

# Eight Tips to Per Diem Success

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Are you toying with the idea of "going per diem?" The lure of flexible scheduling looks like a dream, but fear of losing reliable income could turn this dream into a nightmare.

The potential for financial insecurity is obvious, but it doesn't have to be that way. You can minimize your risk. Nearly every skill you have is marketable. The key to a steady income lies in your ability to diversify. By working in more than one area, in even more than one institution, you can obtain the flexibility you want and the earnings you need.

## Here are some tips on how to do this successfully:

**1. Know thyself.** You must thoroughly assess your skills and knowledge base. Employers hiring "per diem" expect that you will be able to "jump in" and perform competently with minimal training and assistance. Begin by choosing work in which you are already comfortable and experienced. This can be your "home base;" the place where you will want to commit to some regularly scheduled time, perhaps one or more days a week, depending on requirements of hire, weekend, or holiday time. But when that "I'm sorry we have to cancel you today" phone call comes, you can avoid panic by having other options!

**2. Be Gumby.** Gumby was that incredibly flexible television character. Tell employers that they can call you on short notice...say, at 5:30 in the morning after they receive a sick call. Make it clear that you may not be available every time they call, but that if you are, you will be happy to come in. If you know you will be available a certain day, call in advance to let them know. If you receive a request to, say, work 7 AM to 3 PM but are only free from 9 AM to 3 PM, offer that! Make spontaneous calls yourself. "Hi, this is Jane, I'm free today and wondering if you need an extra hand." You have nothing to lose and you'll be surprised to find how others start "thinking out of the box" once you show them how! This kind of flexibility can lead to many opportunities for work.

**3. Be wise.** While it is to your benefit to be able to work outside your comfort zone, that statement never refers to patient care. It refers only to your ability to adapt to new places, new people, and unfamiliar routines. Never enter into a situation where your ability to render safe, competent patient care is in doubt. While neither you nor an employer would knowingly do this, the potential exists. "Winging it" for a day is acceptable only in regard to paperwork.

**4. Respect yourself and your employers.** Never take your commitment lightly, no matter how sporadic it may be. Be there when you say you will be there. Give the proper amount of notice for an absence. Expect and demand proper notification for being cancelled.

**5. Don't bite the hand that feeds you.** Remember that you are a guest in the places you work. Don't criticize the staff, the environment, the manager, the policies, or the work. By not being a

"full-timer" you may not understand the reasoning or history behind many things. Don't engage in gossip, in, out or about the workplace. Your presence should be nothing but an asset, not a liability. However, if you have suggestions for better patient care or safety, by all means suggest them. Above all else, you are the patient's advocate.

**6. Remember, business is business.** Don't take things personally. It is human nature to momentarily feel "rejected" when anyone, even an employer, says they don't need you. Realize it has nothing to do with your self-worth and everything to do with business. When an employer cannot schedule you or must cancel, simply say, "Okay...perhaps another time." Realize too, that managers may also feel "territorial" when they ask you to work and learn that you are unavailable because you are working elsewhere. A simple, "Oh, I'm sorry, I would've loved to, but unfortunately it's not going to work for me today...I hope you'll call again," will suffice. Going into detail in either circumstance serves no purpose.

**7. Expand your horizons.** Actively expand work opportunities. Actively increase your knowledge and skill base. Actively pursue the many rewards, challenges and satisfactions of per diem nursing.