The magical metamorphosis a student registered nurse anesthetist (SRNA) goes through to become a CRNA is extraordinary. It feels like a life or death struggle to transform from a caterpillar-like state where you’re wrapped in a cocoon of textbooks, board practice questions, and endless clinical rotations to break through the National Certification Exam (NCE) and emerge as a fully functional CRNA who can fly on your own. This article will discuss the transition from student to practice, highlighting advice for the last six months of anesthesia school, the transition out of school, and the first six months of practice. I have collated these insights from my own experience and that of dozens of CRNAs I have spoken to. More information on this topic can be found on episode 25 of my podcast, From the Head of the Bed… a podcast for the anesthesia community (www.fromtheheadofthebed.com).

The Last Six Months of School
The three big elements that will consume your attention at the end of school are your project/thesis, the job search, and boards. Hacking out time from the jungle of class and clinicals to wrap up your project/thesis early will pay off big towards the end of school. Likewise, securing a job several months out from graduation will eliminate a big stressor. My podcast episode 23, “Tips for the Job Hunt”, may be helpful. Putting both your project/thesis and the job hunt behind you will help you focus on the biggest piece of finishing school: passing boards. Here are 10 Tips for Crushing Boards:

1. Develop the right mindset. Believe you can pass. Develop a growth-oriented mindset and your exceptional capacity to succeed. The weight of doubt is not worth carrying.
2. Study ferociously. There is no amount of time spent studying that you will regret once you pass.
3. Take care of yourself. Find a balance that includes adequate sleep, exercise, and eating well. Like an athlete or actress training for a big role, you’re training to perform at your best in an epic event. Act like it in every way: mind, body and spirit.
4. Do timed practice exams. Taking timed practice exams with no music or distractions will help you prepare psychologically for boards.
5. Visit your exam location ahead of time. Pearson Testing Centers are classically difficult to find. Eliminate the stress of possibly getting lost on the day of the exam by finding the parking lot, building, elevator, floor, office, and bathroom of your testing center ahead of time.
6. Get your stuff together. This is the “Mom Tip.” Lay out your required paperwork, identification cards, and car keys the night before the exam.
7. Stop studying. Cramming in the last 12-24 hours before the exam will probably not be helpful and will likely only increase your stress. Plan to finish studying a day out. Get good sleep the two or three nights before your exam. Rest mentally and physically ahead of your exam.
8. Take exams carefully. Once you’re at the computer, relax and breathe. Read carefully. Don’t rush. If you’ve done timed practice exams, you’ll have plenty of time to complete all 100-170 questions. Remember, 30 of the minimum 100 questions are random and don’t count toward your score. Have fun—you’re becoming a CRNA!
9. When you finish the exam—relax. Be proud of yourself no matter the result. Many excellent CRNAs needed more than one attempt to pass the NCE. Tell yourself that you will pass—today or another day. You will be a CRNA!
10. When you pass: CELEBRATE! Enjoy what you have accomplished!

Transitioning out of School
You probably can’t wait to get out of school, but know that there are some things actually worth savoring in the waning months of your program. You have been in the trenches with your classmates, preceptors, and professors for years. Since many SRNAs move to take jobs, you may not see these folks after school. Take time to hang out and celebrate with your friends and classmates. Say thanks to your professors and
You Have Incredible Potential

You are the single best advocate for your own practice, your profession, and your future career. You can build the kind of practice you want. You have incredible capacity to either build others up or tear them down. Be kind, even inspirational, to other perioperative staff and the SRNAs you will work with. Remember that you are now the standard bearer of an esteemed profession. You are the face and voice of CRNAs to everyone around you. You may be the only CRNA your patients and their families ever meet.

Consider giving back through the AANA Foundation and the Political Action Committee (PAC). The AANA has paved the road we all walk on as CRNAs. If each of you remain active members of the AANA and give back $250 annually to both the Foundation and PAC, the future of CRNA practice will be brilliant! These are the best ways to stay informed of emerging trends in anesthesia, to stay connected with your colleagues across the nation, and to help build a stronger future for CRNAs. Those who have gone before us have given time, effort, and money to create the careers that we now enjoy. Consider giving back just as our seasoned CRNA colleagues have!

A good life is the culmination of thousands of little choices made well. You made an excellent choice to become a CRNA! Enjoy the fruits of your labor. Keep setting a trajectory in your decision making that creates the life you’ve imagined. Show kindness to others, spend less than you make, develop hobbies outside of work that are rewarding, give back, go big, live the dream, save lives, and have fun! Welcome to the CRNA family!

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Listen to episode 35 of my podcast, From the Head of the Bed, where I will discuss more about key tips for successful transitions to practice. www.fromtheheadofthebed.com/episode35