

The Patient Experience
Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
June 2013



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.

**Are you encouraging employees to R.I.P.?
5 ways to bring them back to life!**

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Last month, we left you with the comment that “what you permit, you promote.” What does that mean? It means that every time you observe an employee do (or not do) something that is contrary to your mission, policies, or protocol, and you don't say or do anything about it, you have, in essence, condoned that behavior. What you permit, you promote!

This can be a tough concept to get your mind around initially, but it's a critical element of leadership. As a leader, you set the tone and need to model the behaviors that you want to see from your staff. Like it or not, you are always “on stage”; you are being watched by employees *all the time*. Scary? Maybe... but important for you to realize. Every time an employee observes you *not doing something* about the staff person who exhibited a surly attitude to a patient, or who violated some rule, you've made a very dramatic statement—but not one that you probably want to make. You've permitted that behavior and, by default, you have *promoted* that behavior.

In my last feature, I talked about the whiners and slackers in our midst. Average and below-average organizations have them to varying degrees, but the ones most likely to fly under the radar are the ones I classify as Retired in Place (R.I.P.). That's right. They've retired but are still showing up at work and collecting a paycheck. We're not talking about the “old guard”; many of these long-term employees are loyal and valued contributors. We're talking about those people on your staff who are either disengaged or only somewhat engaged. They are the quiet resisters who robotically go through the motions, doing just what they've always done. Because they tend to fly under the radar, they may not be as obvious as the vocally disengaged who tend to stir up trouble. You'll never see them volunteer for anything; they do just enough to get by. To our R.I.P. friends, a job is a job. It's a means to get paid, and nothing more. A good day is one where they don't have to see anyone or talk to anyone—especially the boss.

Unfortunately, too often, the things R.I.P.-ers do aren't aligned with the behaviors that will drive a positive patient or co-worker experience. Yet they persist. Why? *Because they have no reason to change.* And, worst of all, *you've allowed it.* Every time you turn a blind eye to actions (or inactions) that are inconsistent with your mission, vision, values, and policies, you've given implicit endorsement of those behaviors. Your inaction serves to reinforce their actions.

Are you encouraging staff to R.I.P.? You just might be if you don't address disengaged or somewhat engaged behaviors. Here are some tips for bringing R.I.P. employees back to life:

- Observe behaviors that indicate the employee is disengaged. (Take notes. You'll need them for your discussion.)

- Have a one-on-one discussion with the employee and compare your observations to the behavioral standard for engaged employees. Ask if they see the gap you've described.
- Give them at least one concrete thing that you want them to work on to realign their behavior with the standards. Ask if there are other actions that they will be taking in addition to the one you prescribed.
- Tell them when you will circle back with them for follow-up feedback. Then follow through. Use the feedback session to recognize positive changes. Give encouragement or coaching where warranted, but make it clear that you are monitoring the situation.
- Most importantly, commit to yourself that you will no longer permit behaviors to occur that are not aligned with your expectations. An important first step here is setting up one-on-one meetings to have coaching conversations with the employees on your staff members that are currently not disruptive but merely R.I.P.

One final note: If you have people who are Retired in Place, they are taking up valuable resources and possibly damaging your intended culture. The other employees see it and, eventually, it impacts their morale.

Phone communication is an essential part of the patient experience and is often the first part of the patient experience. In just seconds, your patients are deciding if you are friendly, knowledgeable, concerned, and willing to help. In fact, research shows that after just a 2-minute phone encounter, patients are clear about whether or not they would return to your organization or recommend it. Patients rely on phone encounters to make appointments and seek clinical advice. Other callers rely on phone encounters to gain vital information about a loved one. In both situations, it's important that you create a positive, trust-building experience. To engage your staff in essential phone skills, look toward the tips and tools in [You'll Have Them at "Hello": Phone skills that will WOW your callers every time](#). For only \$199, you'll receive the following: the video recording, presentation slides, a transcript of the recording, a participant guidebook, a moderator guidebook, a quality assurance tool, and additional handouts! This session is also available as a live training workshop.

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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.