

The perfect recipe for leadership



Gloria Dobies

● A nurse and diabetes educator reflects on being sensitive to patients' needs.

START WITH SPECIALIZED SKILLS, then add a measure of sensitivity and a dash of sharing, and you'll have the recipe for how Gloria Dobies, BSN, RN, CDE, approaches patient care and leadership in the nursing profession. In addition to being a nurse, she's also a formally trained chef. The 2016 American Nurses Association (ANA) Honorary Nursing Practice Award recognizes Dobies for the outstanding direct-patient care she's provided during her 40-year career.

Through the years, Dobies has followed the advice her mother gave. "You have to be honest with yourself before anyone else can believe anything you say," she observed, "and you must treat everyone with dignity and respect. You shouldn't forget where you came from." Dobies grew up in a large family with limited financial means. "As an RN, I made the most money in my family, and I was able to help everyone else," Dobies explained. "I have to go back to that place when I talk to my patients who have limited financial resources."

Dobies' ability to relate to others' experiences has made her an asset to the local community in Northeast Florida where she lives and works. A diabetes educator for more than three decades, Dobies remains committed to educating Spanish-speaking residents about the disease, but the exchange of information between her and patients goes both ways. "I am learning just as much from the patients as they are from me," she said.

Of what achievement are you most proud?

One of my greatest achievements is working as a nurse for 40 years and still loving it. As part of a mobile health unit, I provided care in migrant camps for many years. Once I saw how great the need was, I wanted to pursue more education, especially since

I am bilingual and bicultural, so I went back to school to become a nurse practitioner at 61 years old. That fire and passion for the profession—I still have it. Nursing isn't an easy profession, but you can avoid burnout by looking at all the possibilities open to you as an RN. I will be a nurse and patient advocate until the day I die.

How did you become a certified diabetes educator?

The hospital where I worked started seeing more patients who had diabetes, and management recognized the need for additional patient education. From there, I decided to do outpatient work focused on diabetes so that I could go to underserved areas. I have seen firsthand the devastating results of not caring for diabetes. However, different cultures have different values and eat differently. I provide education and resources designed to dispel myths and encourage healthy living without devaluing my patients' ideas and culture.

How does being a chef complement your work as an RN?

I became a chef 20 years ago. No matter what group of people I'm educating, I can tweak their cooking methods to help them make healthier dishes.

Instead of taking food away from them, we look at their plates and plan healthier meals. It can be done. If I take foods away, it's not going to work. People are more likely to follow a model of moderation.

How would you describe your leadership style?

You must have a purpose and a vision. We all have good intentions, but somehow they have to be transformed into a vision that turns into action. I value people and their opinions, but not negativity. I'm focused on what we can do rather than what we can't, and I accept people for who they are, but I don't accept excuses. Nurses have tremendous power and skills, so to solve problems, we just need to bring all of our positive ideas to the table and explore the possibilities. ★

Interview by Apryl Motley, CAE, professional writer.

