

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.

Service Requires More Than a Smile: The 3 Ps of exceptional patient experiences

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Have you ever had a terrible meal at a restaurant where you were served by a very friendly, courteous waiter or waitress? A bright smile simply doesn't make up for cold or bad food, a long wait, an unkempt environment or a bill that is far higher than the quality received.

Yet many healthcare organizations spend a lot of time and effort training staff members about the importance of delivering care with courtesy and a smile. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but the reality is (and you can almost certainly relate) great, memorable service requires more than a smile. The complexity of healthcare means that there are a myriad of big—and little—details that impact service outcomes.

While many healthcare organizations brag about their service training initiatives, a one-time session on basic courtesy is simply not enough to achieve real and meaningful results that will raise patient confidence and build lasting relationships. In an era where we will all be evaluated based on HCAHPS scores driven by patient impressions (and made publicly available), the stakes are higher than ever. To really impact those scores, healthcare organizations need to move beyond basic skills training for staff members whose abilities to deliver on the service promise is impacted by far more than whether they remember to smile! They need to embed service excellence into every aspect of care delivery and ensure that service excellence is driven from the top of the organization through clear and measurable objectives, concrete expectations, and consistent accountability.

We practice in a world of increasingly savvy healthcare consumers. It's not enough to simply tell them how great we are. We have to be great. And, we have to be great in ways that matter to our patients. To be great it's going to require more than having friendly staff. Of course, friendly service is important, but it's not enough.

When evaluating a positive experience we look at the 3 Ps of service excellence. It takes people, place and processes to deliver a consistently positive patient experience.

Following are the 3 Ps of Exceptional Patient Experiences:

1. **People** are the backbone of the patient experience. But they matter in ways that go way beyond a friendly face and a courteous "hello." The people factor starts with your organization's leaders. Your leaders need to be on board and committed to service excellence not only in word, but in deed. Not only must they be positive role models for (because their every action is watched closely), they need to consistently position service as a priority through messages and

actions. In addition, leaders need to hold staff accountable for their actions and they need to do so consistently. If employees observe their peers engaging in poor service behaviors that are ignored by managers, it sends a strong message that service isn't really important. Conversely, if employees consistently deliver excellent customer service but never receive positive feedback from their managers, this also sends a strong message that service isn't important.

2. **Place.** Just as a cluttered, dirty-looking restaurant impacts our perception of our meal, a cluttered, dirty-looking hospital or medical practice impacts the patients' perception of our care. A sticky bedside table or grungy bathroom erode patient confidence and may even cause them to be on the lookout for other shortcomings. Even seemingly little things like cigarette butts in the parking lot (or no parking spaces in the parking lot!) impact perceptions. In our [Patient Experience Boot Camp](#), we described the essentials of creating a healing environment—the key elements that go into creating a positive experience for our patients based on the physical environment of our health care facilities.
3. **Processes.** The most competent, service-oriented people in the world cannot deliver exceptional care if there aren't processes in place to ensure that they can be efficient and effective. Processes come into play when trying to manage wait times, call backs on lab results, and even rounding. Without effective efficient processes, chances are that patients will be hassled with longer than usual waits, poor response times, and lack of attention to details.

The challenge is to weave service excellence into the culture of the organization so that employees see it as integral to each position at every level.

While many organizations have been working on customer service for a number of years, few have successfully integrated customer service into marketing and business development strategies. When an organization links customer service to the strategic plan, the focus on satisfaction becomes visionary and truly customer centered.

That requires more than smiles. It requires a leadership strategy that considers critical elements of people, place, and processes—all aligned as part of a strategic plan designed to achieve results.

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).