



Intuition: A Powerful Self-Care Tool for a Life that Thrives

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Most nurses have the capability to be highly intuitive beings.
- ▶ There are many techniques for nurturing and feeding our intuition.
- ▶ Listening to our inner voice, creating moments of real silence, disconnecting from devices, and getting adequate sleep can all help open the channels of intuition and inner knowing.
- ▶ As we search for ways of thriving in our lives, make a dedicated effort to stay connected and honor your inner voice that serves as a beacon, reflecting your heart's song and purpose.
- ▶ Nourishing and tending to our intuitive inner selves will allow our sixth sense of knowing to flourish!



Kim Richards

Intuition, not intellect, is the “open sesame” of yourself.

– Albert Einstein

I RECENTLY PUT THE BRAKES on a project with another consultant that looked absolutely perfect and rational on paper. It all made sense. Yet, every time I spoke with the person, I felt my gut tighten with dread and an unexplained icky feeling of repul-

siveness. Every time I sat down to write out content for the project, it felt like climbing Mt. Everest in flip-flops. As much as I sincerely tried, I could not get traction or momentum to move forward. It was painful and I was developing “blisters” trying to press on and ignore the undeniable truth – it simply did not feel right in my gut. My stomach ached. Every day, my body slumped and my head hurt when I would think about this project. Everything in my very being was saying, “Run away... fast and now!”

The Intuitive Voice

As it turned out, it was the best decision I could have made; yet, I paid a heavy price for pulling away. The fallout was still worth honoring my intuitive voice.

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The “collaboration” would have created misery for me. In hind site, I overlooked or dismissed multiple, undeniable warning flags because, at the time, I was immersed as a caregiver in my home and my mother’s home in another state. I was stressed, overcommitted, and too exhausted to just say no from the beginning. I realized my ability to follow my intuition was rusty, where it once had been finely tuned for maintaining harmony in my life. My emotional energy had been used up in the effort of caregiving. The intuitive voice that had always served me well had been muffled, while I spent each day planning care coordination, navigating the system, and doing my best to create a healing environment for my loved ones. I had become disconnected by being hyper vigilant in care management! I had let the noise of daily life, overwhelming terror of potential loss, and multiple priorities scream at me, drowning out my inner voice of intuition. I had become deaf to the one tool I had always relied on to course correct and steer a solid pathway to an authentic, thriving life.

Intuition has been described as instinctual, another way of knowing; yet, like faith, it can be controversial. Some believe it is not a valid way of knowing, but a combination of memory, sense, and emotional perception. Some people dismiss the notion altogether. Sometimes intuition and rationality combine to guide our decisions in ways we don’t always completely understand.

Inner Wisdom

A nurse colleague offered this story regarding her intuitive power to diagnose a chronic illness that had perplexed her physicians.

Many years ago when I was being inconclusively tested for everything under the sun, I was kept in hospital for almost an entire (second) pregnancy while doctors stood flummoxed at the foot of my bed. I waited until the baby was born and then told them I had lupus, which they refuted as that’s not how I presented. I was right, atypical maybe, but I knew. The disease does not define me, I do not own it (I hear people saying “my lupus” or “my diabetes”) and I am incredibly healthy. Most people have no idea and I prefer it that way. Everyone has something, right? So as the challenges come and go, I trust my gut every time. I know when it’s bigger than me and when I need help (which is rare). This means my doctor knows I will only trouble her when I really need her and she reminds me, “I am

here to catch you if you fall.” She once told me I was the healthiest looking sick person she knows.

Living with a chronic disease (said Bernie Siegel) is the secret to longevity! I no longer go for 3 monthly lab checks. I know intuitively how I am doing and when I need to sleep more, eat less, or reduce stress. Too often lab values didn’t match the symptoms and even resulted in unnecessary medications (which I knew my body didn’t need), so listening to my body has become my greatest survival tool. My doctor listens to *me* now, not my test results!

