meet even more of you at AANA meetings and functions. We SRNAs are the future of a profession made great by those before us and continually better by those currently working. Let us continue this great work and continue to improve our profession in excellence in care. ■