

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
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Tactic Overload? Find the Connection to Purpose!

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Talk to any direct caregiver in healthcare and chances are you'll hear a bit about overwhelm caused by the myriad of tasks or tactics they're asked to complete on a regular basis.

Whiteboards, scripting, hourly rounding, and bedside reporting are widely accepted best practices for improving the patient experience. Yet, when these things are demanded of the staff without a clear connection to purpose or sense of engagement, many will feel tactic fatigue. They're worn out by all the seemingly unrelated tasks.

There is no shortage of tasks to do in the average hospital these days. What there is a shortage of, though, are leaders' abilities to create meaning around those tasks—to tie the tactics back to patient wellbeing and to the mission, vision and values, of not only the organization, but individual nurses.

Nurses and other direct caregivers are finding themselves in "tactical overload" and their leaders, by and large, are not taking the time—or simply don't know how—to help them connect the dots so that they feel an emotional connection to the things that they're doing and, importantly, to their patients.

The connection between nurse and patient is a critical one. In fact, since 1999, [Gallup research consistently shows](#) that nurses are the most trusted of all professionals. Because of that high regard in public opinion, coupled with the nature of their work, nurses are in a unique position to impact the patient experience.

How can healthcare leaders help these nurses see beyond the individual tasks to find a way to maintain that critical emotional connection to the patient? One method that we've used as we work with nurses and their leaders is to map the relationship between personal values and organizational values.

For leaders, the process of connecting to purpose involves both an "inside job" and an "outside job." It's a two-pronged challenge. For each of us, the inside job involves thinking about our own personal, core values. This boils down to answering the question; What's most important to me? This requires some personal reflection to gain clarity. Once you get clear on your personal values, the next step is connecting those values to the organization's values and the work. These steps connect the dots on a personal level. The final step is finding the relationship between the two.

This process is the inside job or the personal connection to the work. For leaders, the outside job involves helping your staff to make the connection to purpose as well.

When we fail to take the time to find the connection between our heart and our work, we can feel overwhelmed and rudderless. This is a task for individuals, but also a task for leaders who can play an important role in helping staff members make this connection.

Leaders need to avoid the typical “tell, tell, tell” when it comes to interacting with staff members, particularly nurses. Do this, do that, and do this. This focus on tactics alone won’t help to connect with mission and values. Instead leaders can help nurses see how the tasks they do on a daily basis tie not only to organizational values, but to personal values as well. Sharing stories and patient feedback can help give richer meaning to the “tasks” that might otherwise feel routine.

As I work with nurses around the country, it’s clear that their hearts are in the right places—they very much want to engage with their patients and provide exceptional care. But, they’re operating in overload. They’re becoming burned out on tactics.

The challenge for leaders: help your nursing staff move beyond tactics to make that critical connection between personal and organizational values. The result can be a win-win-win-win: for the leader, the nurse, the organization and, of course, the patient.

The Nurse/Patient Partnership©

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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



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