



## Being a Self-advocate for Your Professional Life

By Diane E. Scott, M.S.N., R.N.

Many nurses start their careers highly engaged with a dedication and purpose that they think will carry them through a lifetime. With many substantial changes in health care environments and a wandering economy, however, numerous career nurses have become disheartened and yearn to seek the passion and drive that encouraged them to enter the profession in the first place.

According to a study of nurses in five countries by Linda Aiken, Ph.D., R.N., published in the May/June 2001 *Health Affairs*, more than 40 percent of hospital nurses reported being dissatisfied with their jobs. This alarming statistic is a testament to becoming a self-advocate in your professional life in order to find happiness and fulfillment throughout the lifespan of your career.

According to Dr. Philippa Kennealy, executive and professional career coach, being a self-advocate in your professional life begins with a self-analysis. “Knowing your skills, developed from training, education and experience, is only the beginning,” she states. “Knowing your interests and passions are just as important to creating engagement and happiness within any professional endeavor.”

### **Happiness and a Meaningful Professional Life**

Dr. Martin Seligman’s book, “*Authentic Happiness*,” speaks of the correlation between happiness and a meaningful professional life. Seligman writes that a vocation must have personal meaning to an individual. Meaning is derived from work that is aligned with your sense of purpose about what you are doing and your core values. Your work becomes meaningful when you are doing something you believe in.

His research shows that engagement with a career produces long lasting and positive effects on personal and professional development. Engagement means being absorbed, challenged and interested in what you do so that you almost lose track of time while you are working. According to Dr. Seligman, talents and passions must coexist for true engagement in a given role. To become a self-advocate in your professional life, you must discover and recognize your talents and passions.

The Center for American Nurses is a professional association whose mission is to create a community of nursing organizations that serve individual, non-union nurses by providing programs, tools and policies that address challenges and opportunities in their practice environments.



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## Finding Your Talents

According to Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, authors of, “Now, Discover Your Strengths,” most of us have little sense of our talents and strengths, much less the ability to build our life around them. Instead, guided by our parents, teachers and managers, and by psychology’s fascination with pathology, we become experts in our weaknesses and spend our lives trying to repair these flaws, while our strengths lie dormant and negated. It is only when people begin to focus on their talents and build them into strengths that self-advocacy can begin.

The authors state that talent is defined as any recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied. Being inquisitive, charming, persistent, and responsible are all examples of talents. Our dominant talents contain the promise of developing a strength. A strength is defined as a combination of talents, skills and knowledge that are consistently and productively applied to achieve a desired result.

## Finding Your Passion

Curt Rosengren, author of the Web site [passioncatalyst.com](http://passioncatalyst.com), states that finding your passion will energize you and will strengthen your confidence. He states that passion is not some exotic, rare experience. Simply put, you get energy by bringing more of you into what you do. To find your passion, begin with identifying what lights “your fire

at a core level.” Rosengren states that it is important not just to state what you love, but also to identify why you love it. The second and most daunting task is to make choices based on your passions.

## Career Coaching

Dr. Philippa Kennealy, president of Oya Consulting, works with many nursing and health care workers to help them discover the connection between passion, talent and professional career choices. “It behooves you in your professional development to know, first of all, your personal sense of purpose, and what your core values are,” she concurs. “A good career or

professional development coach is a great resource to help you figure this all out.” Dr. Kennealy describes her role as a “detective” who discovers what will bring meaning and purpose to a person’s work experience, and then leads

them on a path to self-discovery.

## Self-Advocacy Begins With You

In learning to become your own self-advocate, you will find that your professional life will have more purpose and direction when you face health care environment changes. You will know what you seek from a role and what you will not compromise. If the role that you are in is satisfactory, knowing your passions may serve to enhance the aspects of your job that you truly enjoy. Becoming a self-advocate in your professional life will help give insight to the path that you must take to triumph over inevitable changes and be happy with your professional and personal choices.

**Knowing your passions may enhance aspects of your job.**



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