

The Patient Experience Post

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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.

5 Ways to Overcome the Perpetual State of Overwhelm

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

We live in a time of rampant change—impacted both by changing laws and regulations and constantly emerging technology. Nowhere is this more true than in the healthcare industry where each day seems to bring new challenges and new mandates.

As we work with managers in healthcare organizations around the country one of the things we consistently find is that they are universally in a chronic state of overwhelm. Competing priorities, constant competition and changing priorities impact them every day. Both managers and staff are continually buffeted and continually in a frustrating state of overwhelm that makes them feel ineffective, frustrated and, increasingly, burned out.

But, regardless of the competing priorities that challenge us behind the scenes, our patients need us to be at our best for them—always.

Fortunately, we're all in this together. Managers can set the stage by establishing a calm, "we can do it" environment for themselves and staff. Leaders who take a "the sky is falling" stance (and there are many of them) create a culture of panic which doesn't serve anyone. So, how can you lay the foundation for overcoming the perpetual state of overwhelm? Here are five tips:

Clarify the "Why"

As priorities shift, ask yourself why this particular priority is important and how it ties to core strategy. If you don't have the answers, turn to your leaders for help in understanding why you're shifting direction and the impact this shift will have on the organization—and patients. Then, provide that same clarification for your staff members. They want and need to understand.

Don't be that manager who follows every edict with the response "because I said so!" when employees ask for more information. Worse yet, don't say it's because administration says so. That's not inspiring. What *is* inspiring are priority shifts that benefit patients. That's why we're all here after all. In healthcare we're fortunate because we can all

rally around the concept of patient care and doing right by our patients. Appealing to that human element of our work can be both inspiring and motivating.

Make a Tie to Mission, Vision and Values

Healthcare staff members from the top to bottom of the organization, and in all departments, tend to be very mission-driven people. Most entered the industry for a reason—because they care. Leverage that innate capacity for caring by providing an ongoing focus and a sense of purpose through clear alignment with your mission, vision and values.

In our training programs we emphasize the importance of tying service behaviors to the organization’s mission, vision and values. We advise [using your mission, vision and values](#) as your “north star” to provide context and clarity for all of your communications.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

To help manage a sense of overwhelm, communication is key. So is transparency. Be up front with your colleagues and your staff to elicit their commitment and support. Don’t shy away from sharing bad news—chances are they’re already in the know! Not being upfront can do more damage than good and will lead to an increased state of frustration and burnout. Remember that in the absence of clear communication from administration, the rumor mill will run amuck.

Leverage Your Resources

When priority number one is employee engagement *and* safety *and* patient engagement *and* high-quality care, what’s the real priority? It can be hard to tell, but here’s an important point: all of your staff members don’t need to be focused on the same priority at the same time. You may have many priorities at once, but the key is to leverage your staff and other resources effectively by clarifying and distributing work among your team members.

Know the Business

The more you (and they) know, the better you’ll understand why priorities are shifting and why your focus may need to shift as well. It’s important to understand not only the organization you work for (and its mission, vision and values), but also the industry within which you

operate. In our case, healthcare is a rapidly shifting industry with impacts coming at us from both internal and external sources. We're facing staffing challenges. We're facing reimbursement challenges. We're facing competitive challenges. We're facing technology challenges (along with opportunities).

Understanding these challenges, how they affect our organizations and how we can help to address them through our daily efforts—together—can help ease the sense of overwhelm that might otherwise stymie our efforts.

We've said this before, but it bears repeating—it's critically important to help your staff members stay grounded on what we're here to do, serve patients. Our doors are always open, our patients are continuing to come to us and they need us to be at our very best—always. This won't change. In a midst of constant change and continued turmoil that's the most important constant we can all cling to.

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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.