

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence



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.

Gossip, Grudges, and Gripes (Oh my!)

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Face it. Dig beneath any organizational issue and you're likely to find communication problems. Organizations are, after all, comprised of people and dependent upon good relationships among those people to effectively perform the work of the organization.

This is particularly true in healthcare organizations. A healthy culture is at the core of how people communicate, and there are things that each of us can do to positively impact a healthy communication culture. Even if you're not a formal leader in the organization, you can play a leadership role in improving your healthcare organization's communication culture.

There's an expression I like to use with people who begin telling me about issues (often communication issues) they are facing. I advise them to: "ask yourself if you're part of the problem or part of the solution" and tell them that, when they start the initiative and participate in honest communication, they become part of the solution.

A healthy, open culture encourages people to speak up and talk to each other about disagreements. Not talking to each other fosters resentment and feeds the rumor mill.

Whether you have an issue with a peer (A), have a subordinate coming to you with an issue about someone else (B), or have a peer coming to you with an issue about another peer (C), there are positive, proactive—and healthy—communication steps you can take.

Let's take a look at the ABC's of healthy communication:

A. What to do if you have a beef with a peer

- Plan ahead for the discussion
- Ask to talk in a private place
- Use the XYZ Formula

Here's how it works. Suppose we were in a meeting where you criticized something I had done in front of the group. I was very upset about that because I felt you were condescending and insulting. So, I would plan ahead and ask to talk to you in a private place, and then I'd use the XYZ formula, which looks something like this: "When you do X, it causes Y, and I'd like you to do Z."

In this case, it might be: "When you bring up problems in public meetings (X), it makes me feel very embarrassed (Y) and belittled in front of my peers. In the future, if you have issues or concerns with me or my work, I'd like you to talk with me privately about them (Z)."

B. What to do if a subordinate comes to you about a problem with someone else

- Listen attentively
- Acknowledge concern
- Ask the individual what they would like to have happen in terms of an outcome for the situation
- Determine if there is a clear power difference between the two
 - If there is not, encourage the subordinate to first have a constructive feedback conference with the individual
 - If there is a clear power difference, it may be appropriate for you to become involved in discussions between the two
- Coach your subordinate on how to do this effectively (Hint: teach them the XYZ Formula)
- Roleplay as necessary
- Make an appointment to check back with the individual to see how the constructive feedback conference went and then follow up

C. What to do if a peer talks to you about a problem with another peer

- Determine if this is gossip by asking yourself these three questions:
 - Is it true?
 - Is it necessary?
 - Who is benefitting from the conversation?

Overhearing gossip is a common occurrence in many situations. If you are committed to a healthy culture, it is important to become involved. You become a contributor if you just sit quietly and listen. You might say something like: “I can see that you’re frustrated. This is something I think you need to talk to him/her about. If you’d like I can help you get ready for that conversation by helping you roleplay.” And, of course, in some situations, you may simply need to walk away. The key is to not become part of the problem but to strive to be part of the solution. That’s what effective leaders do.

These situations are never easy to deal with, but they’re essential to deal with. The XYZ Formula can help.

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).

