How could I balance continuing to work while pursuing a degree?

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In October 2010, the Institute of Medicine released the report The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, which called for 80% of all nurses to have a BSN degree by 2020. This expectation was overwhelming and, in the beginning, I felt like it was an insult. I have had my associate degree in nursing for more than 20 years. All I could ask was: How can I have worked so many years and now be considered a subpar nurse? Regardless, the fact remained that I needed to return to college and obtain a higher degree.

Pursuing my BSN would require a tremendous amount of time and energy. My greatest challenge was time. Working a full-time job did not lend itself to going to school with a full course load. On the other hand, taking only one or two classes at a time was going to be painful and take forever. How was I going to finish school and stay on task at work? Would I be able to balance the two and, if so, at what cost?

Throughout my journey, I found many supportive people and strategies that allowed me to finish my degree and keep my sanity. First and foremost was my family. Their understanding and support were key to my success in attaining my degree. Second, my director was supportive and encouraging. She gave me the ability to take time off, if needed, so I could keep up with the hectic pace of school. Third, my employer provided tuition reimbursement. Although it didn’t cover the full cost of my tuition, I was fortunate to have this financial assistance. Many other work environments do not provide this benefit and my hard work, I was able to reach a goal I had never dreamed of.

Now that I have my BSN, I am proud of my achievement—and so proud that, when my director asked me to go for my master’s degree, I said yes!

REFERENCE

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