



TotalMed

7 Habits of  
Highly  
Successful  
Travel Nurses

# Introduction



It takes a lot to be a successful travel nurse. You not only have to be good at the tasks that are the marrow of travel nursing -- from patient care to meticulous charting but you also have to roll with the punches of a traveling life. It takes a special kind of person to accomplish it all.

We interviewed some of our travel nurses to find out exactly what it takes. Here are 7 habits of highly successful travel nurses.

# 1. They love change

Very little about the traveler's life stays the same for long. Sure, nursing is more or less the same at every hospital you visit, but the hospital itself, the other nurses, and the patients can change wildly from one assignment to the next. So the key to thriving as a travel nurse is to love the change.

Traveler [Megan Nash](#) says, "I'm proud of the fact that I can go into these new hospitals, adapt to new policies, and work with different patient loads and different coworker personalities."

I love everything about travel nursing. I love the change and the new experiences. I love working in different facilities. — Megan Nash

[Tiffany Cash](#) enjoys the cultures she's gotten to experience in her travels. She's gained unique insight into how various people respond to medical treatment, healthcare customs, and even pain.

Cash says, "I love getting to meet all kinds of people, in and out of the hospital. I have learned about different cultures and how they respond to healthcare. I am a labor and delivery nurse, and the way women respond to pain, labor, and childbirth varies so much. One of my favorite things is learning from my patients. I'm getting to know so many things about other parts of the world, just from interacting with my patients, doctors, and other nurses."

## 2. They are open-minded and adventurous

In the midst of all this change, you're going to have your ideas of what's normal, what's expected, and what's best to challenge. To remain a positive influence on your patients and your fellow nurses, you need to be open-minded. Instead of being fixed in their thinking, great travel nurses are curious about what makes people different.

Jamey Rains reflects that open-mindedness is key to fitting in on a new unit: "If you're welcoming, if you're open to suggestions, then you'll have a much better time getting along with new staff."

Be open to the way they do things. You might not understand at first, or you may have been trained another way, but the best way to learn is to stay open to how every hospital does things just a little differently. — Jamey Rains

Keeping an open mind will help you make the most out of your nursing experience. Nash says, "You're going to gain a lot more confidence as you go, so you can't let what anyone says scare you off." Shedding any preconceived notions will leave room for you to decide exactly what you want to get out of every assignment.

# 3. They are eager to learn

To be a nurse, you have to be a good learner. After all, no one has ever said that nursing school is a cake walk. (Unless that cake is covered in hundreds of painstaking notecards, microscope slides of epithelial cells, and the plastic body parts of anatomy dummies). You know a thing or two about the value of education.

And that learning doesn't stop as soon as you pass your NCLEX. In every hospital, at every patient's bedside, in every chart review, you learn more and more. [Jennifer Klein](#) says that travel nursing has fast-tracked her nursing education. "Traveling expands your education. I've learned different computer systems and expanded the number of diseases I'm familiar with."

**"I love that there's always a learning opportunity within the job itself. It keeps me on my toes." — Megan Nash**

A great travel nurse is honest with herself about what she knows and what she needs more help with. And the key to being an engaged travel nurse is to always ask questions. Cash says, "Don't be afraid to ask questions. If someone asks why I'm doing something a certain way, I'll ask, 'what do you recommend? what do you suggest?' Sometimes the way they do things isn't the easiest way, and they learn things from me, too."

Being an avid learner who asks the right questions also helps a travel nurse fit into their new environments. Cash says, "To get along, you have to go in there and show that you want to learn how they do it. You want to learn how they run their show."

Rains especially loves learning the ins and outs of different hospital procedures. "Every facility has its little quirks. Some places take things more seriously than others or put more importance on different aspects of the job. It's important to learn what's most important to the core staff in every hospital you work."

Many successful travel nurses are lifelong learners. [Saynab Omer](#) recommends that travel nurses read deeply into the subjects that matter to them. “Stay on top of your evidence-based practice, too. Keep growing and learning.”

## 4. They are prepared

Just like a boy scout is always prepared to trek into the wonderful and dangerous woods on a camping trip, a travel nurse must be prepared for whatever a wild new assignment brings.

The first step of being prepared is gaining the general nursing experience that will be the foundation for your work as a traveler. Most hospitals require 1-2 years of experience before they will take you on as a traveler -- and more can be even better. [Nancy Koopmeiners](#) finds that even as a seasoned nurse, you can never be too prepared.

“You have to have a really strong foundation in nursing first — I was a nurse for 13 years before I started, and I still find myself learning new skills at every assignment.” — [Nancy Koopmeiners](#)

Omer agrees. In her advice to aspiring travel nurses, she says, “Go into travel nursing with some experience under your belt. Though you may only need a year or two, the more experience you have, the more confident you’ll be. If you’re confident, it’s going to benefit your patients.”

Nash points out that preparation doesn’t stop once you have the requisite experience. You want to do all that you can to be prepared for your first day on the job. “Read Google and Yelp reviews of hospitals so you know the kind of environment that you’re headed into.”

# 5. They stay out of hospital politics

Successful travel nurses know that one of the top perks of their job is that they can sidestep the hospital politics that can bog down permanent nurses.

In fact, Koopmeiners says avoiding that kind of drama is one of her very favorite things about her job. “The best part is that I don’t have to get involved in the politics.”

“I just come in, spread my sunshine for three months, and then I leave.” — Nancy Koopmeiners

Rains agrees. “I like the control I have over my life. I don’t have to deal with the politics of being a core staff member. I don’t get caught up in what benefit changes the hospital might make or what happens if they cut PTO. Travel nursing means I have a little more control over my world.”



## 6. They stay connected to old and new friends

Travel nursing can be lonely if you don't put yourself out there. Successful travel nurses know how important it is to create a support network - at home and on the road. So they stay in touch with family and friends back home and prioritize making new friends when they are traveling, too.

Rains sees meeting people as part of the adventure of travel nursing. "I love to meet new people! Whenever you go to a new facility, you meet other travelers. You have this common ground with them that helps to form strong friendships."

**"Get out there and make friends. The way you enjoy traveling is by putting yourself out there." — Jennifer Klein**

Cash has used her traveling as an opportunity to strengthen her relationship to her family back home. "The best thing," she says, "is that my family and I have grown closer, even though I'm farther away."

# 7. They have great recruiters

Behind every successful travel nurse is a great recruiter -- the person who supports you through tough assignments, celebrates your career victories, and makes sure you're thriving.

Nash says that her recruiter was instrumental in getting her into travel nursing in the first place. "My TotalMed recruiter was really patient. He helped me narrow down my thought process. He helped me see that I could give travel nursing a try."

Now, she knows she doesn't want to mess with success. "Other recruiters are always trying to get me to work with them, but I don't want to change a good thing."

Koopmeiners has leaned on her recruiter during rough times. "I've also had the pleasure of working with some really good recruiters at TotalMed. When my car got broken into and I lost most of my possessions, my recruiter sent me \$150 to buy clothes. And another recruiter sent me a birthday cake for my birthday. It wasn't that they sent those things, it was that they did them out of the kindness of their own hearts."

**"It's important to me to have a good, honest relationship with my recruiter. Working with TotalMed has been a dream." — Saynab Omer**

Omer has found more than a strong career advocate in her recruiter -- she's found a friend. "I love my TotalMed recruiter to death. She has been there for me through the toughest times."

She encourages other travel nurses to keep looking until they find the kind of strong nurse-recruiter relationship she has. "If your recruiter isn't honest and kind, keep looking. The right one is out there for you."



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