

I've been thinking...



Quitting
May 2009

I've been thinking about quitting.

The rabbinical students couldn't wait for the sage's answer. Their mentor had been asked what he thought were his greatest strength and his greatest weakness. "My greatest strength?" he paused, "Hmm. I guess it's that I haven't quit." Then without hesitation he added, "My greatest weakness? Often I feel like quitting."

I'm no rabbi, but I relate and I bet some of you do too.

On the heels of Nurse Appreciation Week (May 4-10), I want to commend nurses in hospitals all across our country who stay by the stuff week in and week out. Who refuse to turn in those resignations they frequently and understandably draft in their minds.

Doing a good thing almost always requires doing a lot of difficult things.

Nurses do a good thing, and things aren't getting any easier for them. Patient acuity continues to escalate, as do the expectations from The Joint Commission. Technology-learning curves are getting steeper and fuses seem to be running shorter. Nursing shortages persist, along with turf battles between departments that are supposed to be serving the same patients. This is to say nothing for caregivers having to chase down missing medications or getting chewed out by arrogant physicians.

Nurses meet up with more than their fair share of enough-is-enough moments.

Yes, here's to nurses everywhere who rightfully say, "NO MAS!" at the end of a long shift—then graciously come back for another.

My hat's off to RNs who not only show up for work ("80 percent of the battle," says Woody Allen) but also who show up to work—to expend themselves in doing good with and for others.

At the end of April, I had the pleasure of sharing dinner with RN Kathleen Shinn just before I interviewed her at The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding last week in Tampa. It was hard enough just being a nurse. Add pregnancy and a premature birth, shortly followed by the loss of her little Alyssa to an avoidable medication error, and of course, she felt like quitting. Yet,

somehow Kathleen found grace to forgive the people involved in the error, to eventually get off the couch and back to her own hospital where she supervises nurses. Beyond all this, she reaches out and touches clinicians and administrators across America with a must-hear story.

Though there are still moments when she feels like quitting, her passion prods her to do what she can to protect others from medication errors and to help health-care leaders know what to do with those who commit errors and who are victims of medication casualties in their institutions. It's a good thing she does. Not easy, but good. I hope you will take the time to listen to Kathleen share [Alyssa's Story](#)—then pass it on.

Meanwhile, let's not quit appreciating our nurses.

What do you think?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Neuenschwander', written in a cursive style.

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