

The Patient Experience Post

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5 Counterintuitive Opportunities to Cultivate a Spirit of Gratitude

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

This Thanksgiving, many will spend some time reflecting on all of the things they have to be thankful for: their families and friends, their good health—the lists go on. But, one thing we're unlikely to put on these lists are the "not so great" things that may have happened to us over the past year. We tend to fill our gratitude lists with the "good stuff."

It may be a bit counterintuitive, but we can also find much to be grateful for even when faced with adversity and personal challenges. Challenges are an ongoing fact of life for all of us and, particularly in the healthcare arena, increasingly complex and often vexing. So, how might you look a bit differently at some common situations to find opportunities for gratefulness? Here are "5 Counterintuitive Ways to Cultivate a Spirit of Gratitude":

- 1) A doctor complains about a process that just isn't working; she's frustrated and she's taking it out on you. Is there something to be grateful for here? Yes! You're now aware of a process breakdown and can take steps to improve that process.
- 2) A patient complains about how difficult it is to reach a nurse when they call in for questions about their medications. What can you be grateful for here? Again, a notification about something that is not working *in your patient's opinion*. Those opinions reflect patient reality and present an opportunity to make improvements that can boost patient satisfaction (and HCAHPS scores!).
- 3) A staff member is continually complaining about the way that schedules are created. Maybe you haven't been listening to the reality behind the complaints. Maybe it's time to sit down and listen—really listen—to what the staff person has been telling you. And, then, it's likely that you can be grateful for some insights about how you might make some adjustments to improve your staff members' work/life balance.
- 4) A vendor who meets regularly with members of your facilities team complains about the lack of parking on your campus (a common situation at hospitals around the country!). This might lead to an "a-ha moment" that could save time, and frustration, for the vendor and staff members—maybe those meetings don't have to take place person-to-person; today's technology allows for many virtual meeting

options from phone calls, to videoconferencing and many options in between.

- 5) Your family complains that you're not home enough and, when you are, you're not really "present." This may be the best gift of all—be grateful that your family values your presence and wishes to spend quality time with you. Give them a gift in return: adjust your work/life balance so that you can be with them—and really be *present*—more often.

Here's another somewhat counterintuitive thought: you know how challenging your days can be and, sometimes, how few and far between grateful thoughts and deeds can be—so do your staff members and colleagues. Make it a practice to be sure that you're taking the time to thank them in small and large ways for all that they do.

The days don't always run smoothly, colleagues aren't always as accommodating as we would like them to be and, yes, patients can be difficult to deal with at times. In the end, though, even on those really bad days, there *is* much to be grateful for. As you continue to face challenging situations in the future make a personal effort to think about these interactions differently.

What can you be thankful for this holiday season?

Phone communication is an essential part of the patient experience and is often the first part of the patient experience. In just seconds, your patients are deciding if you are friendly, knowledgeable, concerned, and willing to help. In fact, research shows that after just a 2-minute phone encounter, patients are clear about whether or not they would return to your organization or recommend it. Patients rely on phone encounters to make appointments and seek clinical advice. Other callers rely on phone encounters to gain vital information about a loved one. In both situations, it's important that you create a positive, trust-building experience. To engage your staff in essential phone skills, look toward the tips and tools in [You'll Have Them at "Hello": Phone skills that will WOW your callers every time](#). For only \$199, you'll receive the following: the video recording, presentation slides, a transcript of the recording, a participant guidebook, a moderator guidebook, a quality assurance tool, and additional handouts! This session is also available as a live training workshop.

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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.