

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.

Lessons from the field: Do This, Don't Do That, Can't You Read the Sign?

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I recently completed my certification as an Executive Coach, which included documenting 50 hours of coaching. As I reviewed my notes in preparation for writing my final essay, one theme jumped out at me: everyone I coached identified time management as a coaching goal. Not some, not most – every single person. That might not be as remarkable as it sounds if all these sessions were conducted with leaders at one organization. “That organization has competing priorities,” you might say. But these leaders came from many different healthcare organizations. Does that mean competing priorities are an epidemic in healthcare? Or is it a sign that something deeper is happening in healthcare leadership?

As I looked into this more, I found several common characteristics among the people I was coaching. The first was difficulty saying no. Maybe that should come as no surprise. These are all people who have committed themselves to a profession in healthcare where helping others is part of the job. These folks built their reputations on saying yes and they work for people who have done the same. To be frank, they were never taught the art of saying no without actually saying no. In our Power of One workshops, we teach frontline staff the sandwich technique. You start with a commitment to help, you deliver the potentially bad news, and then you focus on what you can do. How does that apply to leaders with time management issues? When my boss gives me an assignment with a deadline I don't think I can deliver on, I might say something like this: “That sounds like a really important assignment and I'd be happy to help. I'm currently working on [this other assignment you gave me with a competing deadline] and should be finished with that tomorrow. I can give this new project my full attention then and should be able to complete it by Friday. Will that work for you?” You've let your boss know what you CAN do given your current workload and put the onus back on him or her to decide which project is really more important.

Difficulty saying no is often accompanied by the inability or unwillingness to delegate. In an environment where helping others comes with the territory, why are leaders so reluctant to ask the people who work for them for some help? For many healthcare leaders, delegating feels like the antithesis of caring. As one of the people I

coached said, “Giving someone more work sends the message that you don’t care how much work is already on their plate.” Let’s be clear – delegating is not the same as dumping. As a leader, part of your responsibility is to develop those on your team. Giving team members responsibility for a portion of an important project not only helps build buy-in for the project but it also helps team members learn to manage projects and meet deadlines.

The last common characteristic I found always began with a complaint about being overwhelmed by email. In a time where the ease of and access to electronic communication creates a flood of emails that haunts us all every day, what we all need is an email management system. Every email software package I’ve ever used comes with tools like flags, categories, and files to help you manage the unending stream of messages. And yet, the tools don’t seem to be helping. Why? Because the object is not to flag, categorize, and/or file every email that you receive. Before you ever use a single tool, you have to distinguish between the urgent and non-urgent and between the important and unimportant.

Make time for the urgent and important, delegate the non-urgent and important, let someone else worry about the urgent and unimportant, and delete the non-urgent and unimportant. The key is to have a clear definition of what is urgent and what is important.

If you struggle with saying no, delegating, or spending time on the unimportant, the signs may be telling you that it is time to try something different. Talk to the Baird Group about leader coaching and how it fits with transforming your culture and shaping the patient experience.

To learn more about the [Baird Model for Service Excellence](#), employee engagement or leadership development workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to info@baird-group.com.