

# Being Busy Isn't the Same as Being Effective

MacKenzie Simmons, BSN, RN: FNA Early Career Director & Host of No One Tells You This Podcast



If someone asked you how you've been lately, what would your answer be?

If you're anything like me, it's probably, "Busy."

Somewhere along the way, we've started treating busy like a badge of honor. We wear full calendars, long shifts, overflowing inboxes, and endless to-do lists as proof that we're working hard and moving forward. I know I've fallen into that mindset more times than I can count.

But here's what I've been learning lately: being busy isn't the same as being effective.

As nurses, we're constantly moving. We're assessing patients, administering medications, answering call lights, charting, collaborating with the healthcare team, and responding to whatever challenge comes next. It's easy to believe that the nurse moving the fastest is the one doing the best job.

Yet when I think about the nurses who have influenced me the most, that's rarely the case.

The nurses I admire are the ones who stay calm when everyone else feels rushed. They take a moment to think before they react. They know how to prioritize, anticipate what's coming next, and focus on what matters most. Their effectiveness doesn't come from doing everything at once—it comes from being

intentional.

That lesson doesn't stop at the bedside. I've had seasons where every hour of my day was scheduled. From the outside, it looked productive. But looking back, I wasn't always making progress on the things that mattered most. I was simply staying busy.

One question has helped change my perspective:

What actually matters today?

Not, How can I get more done? But, What's the one thing that deserves my attention the most?

It's a simple shift, but it's made a meaningful difference.

As nurses, we're trained to respond to what's urgent. But some of the most important things in our careers—and our lives—rarely feel urgent. Building relationships. Investing in our own growth. Taking time to rest. Being fully present with our patients, our colleagues, and the people we love.

Those moments don't always make it onto a checklist, but they're often the ones we remember most.

Healthcare will always be busy. There will always be another task, another email, another responsibility competing for our attention. The goal isn't to eliminate busyness—it's to make sure our time and energy are aligned with what truly matters.

So the next time you catch yourself saying, "I've just been so busy," I hope you'll pause for a moment and ask yourself one more question:

Am I simply staying busy, or am I giving my attention to what matters most?

Sometimes that small shift in perspective can change everything.

## Continue the Conversation

This article is inspired by an episode of No One Tells You This, a podcast exploring the realities of nursing, leadership, career growth, and the lessons no one teaches us along the way. Tune in wherever you listen to podcasts for thoughtful conversations designed to encourage and inspire nurses at every stage of their careers. ■