



3 Conversations to Break Down Denial

Denial may be an easy behavior for employees to fall into when faced with change or hard facts in the workplace. It's a tricky behavior because, by its very nature, denial leads employees to deny that they're in denial. Sound like a crazy Catch-22 that you, as a manager, are powerless against? It's not quite that bad; there are some eye-opening conversations you can have with employees to help them see the light about their own denial.

1. Hold Up the Mirror

Oftentimes, employees entrenched in denial are unaware of their behavior. As a leader and a coach, it's your job to help them take a step back and recognize the reality of their habit. This does not mean that you forcibly try to convince them that they're in denial. Instead, ask leading questions to encourage them to become aware of their state of denial.

"Our scores show that our patients have an issue with the noise level. Why do you think our patients are concerned about the noise level on this unit? What could be causing this issue? What kind of resolution would you expect if you were a patient here?"

2. Communicate Clearly

How often have you heard, "That's not my job,"? The truth is, in a culture of service excellence, customer satisfaction is everyone's job. One of the most important things you can do as a leader is to point it out to those who haven't yet taken responsibility for it. Make clear the connection between their actions and the desired outcome.

This conversation can be easily framed in an XYZ Formula (When you do X, Y happens. I'd like you to do Z.):

"Nora, when you continually discount the patient satisfaction scores, it keeps you from finding the real solutions. I want you to focus on potential solutions to the noise issue rather than arguing about the scores our patients have given us."

3. Stick to the Facts and Expect Accountability

When working with employees, trying to break the habit of denial, make it clear that excuses aren't acceptable and accountability is expected. Employees are more likely to take responsibility when they see and hear their leader modeling accountability. This starts with acknowledging clear goals and objectives that you strive to meet.

Be vigilant of wishy-washy excuses that deter your staff from organizational goals. They sound like, "We're too busy to deal with this," and "Our patients are sicker than those on the other units," or "The families are too demanding of us."

Respond consistently by keeping everyone on track with just the facts.

"As you know, our service goal is to reach the 90th percentile. Our patients are rating us in the 30th percentile for noise."

Watch Out for These Characters:

The Minimizer

"What's the big deal; it isn't *that* bad. A few patients complain and we jump."

The Victim

"It's not my fault; no one ever told me! If the other departments (shifts, etc.) would do their part, we'd be so much better!"

The Procrastinator

"I'll get to it when I can. I'm working on it."