My friend also learned to listen to her inner wisdom of intuition and trusted it enough to speak up when she felt a hunch. I have observed her using that well-honed intuitive voice in her leadership role and personal life, and I can actually feel it when talking with her. She is listening deeply, observing actively, and absorbing conversations. With critical decisions that allow a moment, instead of responding immediately, she will simply “sit” with her thoughts and allow silence. Her staff responds in tune with her reflective decisions in a trustful, respectful, and appreciative way.

A participant in a recent Self-Care Academy workshop offered an example of a time when he was working on a psychiatric unit. The protocol was to check on patients every 30 minutes. During an assessment of a particular patient, all the checkpoints and information looked fine. But, he had a hunch that he could not explain and he simply *knew* that everything was not ok. He decided to check on the patient about 10 minutes later. The patient had tried to hang himself and this intuitive nurse intervened successfully.

This participant also shared how this experience of listening to his intuition has served to strengthen his inner voice. He depends on his sixth sense to help guide decisions in all areas of his life. He has learned the best way to hone intuition is to nurture it, trust it, and welcome the knowing of the unknown. This event occurred early in his nursing career, 25 years ago. Today, as a nurse leader, he tells his staff that memorable story and encourages them to tap into and embrace their intuitive selves.

“Knowing”

Very early in my career, I had the great honor of working with a very experienced labor and delivery nurse matriarch. (Of course, I did not fully appreciate it at the time, as she was “old-school tough” on me!) This woman could have opened a shop reading a crystal ball! Had lottery tickets been around in 1980, I would have asked her to pick my numbers! Her intuition of newly admitted labor patients was so razor sharp that she barely spent 30 seconds examining them. I learned volumes of often-unexplained information watching her. She would be very quiet, even close her eyes for a moment after observing a patient’s face. While watching how the

patient moved and responded, she would allow time to feel the energy for subtle clues. At times, her intuition leaned so strong in the opposite direction of rational, she would call the obstetrician for delivery while the patient was only dilated 4 cm. Yet, to the patient’s surprise and appreciation, she was spot on every time. And, instead of complaining about being summoned so early in the labor process, the *wise* physicians had learned to also trust her intuition and would always come when called, albeit with this nurse sometimes in the middle of the delivery!

This mentor taught me never to dismiss the feeling that something wasn’t right with a patient, even though all the monitors and other indicators were perfectly fine. Many experienced nurses have felt that unexplainable “knowing” when things just aren’t what they seem. We don’t know why, but we *know*.

Most nurses have the capability to be highly intuitive beings, yet as Malcolm Gladwell states, “our world requires that decisions be sourced and footnoted, and if we say how we feel, we must also be prepared to elaborate on why we feel that way...We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that – sometimes – we’re better off that way” (2005, p. 11). It’s part of the core of our internal wiring. “The adaptive unconscious functions as a giant computer that quickly and quietly processes a lot of the data we need in order to keep functioning as human beings” (Glaswell, 2005, p. 11). Science has confirmed how important intuition is in the way we make decisions. And as Seligman and Kahana (2009) explain, “It has long been realized that many important decisions are not arrived at by linear reasoning, but by intuition” (p. 399)

For example, have you ever made a bad hire even when you had a strong hunch the candidate was not reflective of his or her glowing résumé and references? There’s *something there* that you just can’t put your finger on, yet you move forward?

As a veteran executive recruiter, I still rely on my intuition when interviewing candidates for particular opportunities. The résumé may be perfectly suited, the candidate perfectly qualified, yet, if I start to feel something “off” in my gut, I listen to it. If the feeling doesn’t subside with clarification or gets stronger, I back off from the candidate. More often than not, the decision turns out to be a wise move and my clients appreciate it.

Finding Our Intuition

How can we most effectively nurture and feed our intuition? How can our intuitive selves align more closely with our soul guidance? How can we tend our inner garden of truth and knowing?

First, when you hear your inner voice speak, *be quiet*, listen, and honor it. As I described in my personal story, being “quiet and listening” was sometimes lost on me when I was dealing with serious life and death events involving my loved ones. Yet, there were

moments when I could literally hear my intuition speaking to me as if it were a person sitting next to me. I found it extremely comforting and validating as I awaited a life-threatening diagnosis and prognosis. As the question “Why am I here going through this?” welled up from within me, my intuition boldly and loudly stated, “Because *this* is exactly where you are *supposed* to be, you *can* handle this and you *know* what to do.”

