

The Patient Experience Post

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Service Excellence
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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.

Tactics without Traction

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Three Steps to Getting Your Patient Experience Plan on Track

As hospitals and other healthcare organizations continue to focus on the patient experience (PX), healthcare leaders are frequently in search of the “next new idea” that will push their patient satisfaction scores into the stratosphere. It's a noble goal and best practices abound. There's a lot of power in best practices. The healthcare industry has certainly embraced best practices in many ways, often with good results. Sometimes though, best practices may be adopted without a great deal of thought about either the potential implications or the alignment with the current culture, strategy, or connection with employees in meaningful ways.

What we're seeing as we work with organizations around the country to improve the patient experience is widespread adoption of new ideas and best practices that patient experience professionals (PXPs) may read about in a book or article, heard about at a presentation, or learned from a colleague in another organization. I can't argue that there may be value in trying things that have worked well for others. Yet I advise you to proceed with caution. Trying to move forward too quickly without ensuring that three critical foundations for success are firmly in place, can spell failure. Rushing into several tactics at once without making sure that the culture is ready is like throwing flower seeds on the sidewalk. They will not take root! Here's what you need to do to ensure that any best practice tactics you introduce to your organization will have traction.

Understand the Culture of Your Organization

Culture is rooted in the beliefs and attitudes of your staff members. If you don't know what their beliefs and attitudes are—or if you just make assumptions—you're likely to have a difficult time attempting to implement a tactic of any kind.

When we do culture assessments in healthcare organizations through a combination of focus groups, mystery shopping, in-depth interviews or other techniques, we're able to dig deeper into the beliefs and attitudes of an organization, and we're able to point out some potential barriers that need to be addressed before change of any kind can take root.

Create a Plan That Connects the Dots Between PX and Organizational Strategy

Understanding the culture is the first step in paving the way for patient experience tactics to take hold. The next step is ensuring that you have an overarching plan, with clear goals and strategies, in alignment with the overall organizational strategic plan. You have to be able to connect the dots.

Over the past several weeks, I've been conducting PXP laser focus calls to help PXPs identify their top priorities and institute a plan to achieve them. What I've been finding, though, is that a significant percentage of these PXPs, at all levels, only have a vague idea of what their organizations' top priorities are. Without this knowledge, they are literally *unable to connect the dots between their role, their tactics, and what's important to the organization*. That's a problem.

Without this knowledge, PXPs will be challenged and frustrated. Many of them tell me they're not getting the respect they feel they deserve for their efforts or the buy-in they need from senior leaders, clinicians, and others, for implementing best practice tactics. They fail to recognize that they are often the root cause of their own frustration simply because they haven't aligned their PX tactics with organizational core strategies. They have to connect the dots.

Engage Employees' Hearts

If you engage the heart, the head and hands will follow. Engaged employees are eager to dig in and do what needs to be done to achieve objectives that resonate with their personal passions.

Simon Sinek, the author of *Start With Why* and *Leaders Eat Last*, tells organizational leaders that there is nothing more important to achieving organizational objectives than starting with "why." If you can connect these objectives to employees' hearts, nothing is more powerful in driving action. In healthcare, we have a natural path to engaging employees' hearts—the care of others.

You'll raise the bar on your patient experience when you:

- Understand your culture—What are the attitudes and beliefs about service and accountability among staff, leaders, and other key stakeholders (physicians)?
- Align your PX planning with that culture and your organization's strategic objectives.
- Engage the hearts of your key stakeholders. They will help you to achieve your objectives.

Culture is king. If you don't know where you're planting your seeds, you're certainly not going to reap the harvest (results).

The big takeaway is to stop throwing your time and energy at best practice tactics you've read about unless you are confident that the culture is going to support the proposed tactics. Those best practices will never gain traction until they've been put into the context of the bigger picture.

Not long ago, I had been working with an organization that had experienced 100% turnover of their senior leadership team in six months. In fact, they had three CNO's in two years. So when I suggested the best practice of bedside shift report, one of the nurses said, "Here we go again! Another flavor-of-the-

month.” Ouch! The first CNO was all for this best practice. The second had rejected the practice altogether saying she’d reinstate it when she got her feet on the ground. That never happened because she left after just five months. When the third CNO arrived and stated the discussion of bedside shift report, the team disengaged. Their attitude was, “Keep your head down, do nothing, and we’ll all outlast her. “ This is the reaction that many departments have as they dig their heels in and wait for the tactics to pass along with the leadership. If, however, the tactic is planted in a culture that takes ownership, recognizes the value, and is nurtured by middle managers; it’s like seeds landing in fertile soil. It will take root and grow regardless of the leadership turnover.

It’s sometimes hard for the PXP leader to make these connections and sort through the nuances of the organizational culture. An outside coach may be the answer. Working with someone who can help spot the weak points in the service structure and build on the strengths will help you gain traction. The PXP Advisor is designed to help patient experience professionals drive strategy and achieve results.

The PXP Advisor™

What if you could walk into your CEO’s office and hand over a service audit and a three year patient experience strategy and action plan? You’d build your own credibility and at the same time gain greater support for achieving goals? You can. We’ll help.

[The PXP Advisor™](#) is a customized approach designed to meet you where you are and take you where you need to go. We’ll do a service audit that helps you take stock of your current situation, including strengths and weaknesses. Next, we’ll co-create a clear roadmap to help you plan for and achieve results. One-on-one coaching every two weeks is designed to keep you focused on goals while enhancing leadership skills and stakeholder relations. Webinars start October 22nd. You won’t want to miss this unique opportunity to accelerate your patient experience success. Click [here](#) to learn more.

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.

To learn more about the [Baird Model for Service Excellence](#), employee engagement or leadership development workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to info@baird-group.com.

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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.

