

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.

Reflections from the Field – What Are You Too Busy For?

By Angela Fieler, MPA, CMQ/OE

The Baird Group is always invited into an organization. Potential clients initiate contact, describe their current reality, and look to us to provide solutions. Although we bring our expertise, solutions must be co-created – after all, it's the healthcare organization that must implement and sustain the effort. So, when a leader doesn't have time to meet with us, we have to wonder why. I am not talking about the handful of leaders who had vacations planned in advance of our visit, those who are out sick, or those who are involved in an unexpected event – these are unavoidable absences. I am referring to the leaders who are “just too busy.” These folks are usually apologetic when they explain why they can't meet with us. They are eager to tell us how many hats they wear, how short-handed they are, how big a role they play in the organization, and how we can depend on others to answer any questions we have. Invariably, where we see this behavior in leaders, we also find some common themes in these organizations.

Culture of Excuses

First, behavior like this fosters a culture of excuses. When leaders exempt themselves from participating in what should be an organization wide event, they are sending the message that excuses are acceptable. They are also conveying that the service excellence journey doesn't actually involve everyone and that it isn't really a priority. In interviews with front line staff, we hear things like, “Our standards don't apply to everyone here”, “Customer service is important on paper”, or “It is important until something else comes along,” or “It depends on who you're talking about.”

When speaking of these leaders, frontline staff will say they are neither visible nor responsive. When we first broach these subjects, frontline staff may be hesitant to criticize leaders; after all, the leaders are very busy and don't have time for things like rounding. In the end, staff members say that leaders don't have time for them. And when that happens, team members don't communicate their ideas, issues, or needs, to leaders because they have no confidence that they will be heard.

In organizations where excuses are the norm, we also see that the service excellence journey often lacks the backing of leadership and resources that are crucial to success. Teams of frontline staff and middle managers rarely have trouble generating ideas for how to improve the customer experience. What they need more than anything is leadership support. Showing up for meetings

is just the start. Actively engaging in the process, funding initiatives, and being fully engaged will break down barriers – all of which require leaders' time.

It isn't uncommon for these "absent" leaders to view customer service as a front-line issue that can be fixed with training. They are unaware of the culture they are creating and the impact that culture ultimately has on the customer experience. These leaders are too busy to consider that they are not only part of the problem but unless they change their behavior, no solution we propose will change that.

So, no matter where your organization is on its service excellence journey, I challenge you to stop for a minute and think about how you are spending your time. If creating a culture of service is a priority in your organization, ask yourself if you are making service a priority. Are you making time for your people? Are you supporting the journey? If not, what are you doing that is more important?

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.