

## *The Patient Experience Post*

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## Tomorrow's Culture Starts with Today's Best Interviewing Techniques

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

We know that to create an exceptional service culture, and one that is fully committed to safety, we need to hire right, engage, and retain the best people. These are the three keys to establishing a great workforce. Unfortunately, if you're like most of us, chances are that at some point in your experience as a hiring manager you made a misstep at the very beginning—you made a "bad hire." You hired someone who seemed to have a great service focus during the interview but later turned out to be not service oriented at all.

What happened?

It might have been the types of interview questions you asked. Too often during interviews, we ask candidates to tell us how they would handle certain situations. We ask them to *project into the future* what their responses or actions *might* be. Although this technique might seem like a good predictor of behavior, it's not nearly as effective as looking back. Why? Because we can all be superheroes in our own imaginations. Thinking about what we *might* do is a far cry from what we actually *did* do in a particular situation. A better approach, according to hiring experts, is to look *backwards in time* to ask potential employees about how they *did* handle a certain type of situation.

This focus on actual behaviors during the interview process is known as behavioral interviewing.

Behavioral interviewing considers the types of behaviors that exceptional employees exhibit in certain situations and uses questions about past experiences to determine whether employees have actually exhibited those behaviors.

For instance, in many cases in healthcare, regardless of the position, we are interested in hiring people who have both a strong service and a strong safety focus. From a behavioral interviewing perspective, we would develop questions designed to help us assess the candidate's background and actual performance in these areas. There is an art and a science involved.

The science is determining what questions will get at the heart of the issue. The art is listening for cues about the candidate's intentions, views, and passions. For instance, when assessing for service competencies, you might ask behavioral-based questions like the following:

- Tell me about a time when you felt you went above and beyond to provide exceptional service to a colleague, patient, or family member.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult patient and were unable to resolve the issue. What did you do? What was the outcome? What would you do differently today?

When assessing for a strong safety focus, you might ask behavioral-based questions like these:

- Tell me about a time when you observed a physician or co-worker engaged in an action that raised safety concerns. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you made a safety-related error. What happened? How was the situation resolved? What did you learn?

In creating these questions, you might focus on real situations that have occurred in your hospital. Your goal is to determine how the candidate has dealt with similar situations in the past and whether their actions would be appropriate in your environment. As you listen to the candidate's responses, you will be listening for both "diamonds" and "red flags":

- **Diamonds:** an indication of empathy for the patient's or customer's situation; an effort to find solutions; a respectful, factual description of the situation; an indication that the candidate has learned something from the situation.
- **Red flags:** the use of negative or derogatory terms or tone to describe patients or customers; getting emotional or escalated while recounting the story; blaming others.

Answering this type of question can be tough, so learn to become comfortable with silence. Give candidates plenty of time to recall an appropriate situation. Probe for additional information if the response is too brief or doesn't give you the detail you need. Encourage self-reflection and look for "lessons learned."

Finally, pay attention to the non-verbal cues you may be receiving and inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages. A response like, "I appreciated receiving constructive criticism from my colleague," accompanied with a scowl or a negative head shake sends two different messages; usually the non-verbal message is the most accurate one.

Hiring for service- and safety-minded individuals is critical for any healthcare organization. When you're conducting interviews, don't ask candidates to tell you what they *might* do, ask them to tell you what they *have* done and listen carefully, with both your ears and eyes, to what they have to say.

Want to learn more? Click [here](#) to order a full-length webinar on behavior-based interviewing with a tip sheet for developing service- and safety-related behavioral questions.

*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).