



Tactical Tune-Up

August 2009

2 Easy Exercises to Tune Up Employees' Filters

In health care, it's important for all of us to make sure our internal filters are in good condition lest we utter any number of hair-raising statements that will make our customers abandon us. Sometimes employees make these statements innocently enough, but to vulnerable patients and their families, it's enough to turn them away for good. Not to say that all health care employees are prone to doing this; even the ones who typically employ effective filters can benefit from a tune-up.

1. Ride a Mile on My Gurney: What Does it Mean to the Customer?

In health care, we make a lot of promises and use a lot of words that may mean one thing to us as providers, but mean something entirely different to our customers.

Our mission, vision and value statements are full of words like "excellence," "compassion," and "quality." To us as health care providers, these words most likely denote the success of our clinical outcomes or the status of our clinical credentials.

Health care customers hear these words through a different filter. They expect their health care providers to be clinically excellent. They assume that the person taking care of them has the best credentials and knows what he's doing.

When customers hear or see "excellent care," they expect a warm welcome, a respect for their privacy and to be treated with dignity. Sometimes in the rush of our daily work, health care workers neglect these seemingly little things, which mean the world to our customers.

Exercise Work with your staff to create a list of "never words." Have staff put themselves in the patients' place and brainstorm a list of words and phrases that they would never want to hear as a patient. Some of these might be things like, "You're catching me on the tail end of a double shift," or "I'd be surprised if you can get that doctor on the phone," or even, "Sorry if the food's cold; those dietary aides are always running behind."

As staff members brainstorm this list, they should interpret each of these phrases from the viewpoint of the patient. By working together to identify their never words, staff can also help keep each other on track if one of these phrases happens to slip through a filter.

2. Situation Debrief

Sometimes, we're lucky enough to have our patients and their family members tell us about their experiences. Whether it's a glowing thank you note or a scathing survey comment, all of these stories make great learning experiences for our staff.

Exercise: At monthly or quarterly meetings, read your patients' stories to staff – both the good stories and the not-so-good. Have staff examine each situation and evaluate how well they and their co-workers used their filters in each. In the case of good scenarios, ask how employees successfully framed their conversations to be filtered through the patient's viewpoint. What internal filters worked for the employees in the situation? In the case of not-so-good scenarios, ask how staff could have better framed their conversations with customers and what filters they could have proactively put into place to improve the outcome.

Continuously tuning up your filters will help all health care employees provide the care that customers expect and create more raving fans as opposed to customers who want to run to the competition.



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