

The five C's of professionalism

Mark Stagen

In speaking with colleagues recently, I'm hearing that, in many parts of the country, the demand for traveling healthcare professionals is picking up. That's good news if you are a full-time traveler looking for more and better assignments, or if you're one of the many nurses or other healthcare workers who have been toying with the idea of traveling for your career. Regardless of whether demand for services is high or low, however, it's always a good idea to make yourself marketable—to stand out from the crowd—by demonstrating that you are a true professional. By doing so, you put yourself in the position to land the most lucrative and attractive assignments. Here are five C's of professionalism that, when practiced consistently, will show that you take yourself and your career seriously.

Communication. Staying in close contact with your recruiters is essential if you want to land the plum assignments. If you are out of contact for days on end, even a recruiter who thinks you'd be a great fit for a particular job might have to move on to someone else to fill an assignment in a timely manner. Make sure you are available by both phone and e-mail so that you can respond quickly to job offers and requests for information. Remember, too, that little details can make a lasting impression. Check the quality and content of the outgoing message on your phone, use correct grammar when speaking with recruiters and interviewing, and use Mr., Ms., and Dr. until told otherwise (sure, it's old-fashioned, but respect never goes out of style).

Cooperation. Getting the best temporary engagements is a collaborative effort between you and your recruiter, who is working on your behalf and needs your cooperation to be successful in making the best assignment matches. Make yourself available for interviews, keep your paperwork current (and in electronic format for easy submission), be reasonable with requests related to travel and housing, and be as flexible as possible when it comes to things like the shifts you're willing to work. All of these details, plus showing loyalty to your favorite placement firms, will help ensure that you land the engagements you most want.

Commitment. Once you've agreed to the terms of an assignment (even verbally, pending a contract being signed), consider yourself committed. Healthcare professionals who say "yes" when they really mean "yes, unless I get a better offer between now and then" sabotage their careers as travelers very quickly. When someone backs out of an engagement at the last minute, it also makes the agency (and the industry) look bad, leaves the hospital in a bind, and may even compromise patient care if the end result is a gap in staffing.

Character. Honesty and integrity are highly valued character traits in our industry. Nurses and other healthcare workers who are upfront with their recruiters about what they can and can't do and about the types of assignments they are genuinely interested in earn

respect because their candor saves everyone time. Following through with what you say you'll do (e.g., seeing even a challenging assignment through to the end) demonstrates a strong work ethic and solid character. And, again, often it's the little things that count. Don't show poor judgment by gossiping, backstabbing, discussing your salary with others, or doing anything on assignment that you wouldn't be proud to tell your mother about.

Competence. Fair or not, travelers are often under more scrutiny than permanent staff when it comes to the assessment of skills, competence, and reliability. It's part of your job to stay up to date on the latest advances in your field, participate in courses that keep your technical skills sharp, and be conversant in

current issues in healthcare.

It's in everyone's best interests for travelers to exhibit a high degree of professionalism and integrity. When you represent yourself well, it reflects positively on the agencies you work with. And when they look good, the industry as a whole is in a better position to thrive.

Hospitals and other healthcare facilities that have good experiences with travelers are more inclined to make them an integral part of their strategic staffing plans. So let's all work together to make the field of travel healthcare well respected and successful. **HT**

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NEWS & UPDATES

Attention recruiters: As we reach the halfway point of 2010, you've probably noted some travelers who exemplify the five C's of professionalism. Honor these travelers by nominating them for December's Traveler of the Year Awards. Look for our announcement in the August issue and at healthcaretraveler.com.