

Lessons in Leadership: Nigel Wilson, Assistant Director of Building Services



"I will never say, 'This is what you're doing wrong,' " says Nigel Wilson, assistant director of Building Services at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn. "Being a manager is about nurturing the employee, re-educating them if need be, and helping them progress."

During his seven years at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn, Nigel Wilson has risen from transport supervisor to assistant director of Building Services. Here, he shares how he learned to be a good listener, why he still helps clean patient rooms, and the most important advice he received.

Show that you care. Transporters are responsible for taking patients from point A to point B in the hospital. I started in that role in 2017 before becoming a building services manager, overseeing about 40 transporters in the hospital, in 2019. I'm a big

advocate of developing a rapport with patients. The smallest conversation can help ease a patient's mind and prepare them for what's next. If I see a transporter wheeling a patient toward the elevator, I'll say, "I need everybody off the elevator. We have a VIP patient coming in." That always gets a laugh. At the end of a transporter's journey with a patient, I have every one of my staff say, "Thank you for allowing me to transport you today." I'm proud that every week, the hospital receives positive notes about our transporters.

Efficiency keeps patients and staff happy. I was promoted to senior operations manager in 2022 and then to assistant director of building services in the fall of 2023. Now I oversee 230 staff in Housekeeping and 10 employees who handle the hospital's linens. The more efficiently we turn beds over, the better. Patients might be downstairs for many hours when they are admitted. I want them to find their room in pristine condition so they can settle in quickly. Getting rooms in tip-top shape got a bit easier in December, when Building Services announced that the hospital will own our linens moving forward instead of renting them. The switch gives us full control of the quality and quantity of the inventory, including sheets, blankets, pillowcases, and towels. You can see the excitement on the floor as staff prepares the room with new linens. It's very satisfying to see a patient looking happy in a freshly made-up room.

Learn to listen. I will never say to a staffer, "This is what you're doing wrong." Being a manager is about nurturing the employee, re-educating them if need be, and helping them progress. Early on, I used to bump heads with my staff. I'd talk over them, never giving them the opportunity to speak. My director at the time, Foohel Pena, gave me some great, simple advice: Listen. The next time a staffer was in my office, I absorbed everything he had to say, including complaints about me. I acknowledged my missteps and asked how I could better manage him moving forward. I could see an immediate change in his eyes. He felt heard. That adjustment impacted my whole career. Today I make sure all employees have the opportunity to voice their concerns. I get their feedback, we make decisions together, and we move forward.

Show you're a team player. I have many meetings during the day, but my staff sees me on the floor, too. I'll put on a "bunny suit" and a cap—personal protective equipment—to turn over a room if a patient had Covid. Or I'll split the duties with a staff member, saying, "We have seven steps to cleaning the room. Can you take care of these five, and I'll take the other two?" I'll transport a patient when we have high call volume. Or I'll drop off linens. We are all part of one team.

Stay accountable. I'm grateful for my position, and I take the work very seriously. Two days a week, I come in at 5 am to address any concerns from the overnight shift.

On an average day, I'm here until 6 pm or 7 pm. I like to provide a little buffer for the transition to the evening shift. I make sure everyone knows I'm here for them, and that we're all accountable. If there's even a small area of the building that's dirty, that's housekeeping's responsibility. We can never drop the ball.

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