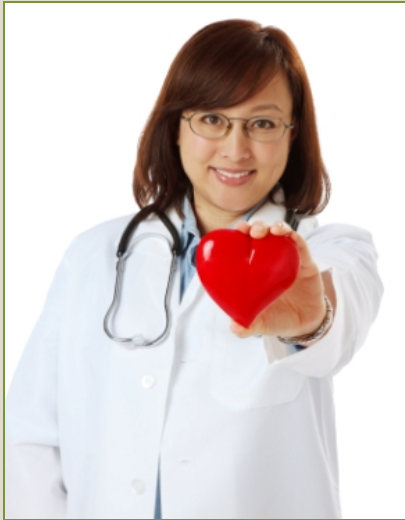


## *The Patient Experience Post*

Healthcare's Resource for  
Service Excellence  
March 2007



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.

## Connect the Dots to Fill in the Service Excellence Picture for Your Employees

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

If you asked your employees why patient satisfaction (or any of your organizational priorities) is important to your organization, how would they answer? How many would they say it's important because the organization is striving to attain a specific goal, such as being ranked in the top 10 percent in the nation? How many others would say it's important because "my manager said I had to do this" for a good performance review?

Finally, how many would say it's important because patient satisfaction is an essential part of the organization's mission, and that, as employees, they are an integral part of helping the organization achieve that mission?

Employees who feel that everything they do is linked to a greater organizational purpose will be more satisfied in their jobs and, ultimately, more committed to fulfilling that purpose.

The challenge is to help employees see how, in a culture of service excellence, all of their daily activities are linked back to the mission, vision, values, and overall goals for service excellence.

### **Start with the Standards**

Your customer service standards are the backbone of your service excellence culture. In a successful, service-oriented culture, the standards are also the most tangible connection to your organizational mission, vision, and values. They describe the way that all employees should act if the organization is to be successful at carrying out its mission. Employees can see that they are all held accountable to the standards—elements of their job descriptions are based on the standards—and their performance reviews are linked to their compliance with the standards.

Even before they are officially employees, you can start familiarizing job candidates with your mission, vision, values, and customer service standards. One simple way to begin this process with job candidates is to publish your mission, vision, and values, along with your customer service standards, on your employment website. Have job candidates sign their commitment to upholding the standards when they turn in an application. Then, as they proceed through the orientation process and become employees, they will see the standards come to life in their daily work.

### **Communicate the Connection**

In a culture of service excellence, there's no such thing as too much communication. Keeping employees informed ensures that they want to stay engaged in living out the organization's mission. Uninformed employees feel disconnected from the overall purpose of the organization and are generally more discontent in their jobs.

You can effectively keep your organizational priorities, such as patient satisfaction, front and center in your employees' minds. Every employee forum, newsletter, and internal memo should have a connection to the customer service standards. Highlight how employees are being recognized for living out the standards and how they are helping to improve customer service through their innovative ideas. Report patient satisfaction scores and what is being done to improve or celebrate the scores.

Talking points are a great tool to quickly and succinctly keep employees connected. These simple fact sheets can be published whenever there's a need. For instance, if trends show that your patient satisfaction scores are slipping in a specific area, some talking points will help get everyone back on the same page. The fact sheet could contain a few simple points:

- What does the trend show?
- How does this affect the organization and its ability to carry out its mission?
- What customer service standard(s) can you as a staff member employ to help reverse the trend?
- Why is it important that everyone be working toward the same organizational purpose?

Distributing talking points to all employees ensures that your employees have the tools they need to be armed as your most effective organizational ambassadors.

### **Become a Master of Measurement**

Chances are you've got many different measurement tools already in place—patient satisfaction surveys, employee satisfaction surveys, customer comment cards, rounding logs. The list is potentially endless.

But what are you doing with the results of all these tools? Is there one person responsible for compiling all of the information that you measure?

Your measurements are a treasure trove of information, and the more you can connect them back to your standards, the more your employees will see how they can affect service outcomes on a daily basis.

But you can do so much more with these measurements and patient comments. They can be used as opportunities to recognize and reward employees who are consistently mentioned as superior performers. You can also connect measurement back to the standards by tracking trends from patient satisfaction surveys and rounding logs to anticipate potential service issues. By recognizing these potential issues, employees can better learn to be aware of opportunities for service recovery and apply the standards to keep your customers coming back happy.

### **The Reward and Recognition Relationship**

Excellent customer service doesn't happen in a vacuum. The reward and recognition connection is one of the easiest and most fun for employees to

engage in. Employees can recognize each other for living up to and exceeding your customer service standards. Your customers recognize employees when they make positive comments on patient satisfaction surveys and on comment cards.

You can recognize organization-wide achievements with special celebrations. Just make sure those celebrations link back to the standards or to specific measurement goals so that employees know why they are celebrating.

Opportunities to reward employees will also arise as you track the number of improvement ideas that they suggest and implement.

Reward and recognition is also an “easy” area to communicate, since everyone likes hearing about good news. Use as many communication tactics as you can to link rewards and recognition to standards and measurements throughout the organization. This method also works to encourage all employees to emulate those who are being recognized.

### **Innovations for Improvement**

One hallmark of organizations that boast excellent customer service is that they’re always looking for ways to improve. They know that the status quo won’t keep patients coming back. They also know that those who have the best ideas for improvement are those employees who have the most contact with customers and often even the customers themselves.

Innovation is another area that needs to be measured, tracked, and then connected back to the organization’s service standards. Ask employees, “Which service standards does this idea support?” and “How will the success of this idea be measured?”

Employee ideas have a long and successful history of contributing to a rich and successful culture of service excellence.

### **The Complete Picture**

The majority of healthcare employees got into their chosen fields because they want to do good and make an impact on the overall health of their communities. Sometimes, it’s easy to lose that personal mission in the day-to-day tasks of getting jobs done. Connecting all of the service excellence dots for employees and tying that personal drive to the greater good performed by their organization makes sense for so many healthcare employees. The complete picture helps keep them connected with their organization, their co-workers, and the people they serve.

*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*



Transforming culture. Shaping patient experience.

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).