

WHAT TO DO WHEN ORIENTATION IS OVER

Is there life after orientation? Yes, but life is different. You are expected to work independently after only brief instruction. This is the beauty of being a traveler. A traveler must have skills that allow them to act quickly in new situations. Besides, being flexible and observant, I try to remember to think two steps ahead the first couple of days.

I say two steps ahead because I believe nurses already think one step ahead as part of their profession. Professional travelers must take extra steps to gather information before taking action. For example, if you know you will need to call x-ray later in the day to do a chest x-ray, look up the number ahead of time and carry it with you. By thinking one step ahead, you will prevent unnecessary frustration in the future. Frustration on the job often comes about when you are trying to do a task that can't wait, while you take extra time to fumble for phone numbers or supplies.

Katie, an experienced surgical nurse, shares her story about thinking ahead. She scrubbed in for a surgical procedure, but she didn't think to scan the table and identify certain items she might need later. When Katie looked for a needle book (an item needed for almost every procedure) she didn't see it. She said out loud to herself, "Where is my needle book?" Previous places she had worked had red needle books, but at this hospital their needle books were blue. Out of habit, she scanned the table for a red square needle book. It wasn't long before she realized the color difference. Within this short period of time, the other nurse in the room quickly concluded that Katie didn't know what was doing and reported her to the travel company. Katie didn't get fired, but she did wish she would have thought ahead that day.

Thinking ahead will save you in some situations. However, some things you will not know or be able to predict. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Colleagues do not expect you to know everything. Besides, it is better to ask rather than make a deadly mistake. Therefore, it is important to be upfront, even modest, when filling out your skills checklist. Your skills checklist sets up initial expectations of your performance. You don't want to set yourself up for failure from the start. It is natural for some of the items on the skills list to look like a foreign language. After all, you are going to work in a foreign environment with different policies, procedures, and equipment.

Therefore, thinking ahead and asking questions will get you through the rest of your assignment with confidence. You already have the experience and background to draw from. You can do amazing things when you set your mind to it.