

How To Get a Job As a New Grad Nurse

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The tale and advice of a brand new grad on how to stand out and score yourself a job as a new graduate nurse. I was the first in my class of 50 to score a job, and after giving out a lot of solicited advice, I've decided to write it out and share with other hopeful and passionate new grad nurses.

Alright new grads, I am a straight shooter and a bit of a cynic (I like to call myself a realist, personally) - but that is possibly why I scored myself an RN job with a residency, before I graduated, on the floor that I wanted and chose. This is geared for people that know how to get down and dirty, will be great new graduates, and know that a little hard work can go a long way, and aren't scared to put some effort into the job search. Not for those of you that are halfway through nursing school and still "hate" giving bed baths (buck up!)...



Come to terms with reality and what you have to work with.

My boyfriend of three years lives in SF, and I went to school here in the Midwest because it was much more economical; I simply couldn't afford to live the CA lifestyle while in school. Therefore, I of course set my sights only on getting to the Bay Area while in nursing school. And then...my sights started getting set on anything in California...and towards the end of school (and after a few close nabs at a CA residency spot, dangit!), I realized if I wanted employment right out of school, it would mean having to stay here in the Midwest to get some experience. And I have to, because I don't have a roof over my head if I don't have an income, I was living off loans through school. No rich mommy and daddy to hand me things here. Note though, that I am in a pretty big urban city that is still quite competitive - so this article is definitely applicable, I wasn't handed a job in some Kansas farmtown. Anyways, this is sort of a new grad analogy to the first step in AA...come to terms with what you have and things will start to be more realistic! It is 100x easier to get a job where you are going to school.

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About a Nursing Student



Be flexible, but have some goal ideas as well.

Just like a diet or exercise plan, it's a lot easier to get things accomplished when you have specific goals. I started to realize during clinicals that I was flexible, but really didn't have interest in OB or Peds (which is great, since these are so popular...not sure why, hehe). I really liked working with older populations, I liked more acute and sick populations, and I liked roles where there was a lot of teaching involved (I like to get up on my soapbox and preach about diet, nutrition, and mind-body health...yay, Medicine floors!). From here, I picked a few specific floors and went from there.

Stalking time! No, not really.

If you're going to only read one part of the article, read this. But this is where new grads dip out and no one steps up to the plate. Like, out of 50 classmates, I was the only one that did this. I have no idea why because managers for the most part were very receptive of it. So how to do this? If you are lucky enough to do any kind of clinical work, even for a day on the floor, introduce yourself to the nurse manager. Ask your nurse if the manager is there, and have them introduce you, or if you are courageous like me - walk right in the office! Put on a big smile, extend your hand, and start telling them how great your experience is on this floor and that you would really like to work here in the future. There are definitely weirdos and crappy management out there, but for the most part, nurse managers are going to love this. It's a win - win really. If you have the personality and showed them, you're putting yourself ahead, AND you're making a future hire easier on them. They don't have to sort through 50 applications of new grads when they know that you are genuinely interested and you have the great personality, open attitude, and readiness-to-learn that you have showed them, face to face.

Don't have a clinical? Start using Google. If you don't know how to, you're SOL on this one, no internet tutorials here folks. But, yes, Google! Start with the specific floor and then also enter "nurse manager". This doesn't work ALL the time, but usually you can find some linked website, LinkedIn profile, or something else that will show the nurse manager's name, and if you're lucky, their e-mail address. My advice is to e-mail them a few months before you can formally apply for the position. Tell them you are specifically interested in their floor, and just use this as your shot to voice out. Don't make it too long (like this article) - they don't want your life story. Be charming and honest! Convince them why you'd be a great investment.

How I got my job, in a paragraph: introduced myself first day of clinical to manager of a floor I knew I was interested in. Confirmed interest over 7 week clinical. Re-introduced myself to manager last day of my clinical and asked for a business card and said very directly "I love this floor. I would really to like to work here when I graduate. Can I shoot you an e-mail when I apply, so I'm not just in the giant HR pile?" Nurse manager thought I was funny and said "please do". E-mailed her midway during school to tell her that I was getting great experience on other units but I still just loved hers, how it ran, complemented her staff, etc. It was true, and she appreciated. It was my way of holding onto her as a contact. E-mailed her again when I applied months later, referring her back to our e-mail chain so she was reminded who I was. HR called me out of over 500 new grad applications and I got an interview the next week. Then scored the job. It was a bit too easy. But why? Cause I stepped my game up. Oh, and sent a hand-written thank you card after your interview! Duh.

Hiring managers are not looking for new grads with 4.0 GPAs and who were the president of their school and NSNA.

If they are, they're missing out on a lot of great hires. They are looking for someone that is a positive person (SMILE BIG), a professional, and most importantly: can easily integrate into their team, is honest about their strengths and weaknesses as a new nurses, is accountable for their actions, and genuinely has a strong desire to learn much more everyday than they were taught in nursing school, to build their nursing foundation, and genuinely is compassionate and wants to truly ease the suffering of their patients, and help better their lives and health. I myself got into nursing after dropping out of undergrad to help a very sick parent and the rest of my family deal with the illness. I got into nursing because of this; I have an innate desire to really serve sick people and their families, and it naturally shows.

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Write a cover letter.

Put effort and thought into it and don't make it too generic. Don't believe people that tell you not to waste your time writing a cover letter. You need to write a cover letter. Have a great resume. Make it different, somehow. And not with hot pink paper or Comic Sans font. Always be ready to be a professional and meet someone. Always. Look for networking everywhere you go. Use your nursing school contacts to help you get a job. Tell people you know that the nursing economy is rough for new grads and you are trying to step up to the plate early. While you may have to wait until you're licensed to formally apply, you do NOT have to wait to make connections. If you are quiet, don't like doing all the above stated advice, it's time to balls up.

Lastly, realize that getting a degree as a nurse does not guarantee you a job (not matter what Yahoo! News tells people). Not even close, in this economy. I graduated in May and more than half of my classmates didn't get jobs. Guess what? Those were the people that sent in their applications online...and that's all they did. They sent out a generic electronic form and resume into some electronic world. They didn't get in touch with the people who really make things happen. If you think you are going to get a job because you have a BSN; have a previous Bachelor's in Biology, Psychology, whatever; graduated with honors, etc. - THINK again.

Know that I tried VERY hard and spent literally weeks worth of hours to try and get a job in California, and all over the rest of the country. I am estimating I put in at least 500 hours of work during nursing school that was dedicated to my job search and researching the market. Be willing to work very hard, and something will happen for you.

Looking for a job?

