

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
September 2014



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.

Is Good the Enemy of Great at Your Organization?

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Jim Collins is credited with the inspirational quote “good is the enemy of great.” What this statement means is that, for many organizations, they’ve unwittingly slipped into a mindset where good is good enough. They’re doing “just fine” and, therefore, there’s no need to aspire to the next level—to become “great.”

We work with organizations like this frequently. They’re just within the top quartile of whatever patient satisfaction metrics they’re using, their HCAHPS scores aren’t currently creating cause for concern and everyone from board members and senior leaders to the front line believe “we’re doing well.” This belief is further reinforced when the organization has received awards and accolades in one area or another but that success hasn’t translated into customer service and the patient experience.

The problem with this, though, as Collins so astutely told us, is that good really isn’t good enough. Invariably these “good” organizations find themselves facing a challenge, or a crisis, that shakes them out of their complacency and puts them in a position of having to fix something quickly. There are a variety of things that might do this:

- A sentinel event
- Poor survey results that threaten reimbursement
- A patient complaint that comes from a key leader within the organization, a board member, or an important member of the community

But, rather than wait for one of these situations to emerge, organizations should strive to be great from the outset, rather than settle for just being good. It is disheartening, in fact, when an average organization is suddenly concerned about the level of care it’s providing because some “important person” had a bad outcome. Shouldn’t all of your patients be considered “important”?

The trouble is that if your organization is in the “good enough” mode it can be difficult to get it to move from good to great. If senior leaders aren’t concerned, how can other leaders, managers, and front line staff within the organization drive change? The bottom line is that when you’re good, you get comfortable. When you’re comfortable, there is no fire-in-the-belly drive to change. And without the drive to change, you will not achieve greatness.

1. Find the stories and share them.

One very effective way of creating a burning platform for change is through stories. We often unearth these stories through our mystery

shopping activities and they're very impactful. Despite the fact that we may provide qualitative input based on up to 100 interactions, it's the emotion behind these interactions that generally cause leaders to "sit up and take notice." Imagine this scenario: A patient completes a survey giving all 4's on a 5 point scale. You would see the quantifiable evidence that he feels you are good, not great, but you don't know why. But what if that encounter was shared as a story that clearly outlined the patient's feelings and reactions to moments of truth. What if the patient's story added insight about staff behaviors that had a direct impact on the score? Imagine the patient tells you, "People did their jobs efficiently, but no one looked me in the eye, smiled at me or asked me how they could make me more comfortable." By sharing the patient's story, you'd be far more likely to engage their hearts and minds needed to make the necessary changes.

2. Engage staff in defining the difference between good and great.

If people don't see a stark difference between the two levels, they may not know what needs to change or how to make the change.

3. Make a clear link to the mission, vision and values.

If your mission, vision, or values statements contain words like excellence and quality you can emphasize the need to deliver on the promise. Show how scores of 4's (on a 5-point scale) or 8's (on a 10-point scale) are good, but not great. A little humor can go a long way too. I've actually asked leaders if they would be comfortable adding a disclaimer to the mission or vision statement stating, "We're good-not great. And we're content with that so don't expect any more." Of course that question provokes chuckles but it makes people think too.

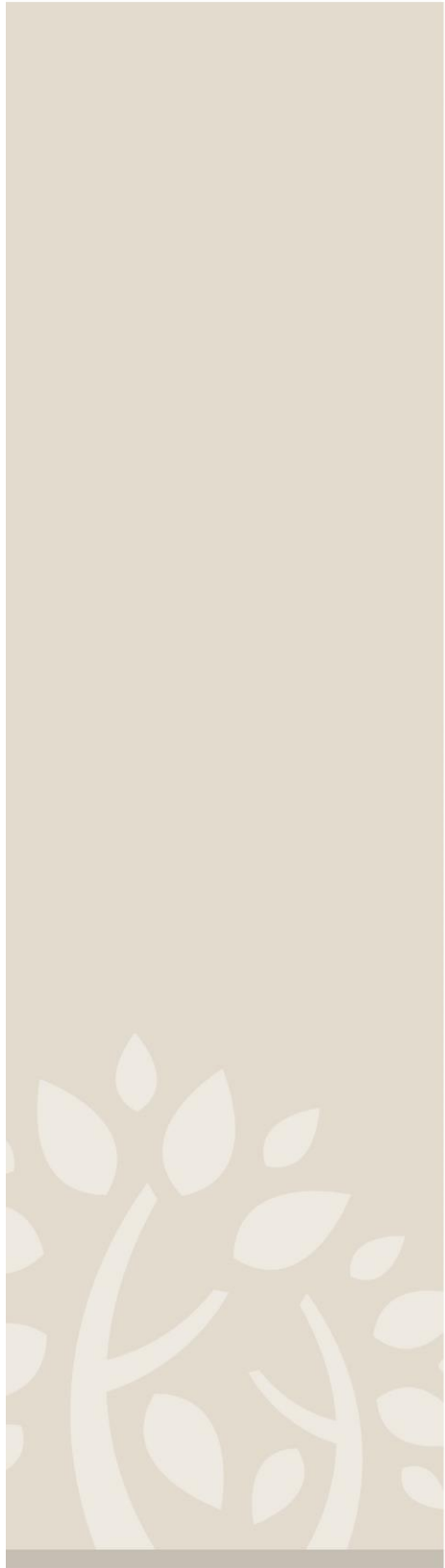
The first step to moving from good to great is admitting that you're in this slump. The next is to decide that good isn't good enough and making a conscious decision to change by creating a burning platform and inspiring others to make necessary changes.

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.