



# The giving time

By Leah Curtin, RN, ScD(h), FAAN

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Real nurses nurture their young.

**MY MOTHER** once told me that the first half of your life is all about acquiring things—an education, a job, a marriage, home, furniture, children, reputation, success. The second half is all about losing things—parents, jobs, homes, sometimes children, siblings, friends, spouses. And, indeed, she was right. However, I think she forgot about the time in between, the giving time. This is the time when we have enough money, time, expertise, advice, love, security, and ability to help.



This is true for just about everyone, but most particularly of professionals and their professions. A profession is more than a job—it's a service, a community, and a culture. A professional is more than a coworker—he or she is a teacher, a mentor, and a cocreator. As nurses practice the profession, they also *create* it. In other words, the profession exists only in its practice; everything else (education, research,

management, administration, theory) exists only to serve the person who's practicing (creating) the service. The service exists in the doing of it, and we, the nurses, are its cocreators—for better or for worse, no matter how young or old, or how experienced or inexperienced we may be.

### Make a commitment

Nurses, as they assume their professional identities, are pledged to the care of those who need our services. This requires a commitment to the work of understanding, interpreting, and expanding the body of professional knowledge; the disciplined work of criticism and self-regulation; and the work of developing and cultivating in themselves and their colleagues those character traits upon which personal and professional excellence depend. Intraprofessional relationships don't tell us how to act, they teach us how to be. The characteristics appropriate to the development of professional character include benevolence, honesty, fidelity, and integrity. Use the giving time to share with others how you've learned to be a nurse—and learn from their responses.

### Give back

Professionals are expected to write, teach, mentor, and help one another to improve the practice of the profession, which, in turn, improves patient care. Professions serve society by pooling knowledge among their members and creating incentives to synthesize new knowledge. If nursing is to continue as a profession that's licensed, self-regulated, and has a legally recognized scope of practice, then the giving time must become an integral part of professional preparation and retirement; those who have received so much must give back.

Many nurses have said that I first invented the phrase "Nurses eat their young." I don't remember doing that, but I'd like to erase that phrase and replace it with "Real nurses nurture their young."

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