

Perfect Gifts: Time, Encouragement, and Expertise

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During this holiday and gift-giving time of year, we often find ourselves in pursuit of the *perfect gift*. In a world that places ever-increasing emphasis on material possessions and buying the next latest and greatest, it is easy for us to overlook the invaluable gifts of time, encouragement, and expertise. The holiday season is a great time to take stock and thank those who have contributed their gifts to our professional journey and honor them by contributing in kind to others' professional growth.

In a 2010 *TED* talk, Drew Dudley describes learning from a young woman that years earlier, when passing out lollipops on campus to promote a charitable cause, he had made a brief but huge impact that changed the course of her life. In his presentation, he defines this as a "lollipop moment," a moment when someone says or does something that makes another person's life better, sometimes without ever fully realizing the impact of that moment. During his presentation, Dudley challenges his audience to "...redefine leadership

as being about lollipop moments, how many of them we create, how many of them we acknowledge, how many of them we pay forward...." (Dudley, 2010).

As I reflect on my professional career, I feel a profound sense of gratitude for the incredible preceptors and mentors from whom I have learned so much and who gave me valuable guidance and wisdom. Who are the gift givers in your professional life? How has their time, encouragement, or expertise made a lasting impact on your professional career? Are they aware of the powerful influence they have had in your life? If not, I can think of no better time of year to reach out, tell them, and thank them.

Pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) and other pediatric advanced practice nurses are leaders, not only by virtue of their graduate pediatric nursing education, advanced knowledge, and expertise, but also by their capacity to create many lollipop moments, especially for those who are pediatric advanced practice nursing students, newly certified PNPs transitioning to the practice environment, or mid-career PNPs needing encouragement to pursue new leadership opportunities. Our ability to expand the PNP workforce to adequately meet the nation's child health care needs and increase our leadership influence to improve quality of pediatric health care depend on the leadership and willingness of today's PNPs to share their time, encouragement, and expertise by becoming clinical preceptors and mentors.

Despite accelerated growth in the national nurse practitioner (NP) workforce, a number of researchers and pediatric workforce experts have highlighted concern that the number of PNPs completing PNP education annually has essentially remained stagnant (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2012; Freed, Dunham, Loveland-Cherry, Martyn, & the Research Advisory Committee of the American Board of Pediatrics, 2010; Martyn, Martin, & Gutknecht, 2013). Although myriad factors contribute to this trend,

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lack of adequate clinical sites and pediatric clinical preceptors present significant and frequently cited challenges (Giddens et al., 2014; Martyn et al., 2013). Being a clinical preceptor takes time, adequate training, and use of effective learning, time management, and productivity strategies, but the benefits to both student and preceptor are many and lasting (Burns, Beauchesne, Ryan-Krause, & Sawin, 2006; Farwell, 2009).

Another critical period in a PNP's development occurs during the transition from novice to experienced practitioner. That first year in practice is stressful for novice NPs because of external stressors such as workload and increasing expectations for productivity, as well as internal stressors including unrealistic, self-inflicted expectations to be completely independent and fully competent or prove one's worth to the organization (Hill & Sawatzky, 2011). Novice NPs struggle under the weight of newfound responsibility for making critical patient care decisions. Mentorship is an effective strategy for reducing novice NP stress and facilitating optimal professional growth and development. Our willingness to serve as a mentor, to share our time, encouragement, and expertise, can be a vital lifeline to a new PNP and make a powerful, lasting professional impact.

The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) has a rich legacy of national and chapter leadership. Our continued ability to grow and thrive as an organization and expand our professional reach and influence to improve care for children is contingent upon our collective willingness to actively encourage and mentor the next generation of PNP leaders. Each of us has a responsibility to identify potential PNP leaders in our workplaces and chapters and encourage them to pursue leadership roles. Taking time

to let colleagues know that they have leadership potential and offering to provide expertise and support as they take on new leadership roles can produce amazing results.

This holiday season, I challenge you to create a lollipop moment—to give a perfect gift of time, encouragement, or expertise to advance our profession. On behalf of NAPNAP, I wish each of you a wonderful holiday season.

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