

## *The Patient Experience Post*

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## Overcoming the Patient Experience “Triple Threat”

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

March Madness is behind us, but after such an exciting season and stellar performance by my alma mater, the Wisconsin Badgers, who thrilled fans with both their personalities and their performance this year—the phrase “triple threat” is still top of mind.

Healthcare organizations can deliver a “triple threat” as well, I think, when it comes to ensuring an exceptional patient experience. The combination of great leadership, the latest technology, and solid, consistent customer service creates an unstoppable force.

As I've been engaged in a whirlwind of activity over the past few weeks, including time in Dallas for the [Beryl Institute](#), meeting with some [HIMSS](#) attendees in Chicago, and attending the [AONE](#) Conference in Phoenix, I've been connecting the dots between the threads of seemingly disparate concepts that I've gleaned from each of these experiences. With my focus, as always, firmly rooted in the patient experience, my big “aha moment” is the “triple threat” healthcare organizations should strive for to ensure that their patients receive the best care and service during what are often the most vulnerable times of their lives.

Without exception, I believe, healthcare organizations want to provide exceptional care and service to their patients. Yet, so many are stymied in these efforts, never actually achieving the high levels of performance that they, and their patients, crave. Why? Because they are often hampered by leadership (or lack thereof), technology, and customer service. Let's take a closer look at each of these areas.

### Leadership

Leaders must set the vision, define expectations, and then, clear the path for staff to meet and exceed patient expectations. They often fall short, however, and it starts with failing to define the vision. Everybody wants better patient satisfaction scores, but “better patient satisfaction scores” is not a vision; it's a metric. Leaders need to articulate the vision and it must be one that resonates with heart and drives staff performance in positive ways. Yes, improved patient satisfaction scores may be an outcome of this vision. It is not, however, “the vision.”

The other area where we see leaders falling short, is in abdicating their responsibility for the patient experience to a team, department, or individual. It's great that so many healthcare organizations have established Patient Experience departments and Chief Patient Experience Officers. But, doing this does not mean that the responsibility for the patient experience falls solely to those departments or individuals. No! We are all responsible for the patient

experience and it starts at the top of the organization. All leaders must own the patient experience!

### **Technology**

Technology can be both a help and a hindrance. The hindrance occurs when the staff focus more on the technology than the patient. We see this when nurses and doctors are drawn to the monitors before the patient or turn on a video instead of discussing treatment. In addition, some organizations “throw gadgets” at their staff in hopes of improving patient engagement, but the tools alone won’t make the changes they seek. Technology in the hands of compassionate people makes the difference. And those people, your staff members, need to have a clear connection to purpose so they can use the tools they’re provided with, in meaningful ways. Find the right technology to support your strategy. Whether it’s rounding tools or patient engagement and educational tools. Find the solutions that will make patient engagement easier. Today’s technology can provide magnificent support, but not if it is bombarding the staff or the patient. Healthcare organizations must have a clear connection between the patient experience goals and how the technology is used.

### **Customer Service**

The ability to provide exceptional customer service is the foundation of improving the patient experience. Too often, though, organizations take it for granted that staff will know what “great customer service” is and will know how to deliver it consistently to patients and families. They won’t know either of these things if they’re not provided with appropriate training, education, coaching, counseling, and role modeling. That doesn’t mean a one-hour training session where they receive a little information and are then expected to “go forth and provide exceptional service.” Front line staff need to know what to do, how to do it, and importantly, they need to want to do it. This requires establishing standards, training to those standards, and continually coaching and modeling to ensure continuity.

These skills need to be built methodically and reinforced over time. The process begins during hiring. Effective leaders know the value of hiring for these skills, and will train and coach to refine them, then reward and recognize their delivery. It’s a process—not a single event.

Visionary leadership and technology in the hands of service-minded people is the triple threat that will give you the edge in the patient experience. What are you doing in your organization to address the triple threat of leadership, technology and customer service?

*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*



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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.