

3 Questions Every Healthcare Leader Must Ask About the Patient Experience

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Since the mid-1990s, Baird has helped healthcare organizations nationwide improve the patient experience and enhance organizational culture. Baird's culture assessment and diagnosis include experience mapping, medical mystery shopping, and focus groups to reveal the real customer experiences within your organization. Using your patients' experiences, Baird and her team prescribe critical next steps for improving patient satisfaction and HCAHPS scores.

When it comes to the patient experience most healthcare organizations want to jump to tactics. They may give someone one tactic or a series of tactics to work on, but they stop there. Then they wonder why they don't have the level of employee engagement and patient satisfaction that they had hoped for. The reason: they haven't addressed the three key questions that link the tactics to the patient experience. It's a triad of questions that includes:

- Do your employees know **what** to do?
- Do they know **how** to do it?
- Do they **want** to do it?

Drilling down into *all three* of these questions is critical to aligning behaviors and attitudes that will create and sustain an optimal patient experience.

What to do

The **what** represents your standards for service excellence—the behaviors you are looking for. Many organizational leaders print out their values, distribute them on pretty fliers, and feel their job is done. Values aren't always written with specific behaviors. In fact, take the word 'respect.' It can mean many things to different people. It's important to define the behaviors you expect to see and make sure they are observable and trainable. If you can't demonstrate the behaviors, chances are you cannot train for them or observe and coach for them either. This applies to physicians too. Many times when we look at the physician code of conduct we see a focus on disruptive behaviors and consequences. But what we **don't** see is an indication of specific behaviors that are expected to deliver the optimal patient experience. Your standards should be clearly stated, explicit in terms of your expectations and tied back to your mission, vision, and values. These behaviors should reflect who you are as an organization. They should define your brand experience in every encounter.

How to do it

The **how** is training and coaching. While many organizations spend significant resources on one round of training, many stop there. Training, without coaching, is not nearly as effective. Training must be followed up with coaching by the manager. Why? Because coaching reinforces the "what & how" and must occur on a day-to-day basis in real time. It involves catching people doing the right things and then reinforcing those behaviors through positive feedback. It also involves observing opportunities for improvement and pointing out those opportunities with constructive examples for improvement. It requires constant and ongoing vigilance. Are you coaching? Are you giving feedback? Both training and coaching are vital to ensuring service behaviors are consistent.

Want to do it?

The **want** is employee engagement—connecting the work to the heart. Do people on your team know how their work connects to the mission, vision, and values? Do they see how they make a difference? This connection to purpose makes all the difference in engagement but so does attitude. Does their attitude reflect the organizations standard of excellence? If not, it may be time for a crucial conversation.

All three of these—the what, the how, and the want—must be in place to ensure exceptional patient experiences.

Keep in mind that this doesn't just apply to front line employees. It also applies to your managers. **Here's how it applies to managers:**

Do they know what to do?

This relates not only to the service standards that are expected of all staff; it applies to leadership competencies that foster service behaviors. Do they know WHAT fosters service behaviors? Do they know WHAT is expected of them as leaders? Again these are the standards and competencies set for leaders. These might include rounding daily on employees, coaching, feedback, and communication.

Do they know how to do it?

Have managers had training on coaching, rounding, and communication? Have they been mentored and prepared to follow through? Is anyone watching and helping them improve? In many organizations managers may understand the what of daily rounding and that it is an expectation. But, has anyone explained how they want it done in this organization?

Do they want to do what is expected?

Some managers are clearly not comfortable with coaching, mentoring, and modeling. It's important to make sure that managers are following through with expected actions and held accountable for results. If there is resistance to coaching staff, then it's time to re-evaluate whether or not the individual is a fit with the organizations future goals.

You can apply these three questions to any expectation you have of anyone in your organization. It's a perfect triad that needs to be considered for both the front line level as well as leaders.

Want to learn more? We're [hosting a webinar on January 21](#), where we'll expand more on this triad and lead you through "6 Vital Steps for Achieving Stellar Results." You'll learn how to shape a service excellence work plan that produces the action you want—measurable outcomes that boost both employee engagement and the patient experience. We hope you can join us!



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Nurse, author, and consultant Kristin Baird, "Healthcare's Customer Service Guru," is the author of *Raising the Bar on Service Excellence: The Health Care Leader's Guide to Putting Passion into Practice* (Golden Lamp Press, 2008), *Reclaiming the Passion: Stories that Celebrate the Essence of Nursing* (Golden Lamp Press, 2004), and *Customer Service In Healthcare: A Grassroots Approach to Creating a Culture of Service Excellence* (Jossey Bass, 2000). The Baird Group provides consulting, mystery shopping, and training services for improving the patient experience. To learn more, please visit <http://baird-group.com> or call 920-563-4684.