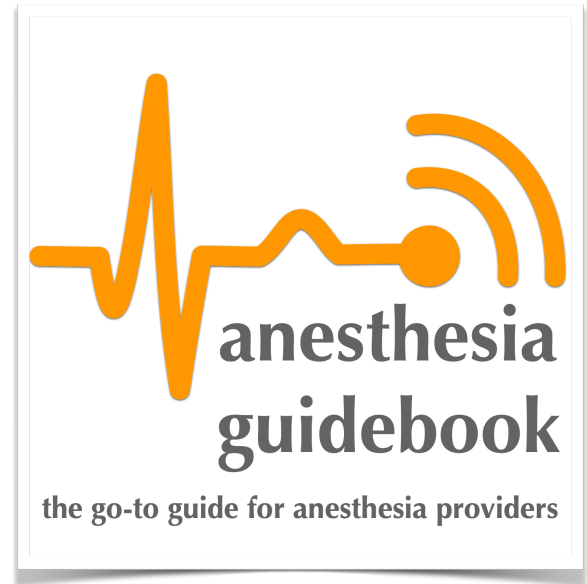


Ten Things Every Anesthesia Provider Should Know



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The following ten ideas have the power to change your attitude towards and even the trajectory of your professional career.

There's three core domains to developing as an anesthesia provider: your knowledge base, skill set and attitude. Each are unique and require different kinds of effort or deliberate practice to grow & improve. This guide is predominately about tweaking & improving the attitude you approach your career with. If you're gonna show up in your life, why not show up with a level of stoke that pulls you through the doldrums & pushes you towards where you want to be? These ten ideas may help you do just that.

1. What you do matters because you hold the lives of your patients in your hands.

The most vulnerable moments of our patients' lives often begin when we say "*hello*." Our patients trust us fully with their lives. Remember that. Your decisions, attention and expertise matter.

2. You're only as good as the decisions you make today... *sort of.*

This adage should really go “*you're only as good as the decisions you (and your team) make today (and the systems of care that you & your team work in).*” But that doesn't sound as catchy or dramatic.

Anesthesia providers work in systems that are designed to ensure safety and quality for our patients. The better we build these systems, the better quality of care we should see across the system: quality should rise like boats on a rising tide. But even in beautifully constructed systems, patient outcomes are still reliant on the actions of individuals working in that system. So *show up*. Make good decisions. Your patients and your team are counting on you.

3. We work in systems that are designed by people, and people work in relationships.

We're surrounded by systems in the work we do. Safety & quality are just one of those systems. Others include processes that govern training, credentialing, scope of practice, billing, service agreements, contracts, scheduling, case assignments and more. It's important to remember that people build all of these systems, and people work in *relationships*. If you want to change a system, you have to build relationships with the people in that system, because systems are created, maintained, torn down and rebuilt by the people working in them. The better you get at investing in and growing strong relationships, the more influence you will have to change and build better systems.

4. You provide a service and you are replaceable.

Anesthesia providers are in a service industry and our clients extend beyond just the patients. With the exception of outpatient pain management, no one comes to an anesthesia provider for the services they provide directly. Patients need the services of surgeons, podiatrists, dentists, psychiatrists, interventional radiologists, obstetricians and other healthcare providers. Anesthesiologists create the environment where these other providers can do their jobs effectively and efficiently. If you provide a suboptimal service, you will likely be replaced by providers who can do the job better.

Bonus: A Look Down the Rabbit Hole of Money in Healthcare

It's important to recognize the forces that shape healthcare for what they are. Not everyone gets into healthcare to optimize patient care in the most efficient, cost-effective, high-quality manner. In the United States, healthcare is a business and a lot of people, including many healthcare providers, see it as a sure way to secure high earnings or corporate profits. Financial gain shapes far too many decisions in healthcare. As long as we have a for-profit system, people will chase the money wherever it can be found and what's right or best for the health of individuals and our communities will be a secondary priority. As an astute CRNA once put it:

“Money’s the answer, what was the question?”

While this is a cynical way to view people and companies that, of course, will state that their first priority is patient care, you have to look for the real core values behind the decisions those individuals & companies are making to understand what shapes their behavior. We could certainly design systems of care that actually have efficient, cost-effective & high-quality patient care as the guiding force, but a whole lot of people would lose a whole lot of money. Learning to see the variables that truly shape decisions in healthcare, with profits often being the driving force, is key to figuring out how you want to participate in the game. Play along? Try to bend it towards better values from the inside? Or tear the whole thing down? Whatever you decide, finishing anesthesia training is just the beginning... what you do next is up to you.

