

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
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.

What's the Story? Great leaders shape culture with stories that support mission, vision, and values

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Storytelling is ageless. It traces back to prehistoric times when cave dwellers would capture their stories in the form of pictures on cave walls. From Aristotle and Aesop to Shakespeare and Doug Lipman, throughout time, those who have been able to craft a good story could hold audiences in thrall, capturing both their hearts and their minds.

In organizations—and especially in healthcare organizations—we sometimes forget the power a story can hold for staff, and even for our patients. In meetings and forums, the tendency is to share data, which is very cerebral. It is rare that statistics are credited for inspiring the heart. Storytelling, on the other hand, can inspire. It can "heartwire" your organization's mission, vision, and purpose by making them come alive through tales that are rooted in reality. When words are woven into stories, they resonate at a deeper level and help others make connections that live on in their memories over time.

- Remember the patient who was miraculously saved by a phenomenal team effort that some say was nothing short of miraculous?
- Remember the employee who volunteered to work on her scheduled weekend off so a colleague could tend to a sick family member?
- Remember the time that staff pulled together during a disaster to make sure the community had access to food, water, and shelter?
- Remember....

What are your stories? What cultural lore best illustrates what you stand for-- or won't stand for?

Inspiring leaders must be able to communicate a compelling vision. Storytelling can help translate a vision that is "just words" into a vision that lives on as the story is passed from one person to another and another....

For instance, telling stories can be a great way to engage new hires in the culture of your organization. Tell stories of stellar service or of other new hires who went on to become some of your stellar performers. Use storytelling to teach the standards for service. Don't just read through a list of standards--tell stories of the standards in action.

Words are powerful. They give oral history and shape culture and lore. Storytelling, therefore, is a vital part of the culture of any organization. Don't leave it to chance. Make it happen by design. To get started, consider the following:

- Who should tell stories? Different types of stories lend themselves to different storytellers. Consider both your audience and the message. Sometimes, the CEO may be the best choice—other times, a

housekeeper. Department meetings offer a great opportunity for managers to share stories of success, teamwork, and the mission in action.

- Where are the stories? Some of the best stories are sometimes hidden deep within the recesses of an organization. Dig them out! Or, better yet, help the staff dig them out by teaching them how to spot a good story.
- How do we get the stories? Make storytelling a part of your culture. Encourage staff members to share their stories through various communication channels. Some of our clients have an intranet page dedicated to stories that tie to recognition.
- How do we retell the stories? Capture the stories you gather for retelling internally and externally through newsletters, blogs--even social media.
- What tools do you need? Today's technological options allow you to tell stories face-to-face, through print, audio, video—or through a combination of all of these.

Leaders who can master the art of storytelling will be able to motivate and move their associates. In my book, [Raising the Bar on Service Excellence](#) (Golden Lamp Press, 2008), I've expanded more on the subject and included a number of resources for improving storytelling skills.

Today's stories are tomorrow's legends. Don't let the lore of your organization slip away. Capture and share it through stories that connect and compel with your staff and other audiences.

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).