

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
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500!

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.

Lessons from the Field: You Get 500 Points!

Angela Fieler, MPA, CMQ/OE, Consultant

As a consultant, I spend a lot of time “in the field.” Every time I’m with a client, I learn something new. I try to share these lessons in any way I can. I had a recent field experience that didn’t come from a client, but is an important lesson nonetheless.

I was on the road and had a last minute change of plans for which I needed a hotel reservation. I wasn’t familiar with the area I would be travelling to and was therefore dependent on the internet for hotel information. I found a name brand hotel close to my destination and called the number published on the hotel website.

Much to my surprise, the phone rang many times – so many that I lost count and was about to hang up. Since auto-attendants usually pick up very quickly, I was expecting to speak to a reservation clerk. Instead, what I heard was a recording that said, “Thank you for holding, we are going to play music while you wait.” I literally heard two seconds of music and then the message repeated itself. This loop repeated itself 27 times – I counted! – before an agent came on the line.

I could end the story there, but there were more lessons to be learned and shared. First, the agent was very clearly reading from a script. I could tell by the odd emphasis she put on words, as if some of the words surprised her. The fact that she repeated exactly the same words when making a second reservation for me cemented my impression. She also thanked me for my loyalty, even though I had just signed up for the loyalty program while I was on hold. If just for that, I might not have written about this experience, but the story continues. When she asked for my name, I began to spell my last name. I do this because far too many times, my reservation can’t be found because my name has been misspelled. This agent cut me off after the second letter of my name by saying, “You don’t need to spell it.” She then jumped right into a sales pitch for a vacation club and said I would receive 500 points just for listening, as if I had won a kewpie doll at a carnival! I had no idea how long the vacation club speech would take, but by this point, I was certain it wasn’t worth the 500 points. I kindly declined, ending what was perhaps the most impersonal phone interaction of my life.

As I reflected on my experience, I couldn’t help but wonder how the hotel chain hoped I would feel after the call. Were they even aware of the first impression their phone system was making on potential customers? Once they trained this reservation agent, did anyone listen to how she was delivering the

prescribed scripts? Do they have any mechanisms in place to monitor phone interactions?

How about you? Do your patients, family members, and other customers contact you by phone? Are they reaching a live attendant or an automated system? Is that system working the way you intended? How do you know? Have you trained your teams in how to create great phone experiences? Do you have any systems in place to monitor phone interactions? If you don't know, I would encourage you find out. If you find that you haven't done sufficient training or you don't know how to set up an effective monitoring system, let us know. We won't offer you 500 points for listening, but [we can help you](#) create a great phone experience for all your customers.

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.