5. You have incredible potential to develop your skills, knowledge, attitude and even your intelligence.

Leading psychologists have laid bare the fact that intelligence is not a fixed trait and expertise & human performance can improve over time with deliberate practice.

The philosophy and spirit of Anesthesia Guidebook draws inspiration from the work of Ericsson, Dweck, Duckworth and others with concepts such as deliberate practice, growth mindset and grit shaping the way we approach achieving expertise in anesthesia. Understanding your immense capacity to grow and what is needed to actually realize that growth is vital to the taking up the path towards mastering your craft as an anesthesia provider.

6. No one cares about your money, career, scope of practice, time off, goals, wellbeing and success more than you do.

Your lack of success will probably be ignored by everyone except your mother. Your achievement of success or taking better care of yourself may actually upset other people. (Are you in a super busy anesthesia practice? Try cutting your hours for better work-life balance and see how that goes over.) Take a look around. We are exactly where we should be as a society and as individuals based upon either our inaction or action. Your whole life is made up of the days that go by day-by-day. And those days are made up of the choices you make along the way. People rarely hit what they don't aim for. Think about where you're at right now and where you'd rather be and then start moving in that direction. Because no one will do the work for you. As Kiki Mattress said in episode 5: *"don't talk about it, be about it."*

7. Embracing delayed gratification and understanding the power of compounding interest are critical to creating a brighter financial future for yourself.

No matter where you're headed financially, where you started, how old or how in debt you are, these two power tools are fully at your disposal. Delayed gratification is about making small decisions today to make your future self more stoked down the road. Harnessing the power of compounding interest is possible with a very basic understanding of savings & investing. These tools are at your disposal; utilize them to create a better future for yourself: Future You will thank you!

8. You have more power, influence and capacity than you think, and so does everyone else.

Our capacity as humans is often limited by the framework through which we see the world. There are certainly very real and powerful external constraints like systemic racism and economic inequality that attempt to marginalize vast numbers of people in our communities. However, one of the most powerful constraints on your capacity for growth, change and achievement is how you perceive that capacity - what you think is possible. *The poet Mary Oliver once asked, "what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"* When you realize your capacity is linked to the time & effort you put in, all that's left to decide is where you want to go.

9. Location - Compensation - Autonomy. You can pick 2.

This principle offers a simple way to balance variables when you're on the job hunt. It's rare to find the perfect job. With the work we do, we often face having to balance pros & cons when it comes to where we work, how we get to utilize our skills and what our compensation looks like. In order to maximize 2 of these variables, you may have to compromise on the third. You might have a wonderful compensation package and get to live in a desirable location but suffer on the autonomy front. Perhaps you want to maximize your ability to work in an independent practice and earn an incredible income but doing so may put you in a less-desirable place to live. The pro & con balance and what ultimately makes you happy with your life and career are only for you to decide. Remember that a 10-15% difference in pay may not outweigh the benefits of living in a desirable location or the pros of some other aspect of your career/lifestyle. *"Money's not the answer, "what" is the question?"*

10. Joy is more valuable than your income or job.

In western cultures, we often strive for greater achievement & signs of wealth without stopping to ask if our striving is actually worth it. (Notice I said "signs of wealth." Too many well paid anesthesia providers squander their income on consumerism & status symbols and don't actually accumulate wealth or even financial stability.) When we slow down enough to ask ourselves what we really want, or if we listen to those who have gone before us, we may realize that chasing an American dream based on consumerism is not *our* dream, that joy and happiness come from aspects of our lives that have little to do with money & status symbols.

In fact, research shows that globally, after an annual individual income of \$95,000 is attained, greater degrees of subjective well-being and happiness are not correlated with greater income (Jebb, 2018). (The threshold income for peak reported subjective well-being is slightly higher in North America at \$105,000.) The research shows that after this level of income is achieved, greater income is actually correlated with decreased levels of happiness. The authors postulate that this may be related to the stressful demands that go along with these high-income jobs or perhaps greater materialism and the tendency of social comparisons with other high-income earners. *More money may actually lead to, as the poet Notorious BIG put it, more problems.*

Physician and nurse anesthesiologists will earn far more than the threshold income for peak subjective well-being or happiness. So what else is important to you? What else will you value in your life? Where - and with whom - will you spend your time? Mastering your craft as an anesthesiologist can be a source of deep meaning in your life. The relationships you develop with other staff and your patients, the quality and specific kind of work you do are all important and meaningful. But the thread of joy in your life will run deeper than your income or your job. Picking up that trail... following that path and seeing where it will take you is where the journey gets really interesting.

Resources

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