

25 Principles for Adult Behavior in Healthcare



This month [John Perry Barlow](#) died.

Described by [Stephen Levy of Wired](#) as a “cowboy, poet, romantic, family man, philosopher, and ultimately, the bard of the digital revolution”, Barlow penned a list he called the “25 Principles of Adult Behavior,” as a series of instructions for life.

I see it as a series of turn signals and it inspired me to create the “25 Principles of Adult Behavior in Healthcare.”

I stole 9 of his principles (those in italics) and added a bunch of my own.

1. Don't assume you know what a patient is going through.
2. Don't think the patient owes you respect for caring for them.
3. Don't think anyone owes you respect because you're in charge.
4. Be patient with every patient. Be patient with everyone. *Be patient. No matter what.*
5. *Don't badmouth: Assign responsibility, not blame.*
6. *Say nothing of another you wouldn't say to him.*
7. Put nothing in writing that you are not willing to repeat in a court of law or have printed on the front of the local newspaper.
8. *Laugh at yourself frequently. Just laugh, but not at others.*
9. *Concern yourself with what is right rather than who is right.*
10. *Expect no more of anyone than you can deliver yourself.*
11. *Never forget that, no matter how certain, you might be wrong.*
12. *Praise at least as often as you disparage.*
13. *Admit your errors freely and soon.*
14. Knock before entering.
15. All people deserve dignity. Offer it.
16. Everyone is frightened in healthcare, even if they don't act like it – patients and admins alike.
17. Leave it at the office.
18. Address patients and others by their formal titles until they give you permission to do otherwise.
19. Keep your hands away from your eyes, your nose and your mouth regardless of what your job is.
20. Wash your hands frequently, regardless of what your job is.
21. Listen more than you talk. Especially listen to patients even if you are sure you know what they are going to say.
22. Let people finish their sentences and pause before answering.

23. Start conversations with questions. You might be surprised at what you learn.
24. If you're the boss: sit at every workstation in the office once every three months and observe.
25. Bring cookies to work once in awhile.

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