

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.

Are You *Heartwiring* Service Behaviors to Ensure Exceptional Patient Experiences?

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

There's a lot of talk in management circles, including in the healthcare industry, holding employees accountable for certain service behaviors to ensure that they happen consistently—that they simply become so engrained that employees exhibit these behaviors or perform these tasks almost without thinking about them. The term *hardwiring* has become industry jargon. There is a lot of merit in hardwiring behaviors, but it's equally important to instill certain behaviors in the hearts of your employees.

I like to think about this as *heartwiring* because, as I've worked with people in various settings over the years as a clinician, a leader, and now as a consultant, I've found that without a personal connection to purpose, service tactics can just feel like more work for employees. There are two key operating assumptions at work here:

1. Everyone wants to matter; every employee wants to make a difference. I don't believe I've ever met an employee who got up in the morning and thought, "Gee, I sure hope I can tick off some patients and co-workers today." Employees *want* to succeed—they need our help in doing so.
2. Everyone wants to be a member of a winning team. Your employees want to work for the best healthcare organization in their community—in fact, they'd love to work for the best healthcare organization *in the nation*. Wouldn't we all? And, as part of that organization, they want to know that what they do, whether it's taking care of patients or taking care of the people who take care of patients, is contributing to the organization's success. Healthcare leaders' abilities to heartwire behaviors and actions are part of an ongoing process.

There are three key leadership skills that will help heartwire behaviors:

1. Hiring—Heartwiring starts during the hiring process. It, of course, involves careful selection of employees who mesh with the organization's culture. Find out what draws the candidate to healthcare and how he/she makes a difference in the lives of patients. But the hiring process also involves individual conversations that explore employees' unique interests, hopes, and desires for the work they do and the career they aspire to. It involves conversations about how what they will do will drive high-quality care and an exceptional service experience for every patient. It involves clearly conveying to each employee what the mission and vision of the organization is and how what they will do each and every day contributes to the mission and vision.
2. Coaching—Once hired, it is the ongoing coaching and feedback employees receive (They *do* receive that ongoing coaching and

feedback don't they?) that helps cement desired behaviors and actions throughout their employment. Coaching provides a series of continual reminders of the connection between your mission and vision and the work being performed. Coaching helps employees see that what they do and what the patients experience are intertwined.

3. Recognition & Accountability—We all like to get an “atta boy” every now and then. Recognize the behaviors you want to see more of. Employees (particularly the Millennials on the team) need to be recognized when their behaviors match mission, vision, and expectations; employees also need to be reminded when their behaviors *do not* match mission, vision, and expectations.

Keep employees in the loop in terms of how their department or team is doing and how the organization is doing overall. Keeping score is a continual reminder of how the team is doing and a reinforcement of how their individual contributions are making a difference.

Tactics alone won't engage the heart. In fact, they can sometimes fuel resentment that more and more tasks are being layered on an already over-stretched team. Help your employees make the connection between the tactics and the patient experience so they see how they matter. That's heartwiring—ensuring that each and every one of your employees not only knows what is expected of them but believes down to their very core that these expectations matter and make a difference to patients. Through their actions and behaviors, employees are impacting the patient experience.

For additional thoughts on heartwiring, see this week's [good read](#).

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).*