

## *The Patient Experience Post*

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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.

## 3 Sure Signs that Employee Engagement is Slipping

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

It's been well documented that there is a strong correlation between employee engagement and patient satisfaction. That's why it is essential for leaders at all levels to remain vigilant about engagement. Even minor downward shifts can have negative effects on quality of care, turnover, and overall performance.

While it is important to conduct employee engagement surveys, the data is a lagging indicator. In our consulting work, we find that many organizations only conduct engagement surveys every few years, if that. In fact, we're often discouraged to learn some only schedule them every three to five years without any pulse surveys in between. If that is the only way you are gauging your employee engagement, you will be missing opportunities to take action and spare yourself the fallout.

Leaders who are committed to maintaining a healthy, supportive culture that is aligned with the values must remain vigilant for early signs that the culture is eroding. Here are three things that we see in the early stages of decline:

1. You observe uncharacteristic tension between team members. If your department is one where teamwork reigns supreme, uncharacteristic tensions can indicate something is going on. It could be that two or more team members are having some sort of dispute, and, if allowed to fester, the tension can grow and involve more people over time. Before you know it, the issue has grown, people have taken sides, and morale dips.

One of the challenges for managers is that it's hard to know when to step in. I've coached many managers over the years who regret ignoring signs at their own peril.

2. Otherwise engaged staff begin calling in sick or doing the bare minimum. Sure, sometimes people need a mental health break or are fatigued, but you don't want to ignore signs that your best performers are checking out. This is where coaching conversations become vital. Don't ignore these signs. By asking questions, you have the opportunity to help them navigate through difficult issues or intervene when their behavior is related to department issues.

I was recently coaching a nurse manager who picked up on signs that one of her best nurses was becoming less engaged. By talking with her, she learned that another nurse (one who was already on a performance improvement plan) was creating significant drama and

divisive behavior on the night shift. The high performer admitted she had begun looking for a new job.

By not ignoring it, this nurse manager was able to keep her high performer and take action with the staff member who was creating problems. Had the manager ignored it, she would have been eroding her own credibility.

3. Patient and family complaints increase or you notice little things are being allowed to slide. When engagement slips, so does the patient experience. Rounding is the best way for leaders to keep a finger on the pulse of the patient experience. Daily rounding gives the opportunity to observe and interact with patients, families, and staff. Keep in mind that the complaints don't have to be full grievances to indicate a downward shift. They can be little things that start to paint a picture that your team members aren't fully connected and living the values in every encounter. In clinical areas these can include rooms left untidy or nurses not making hourly rounds consistently. In non-clinical areas, it can be lack of attention to detail and mediocre interactions with their customers.

These are just a few of the early signs of wavering engagement that leads to culture erosion. If you know your team well, you'll be more keenly aware if things begin to slip. You'll be able to ward off problems much more easily if you round with purpose, listen carefully, and trust your gut.

Would you like to learn more about Baird Group's Coaching for Engagement or leader coaching? Contact us at [info@baird-group.com](mailto:info@baird-group.com) or call 920-563-4684.

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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.