

Fostering Exceptional Patient Experiences: 7 steps for healthcare leaders

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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.

There are many leaders in healthcare environments, each with an opportunity to exert positive influence on those who follow them. If you're in a position to guide and shape the behaviors of those around you, here are some specific things you can do to help foster exceptional patient experiences:

1. **Set the expectation.** Leaders may have a strong internal commitment to the patient experience, but they sometimes fail to explicitly convey that commitment, along with their expectations. Don't assume that your staff knows what is expected of them. You need to clearly communicate your expectations.
2. **Get out of your office and talk to patients and staff.** Leaders can't influence from behind their office doors. You need to get out of your office and interact with both patients and staff to help reinforce your expectations and commitment to a positive patient experience. And above all, listen and learn about the needs and expectations of those you serve as a leader.
3. **Do an attitude check.** Attitude is everything. As leaders, we have to develop a mindset of being service excellence champions ourselves. That starts with an attitude check on ourselves, beginning with the question: "Do I have an attitude that conveys that I expect excellence?" Saying it is one thing. But, it is what we do that most influences those who follow us. Do you have a crusader mentality—an attitude that communicates to everyone around you that a positive patient experience is a must, and that you're going to do whatever it takes to make it happen?
4. **Get out of the way.** It's an old and often over-used term, but organizations that really, truly, empower their staff to make decisions on the spot and on a day-to-day basis, will provide exceptional service. They are rare, but they don't just happen spontaneously. They are developed at the hand of strong leadership that has the confidence to get out of the way and let their employees do their jobs, including whatever it takes to create exceptional patient experiences.
5. **Recognize and reward the behaviors you wish to see.** Catch people doing something right. And when you catch them, recognize and reward them. This can happen in large and small ways. A simple, sincere, and specific "Thank you for..." means a lot to an employee, and reinforces the behaviors and actions you want to see again and again from each and every individual in your organization.
6. **Hold people accountable.** The flip side to recognizing and rewarding

the behaviors you want to see is swiftly addressing the behaviors you don't want to see. As leaders, we need to have zero tolerance for things that overtly conflict with our organization's mission, vision, and values. If we've hired people who reflect our mission, vision, and values; clearly and explicitly communicated our expectations; and we've provided the training and tools they need to meet those expectations, then we need to hold them accountable. This may be both the most challenging—and the most impactful—leadership action we can take. Nobody likes to think of themselves as being deceptive. But, for every day that we tolerate behavior that is inconsistent with our mission, vision, and values, we're being deceptive. We are deceiving people into thinking that these behaviors are permissible when they are not.

7. **Create a cultural expectation that everyone in the organization is responsible** for spotting, recognizing, or correcting actions and behaviors they see every day. Anybody walking through the organization, from the housekeeper to the CEO, who sees something amiss should feel a sense of responsibility to do something about it. As healthcare leaders, we need to have a heightened awareness of the patient experience, really seeing and experiencing every interaction through the patient's perspective.

Whenever we fail to convey our expectations, model our expectations, or hold people around us accountable for meeting those expectations, we fail our patients, our staff, and ourselves. We owe it to them—and to ourselves—to take our role as healthcare leaders seriously and to take steps every day to build a culture of service excellence.

Learn more about ways you can ensure that all of your customer interactions, including over-the-phone interactions, support your healthcare organization's brand, as in [Living Your Brand Promise](#), featuring Kent Seltman, co-author of Management Lessons From Mayo Clinic. As the former Director of Marketing at Mayo Clinic, Seltman was charged with managing the brand for this world-renowned organization. During this 90-minute presentation, you'll hear about crucial elements in aligning the brand promise with the patient experience in order to build trust and credibility with customers. For only \$89, you'll receive all this: pre-session worksheets, a session workbook, webinar slides, and an audio CD of the 90-minute webinar, complete with the Q&A session.

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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).*