

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.

The Value of a C.O.A.C.H.

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Are you someone who puts in their time at work each day with no clear idea of where that time will lead you? Or are you a new manager faced with having to give a poor performance review, quickly losing your nerve to do so? Or have you ever felt like the pile of work on your desk is threatening to suffocate you before you can complete it?

From big-picture career planning to leadership development and job-skill building, coaching can be a valuable asset to most people in today's workforce. Many employers look favorably upon employees who proactively take responsibility for their career development by working with a coach.

Some of the most valuable tools in the coach's toolbox can be fittingly described by the letters in the word C.O.A.C.H.

C: Clarify the Goal

Coaching is not an end in itself. As a coach, make sure you are being engaged for a specific purpose. Coaches should not be engaged simply because it's "the thing to do." Coaching is most effective when both the coach and the coachee have a clear definition of what they expect out of the relationship. This often requires both parties to take a step back and clarify what specific action or skill needs to be developed.

Perhaps the goal is to develop a brand new skill altogether or to develop a new way of approaching an old problem.

Can both parties in the coaching relationship define the goal? Maybe the coachee would like to accomplish more than one goal? In this case, has each goal been given a specific definition? The goal is a commitment between the two individuals. The coach commits to provide resources and feedback specific to the end result, and the coachee commits to using the feedback and making necessary changes.

O: Observe the Present State

Before embarking on a coaching venture, the coach should work with his coachee to assess the current situation. Once the goal has been clarified, they can work together to define the current situation and what obstacles might come up during reaching the goal. Many times, people who engage coaches know what the end result is that they wish to achieve. It's harder for them to define their present situation and how it's different from the end result. They only know "I want to get there, but I don't know how."

Part of the "how" is an objective assessment of their current habits and actions. An effective coach will be able to present a clear picture of how the current practice differs from the desired goal. The coach will also be able to help map out steps to close that difference gap.

A: Action Plan

One advantage to having a coach from outside the same organization is that the coach is an objective third party with no vested interest in the coachee's day-to-day business. Therefore, the coach is able to design an action plan to reach the goal without any built-in biases or obstacles that the employee would put into place on his own.

The action plan the coach designs must be specific and measurable. Starting at the current state, the action plan describes specific actions that must be taken to reach the goal. The coachee has a specific timeline for accomplishing each action and is accountable to the coach for completing assignments on time.

C: Communicate/Give Effective Feedback

During the time when the coachee is following the action plan, the coach's primary responsibility is constant communication. The coach's feedback is critical to the success of the coaching relationship. Coaching feedback should be descriptive and focus on specifics of what is said and done. It is also timely, so the coach isn't overloading his coachee with too much information at once. This is why it's important to focus on one clear goal at a time.

H: Help Remove Barriers

When someone has engaged a coach and is looking to improve some aspect of himself, he is looking for the coach's help in removing barriers he couldn't overcome on his own. Those barriers can be external or internal.

External barriers are encountered in the working environment. They may include a process that's hard to understand or a person who's hard to work with. The coach can help put a different perspective on the process or suggest a different way to approach a difficult co-worker.

Internal barriers come from within the person himself. They may include old thought patterns such as, "I'm never on time," or unconscious habits formed over time. The coach can work with his coachee to be conscious of these habits and thought patterns and work through suggestions for overcoming them.

A coach is a valuable member of a personal and professional development team who will work continuously to design strategies that will move clients closer to their goals and get the best out of their personal and professional lives.

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).