“Step out of your comfort zone and overcome your fears”

Have you ever considered taking an active role in a specialist nursing organisation? Becoming more than just a member? Six years ago I took the chance to join the committee of the Association of Respiratory Nurse Specialists. I wanted to meet other nurses and put forward my ideas on how the organisation could be improved and modernised. When I first attended committee meetings I was overcome with fear. Surrounded by experienced nurses who knew each other, I thought perhaps I’d made a huge mistake and didn’t deserve to be there.

I stuck with it, though, and over the next few years I gained some great new skills, which I wouldn’t get in my day job. For example, working with Saatchi & Saatchi to design a new logo and working with developers on a new website taught me about marketing, using taglines and the importance of branding.

Gradually I lost a little bit of that fear, worried less about saying the wrong things and began to enjoy the work I was doing. However, I hadn't lost the fear of over-reaching myself. This became apparent when the vice chair position became available a few years later. Despite some colleagues suggesting I went for it, my immediate thought was no. But then I decided I should use the opportunity to shape the organisation in the way I thought was needed and eventually became chair of the ARNS two years ago.

Having taken that step, I then took a bigger leap and, with the support of the committee, started to make big changes to the association, by developing a plan and launching a new dynamic strategy for the team to work towards. This energy for change began to build my confidence and I relished leading and working with a brilliant committee, which has flourished and created a great nursing association with a powerful voice.

A negative that has over time become a positive is that in order to do the job, I've had to do things I would traditionally hate. These include networking with chief executive officers, chairs of other national organisations and representatives of government bodies, and developing relationships with pharmaceutical companies and negotiating funding. But I've done it.

Overcoming these fears has not been an overnight process, more of a steady chipping away. I will never be naturally comfortable doing these tasks but I now know I can do them, and don’t have to be too self-critical.

Joining a national committee or group may make you feel uncomfortable or, as in my case, even scared. It might be overwhelming, but I would really recommend that you try it. Over time, your efforts will enable you to shape a nursing organisation to represent the real world of nursing, and ensure that not only the super confident get heard.

It will without doubt also enable you to develop and enjoy a real variety of new skills outside of your usual comfort zone of nursing. NT

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