

How to succeed at floating

By Kim Horvath, BSN, RN

Learn how to decrease your stress and increase your job satisfaction as a floater.

IF YOU'VE EVER FLOATED, you know the experience can be challenging at times. Whenever you work, you may sometimes feel you don't have enough hours in the day to complete all your tasks, especially when working in clinical situations less familiar to you.

To float effectively and efficiently, you need to be skilled, knowledgeable, and competent. You have to stay current with new techniques and equipment, and be familiar with the policies and procedures of each facility where you work.

In many settings, floaters have opportunities to learn new skills. Once you've established key skills and gained the necessary knowledge, you can float to different departments with confidence and convey the message that you're a team player. What's more, gaining experience and skills in multiple settings can enhance your job security.

Floaters' de-stressing guide

Patients trust all nurses (floaters or not) to take good care of them. With this responsibility comes stress, which can impair your mental, emotional, and physical status.

Here are some strategies that can reduce your stress—and increase your success—as a floater:

1. Incorporate spirituality.
2. Be flexible.
3. Boost your knowledge base.
4. Continue your education.
5. Build your confidence.
6. Be humble.
7. Hone your communication skills.

Getting in touch with your *spiritual* side each morn-

ing and throughout the day can bring comfort and peace—not just to yourself but also to the patients you serve. Spiritual activity, such as prayer or meditation, can calm you and make you more compassionate. Remember—patients notice your countenance. Yours may be pleasant and calm, or miserable and uptight.

Spiritual practices can lead to a compassionate heart, which ultimately becomes part of your character.

Flexibility is a must for floaters, helping you roll with the punches of new coworkers and new work settings. Coworkers are more likely to have a positive attitude toward a floater when they know that person is willing to be flexible. Expect some colleagues to see you primarily as a helper, calling on you to assist them and to provide coverage on their breaks. Being flexible nurtures camaraderie, which can reduce tension and improve patient outcomes.

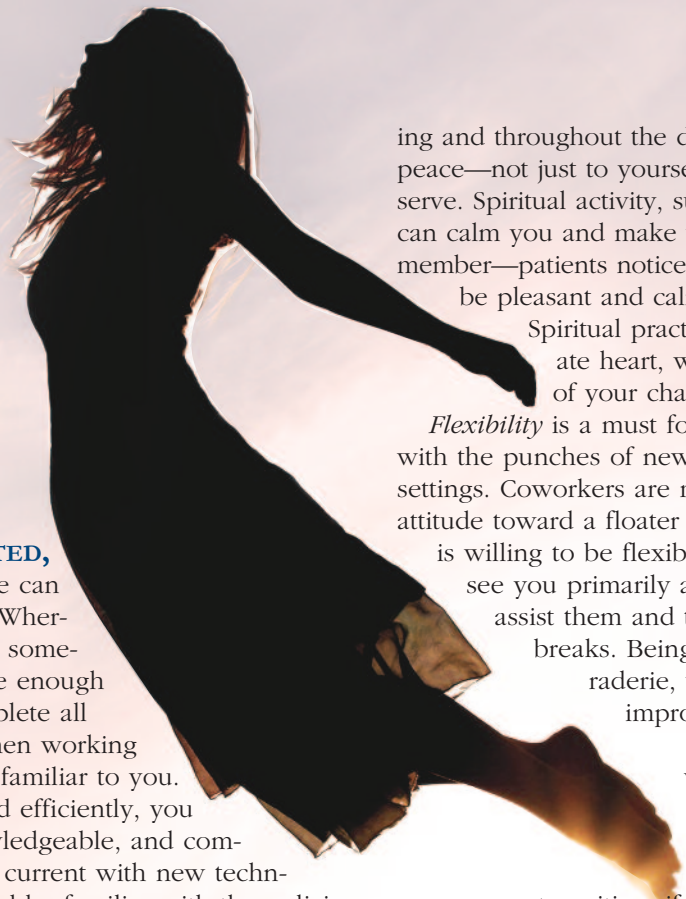
Being knowledgeable in a wide range of practice settings increases your proficiency—and your value. It could even advance you toward a management position, if desired. Knowledge and proficiency promote excellence in quality patient care and a safer environment, which in turn provide a calmer workplace.

Continuing your education not only is important to retaining your nursing license, but it also keeps you abreast of the latest research, techniques, equipment, procedures, and guidelines; helps you maintain your nursing skills; and deepens your knowledge base. To continue your education, you can complete continuing nursing education (CNE) modules, seminars, and hospital-mandated classes. Many healthcare facilities make it easier for nurses to earn CNE contact hours through online courses that you can complete at work. Some even pay for nurses' contact hours through a contract with an accredited provider, making it both simple and affordable to continue your education.

Confidence helps you carry out your nursing responsibilities more calmly and nurture a trusting relationship with coworkers, patients, and family members. When others sense you know what you're doing, this puts their minds at ease.

Humility, a gift from the heart, brings respect and dignity. When you treat others as you'd like them to

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treat you—or, more important, as they would like to be treated—you stay true to yourself. A floater who upholds high standards of behavior and ethics is appreciated by peers and patients alike. When you convey humility, others are likely to respond kindly—and in kind.

Communication skills are imperative for everyone, not just floaters. They help you establish a therapeutic relationship with patients, reduce the risk of medical errors, and improve care coordination. Good communication skills can ease your adjustment to new environments, helping you ask intelligent questions about your new duties.

Keeping your perspective

Although floating may require you to wear a lot of hats, many floaters find it rewarding, educational, and skill building. Keeping your perspective is the key to succeeding in any stressful situation. You can choose to focus and think critically, remaining calm and controlled. Or you can lose control and try to do things on your own, getting frustrated, losing confidence, and

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possibly making mistakes.

I'm a floater in surgical and procedural areas. I've worked in hospital settings and in an orthopedic clinic as a scrub nurse. Currently, I work in an outpatient surgical center. I've floated to the operating room (OR) as a circulator

to a scrub nurse, to the same-day surgery unit as an admissions and preop nurse, to the endoscopy department as a preop and recovery nurse, and from preop to the postanesthesia care unit to the OR as a circulator in an outpatient setting. At first, I was a bit overwhelmed as I strove to focus on the job at hand and use my experience and skills in these radically different settings. Cross-training for these settings can be time consuming, with orientation and check-offs for each department and duty performed. But once I became proficient, I was able to float with confidence and knowledge, which greatly diminished my stress.

You can be an unflappable floater, too, by focusing on the seven strategies I described earlier. They can help you float your way to a more satisfying career. ★

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