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.

A New Year, a New Look:
4 questions to help you set and achieve goals

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Very soon the countdown will be completed, the ball will have dropped, and we'll all be facing a brand-new year. As one year ends, making way for the new one, we can all benefit from taking a moment to step back and reflect on what went well during the year, what could have been better, and what goals you'll set for the coming year.

That reflection time is so important. It gives you that brief pause to re-group, re-assess, and re-charge, armed with information from the recent past. Organizations can perform a similar year-end inventory, reflecting on successes, challenges, and progress toward organization-wide goals. Involving your staff at the department level in a discussion about the past year's progress is a great strategy for putting closure on the year and preparing your team for what lies ahead. A discussion of this nature not only engages staff in setting new goals, but also provides a great opportunity to celebrate successes that may have dropped off the radar for several months.

At the organization-wide level, publishing a summary of the reflections for all employees (or, better yet, involving them in the year-end assessment) will ensure that all your internal stakeholders start the new year out on the same page.

What Is the Goal?
In assessing end-of-year achievements, it's important to reacquaint yourself with the original goal. Take a step back and remind yourself what your goals were at the beginning of the year. Do those goals look the same at the end of the year? What progress did you make in achieving that goal? If you didn't make good progress, what were the barriers that stood in your way?

Many organizations set goals on a multi-year basis; however, it's still important to re-assess them periodically throughout the year, particularly at the year's end. Over the course of the year, your objectives may have changed due to external circumstances, internal changes, or any combination of environmental factors. The important thing is that you evaluate whether or not you actually have a solid set of worthy objectives guiding your daily work.

When you're doing your year-end assessment of your progress toward your goals, think through some important questions.
- Are your department goals still in line with the organizational strategy and values?
- Are they S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-worthy?)
- Can employees get behind and believe in the goals? Have you helped them see how the goals fit their personal values and organizational strategy?

- What roadblocks have prevented your staff from reaching their goals?
- Have you been working toward your goals all year, or were they trotted out last January never to see the light of day again until now?

How Do You Know If You've Reached Your Goal?
A commonly accepted practice in goal setting says that goals must be measureable; otherwise, how will you know if you've reached your goal? However, if you only review your objectives on an annual basis, you have ample opportunity over 365 days to run your goal off track. Any goals for your organization, department, team, or yourself can be broken into short-term goals that can be used for benchmarking progress. As you're assessing your year-end progress, note those benchmarks. Some goals for the year may not have been reached, but some progress is better than not moving at all. Some organizational goals may be more "open-ended" goals, not tasks to be checked off, but more to be checked up on.

What Do You Do If You Haven't Reached A Goal?
There is a multitude of reasons why you, your organization, or your team may not have reached one of your annual goals. This is the perfect time to step back, re-examine your purpose, and rewrite the goal for the next year. Is it something you still believe in and value? Is it a priority? If so, determine what obstacles kept you from accomplishing it. Not enough time? Not enough resources? Not enough personal commitment to making it happen? If you don't reach a goal, it is important to re-assess its relevance. You may determine that it is no longer a priority and that is fine. Where we often struggle is when we feel that a goal is still a priority, but we didn't make it happen. Remember, this reflection time is about moving yourself, your department, and your organization to new heights in the new year, so be honest without being self-deprecating.

What Do You do if You Have Reached a Goal?
Congratulations! This is when year-end evaluations feel great. However, basking in your accomplishments doesn't mean you have all the questions answered. The biggest one looming now is what next? This is the time to raise the bar. Do you know what you are capable of? Are you maximizing your team's potential? Are you playing to your strengths? Have you identified your weaknesses and strived to overcome them? Can you push your team to a new level? As you craft next year's goals, keep in mind how it feels to have something checked off your list at the end of the year. Better yet, keep the goals front and center throughout the year so that everyone can see when the goal is met.

You may notice that there are a lot of questions sprinkled throughout this article. As we stand on the cusp of a new year, it's a great time to ask ourselves and our organizations these questions. Then take the time to reflect and answer them. As with most issues in life, it is only by questioning that we will improve.

Here's to a productive, successful 2008.

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.*

Invite Baird to speak at your next leadership development event! To learn more about the Baird Model for Service Excellence, *employee engagement workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to* info@baird-group.com.

Copyright Use

Want to use this article in your e-zine, newsletter, or on your Web site? You may, as long as you include the following statement:

> 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).