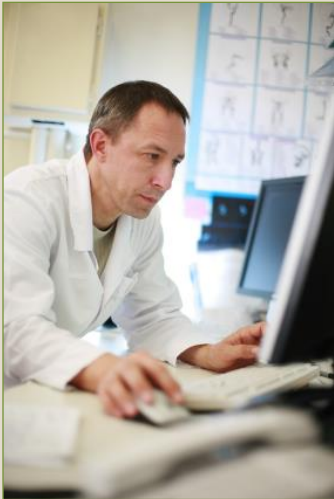


The Patient Experience Post

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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.

Using Recognition to Build Engagement

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Everybody appreciates a pat on the back. The problem is that sometimes supervisors, managers and other organizational leaders are simply too busy, and too distracted, by their myriad of day-to-day responsibilities that they miss those important opportunities to recognize the staff working diligently right beside them.

Worse, research from [organizations like Gallup](#) tell us that managers can have a tendency to spend more time focused and providing feedback to *poor* performers than to their top performers who, after all, often have a tendency to be taken for granted.

Recognition Leads to Engagement

Research shows that employee engagement is connected to recognition. Those who get recognition from their bosses are more likely to be engaged. [The VA, for instance, points to research](#) to support that [engaged employees outperform disengaged employees by 202 percent](#), and that organizations can [save 35 percent on their payrolls](#) by actively driving employee engagement. They also note that the United States economy is negatively impacted by disengagement to the tune of [\\$500 billion each year](#).

Those quantitative impacts are striking, but they're not the only impact. Disengaged employees also affect the organization—and other employees and patients—in less tangible, but no less real, ways. The bottom line: it pays to take time to give employees that pat on the back that we all appreciate.

Lessons from the Field

As I work with healthcare organizations around the country I see various types of recognition efforts taking place—some good and some that can, however unintentionally, backfire.

For example, while “Employee of the Month” programs are relatively common, I’m not a fan. Here’s why. These programs are often based on very loose criteria or guidelines. They’re almost never tied to specific standards of behavior or values. When we conduct focus groups among employees we often hear that they don’t have much respect for these

types of programs and think of them as little more than “popularity contests.”

Think about it: if you have 2000+ employees, someone could work for you for a lifetime and *never* get recognized as an “employee of the month.” Wouldn’t it be great if you had 2000 exceeding the standards every month and being recognized for it?

What we tend to see is that executives will push this employee of the month programs because they’re “easy,” and hand off responsibility for running these programs to HR. But, while they may be “easy,” it’s almost certain that they’re not effective in terms of driving a positive culture of recognition. Help build a culture of recognition by giving people tools to recognize one another.

Connect to Standards

Effective recognition programs should be tied to standards (which of course are the behaviors that help live the values). When there is no connection to standards or values, recognition feels arbitrary—however heartfelt the recognition may be. In order to drive culture forward in a positive way, and to gain traction with employees, you need to connect the dots and tell the stories that illustrate how desired, and rewarded, employee behaviors contribute to the culture.

You’ve heard this before: what gets measured gets done. But, think about this: what gets measured and rewarded *gets done well!*

If you want to shift culture, here’s what you need to do. Define what you want to see, articulate that vision, provide the tools needed to achieve results and reward the right behaviors.

That’s the right way to use recognition to build engagement. Try it.

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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.