Find a way to create moments of *real* silence, stillness, and aloneness every day. Meditation, mindfulness, prayer, and yoga can help still the noise of the world. These moments may be found in doing artwork, writing, needlework, playing a musical instrument, etc. These moments could happen in your car (off the phone), your office (off email), your bedroom (TV off), nature, a bathtub, or even a toilet, if absolutely necessary. Make friends with silence. It may feel a bit weird and a time waster early on, but the stress release and rejuvenation associated with aloneness and silence contribute to letting go of old ways of thinking, making a clear path for new ways of knowing. Don’t wait for critical decision times; allow silence to be as much a part of your daily routine as checking emails. As a yoga instructor, I find the hardest posture for most yogis is often savasana or corpse pose. Silence and stillness are just as important to our well-being and nurturing our inner selves, as “flipping” our downward facing dog.

Disconnect from devices. The Pavlovian pings only serve to reel us in again, again...and again. The more we fill our lives with timesaving devices and strategies, the more rushed and behind we feel. There are no rollover minutes in life. Allow your central nervous system to reset to calm, the chatter to fade, and the channel of inner connection to open.

Get more sleep. Sleep deprivation is not only a serious health concern on many levels, but serves to squash intuitive sense. When people are sleep deprived, they are functioning in a flight or fight mode or completely numb to all but the most immediate survival senses. The body becomes out of balance. Emotional intelligence is dwarfed, along with empathy, attention span, and memory. Many of my clients have found that simply improving sleep quality along with quantity serves to significantly increase their ability to tap into their intuitive senses, and produces a greater sense of well-being and self-esteem. Often it’s a basic, primal solution to many issues including being open to “gut signals” that help illuminate a clear pathway to a life that thrives.

Listen to calming music. Close your eyes for a few minutes. Breathe in the calm and rhythm deeply and visualize your breath moving in and out of your lungs into the air. With every exhale, visualize worry, anxiety, and tension moving away from your body...just for a moment.

Just let it go for a moment. Some of my clients have found it helps to say to themselves the following three

words, “their first name, let it go.” (As in “Kim, let it go...”) Besides feeling a bit better, what other feelings came up? Did you see a glimpse or a fleeting image? Perhaps write it down in a journal and simply let it be for the moment.

Journaling is also an effective way to unblock stuck pathways of thinking to allow the flow and welcoming of intuitive awareness. In journaling, as we allow ourselves the nonjudgmental freedom of writing thoughts, feelings, and random observations, the essential truth is revealed in patterns, words, or by revisiting entries at a later time. Often, the tone and selection of our words can illuminate underlying feelings, making way for intuitive understanding.

Thriving and Flourishing

There are many other ways we can open the channels of intuition and our inner knowing. Repetitive, rhythmic activities (e.g., biking, running, walking, knitting, rowing, gardening) are times we can simply breathe and let our minds wander. Letting yourself get lost in a good book, or, my favorite, travel to a different culture, also serve to open our intuitive ability. Often it’s a situation or an image that causes us to see things in a different perspective that can trigger a hunch or whisper an intuitive voice. The late Steve Jobs wrote, “Intuition is a very powerful thing, more powerful than intellect, in my opinion. That’s had a big impact on my work” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 48).

Arianna Huffington (2014) states:

Intuition is about connections, but connections that aren’t obvious and that can’t be reasoned into existence. Our intuition connects us both to our inner selves and to something larger beyond ourselves and our lives. But it’s incredibly easy to become disconnected from it. And with the pressures and paces of modern life, without deliberate effort, it’s more likely than not that we will stay disconnected. Our intuition is like a tuning fork that keeps us in harmony – if we learn to listen. It helps us live more of our lives from that still center in us that Marcus Aurelius called our ‘inner citadel’ (p. 137).

As we search for ways of thriving in our lives, make a dedicated effort to stay connected and honor your inner voice that serves as a beacon, reflecting your heart’s song and purpose. Nourishing and tending to your intuitive inner selves will allow our sixth sense of knowing to flourish! \$

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