

## Heartwire to Strengthen Employee Engagement

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### *The Patient Experience Post*

Healthcare's Resource for  
Service Excellence  
October 2020



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.

Healthcare leaders want to see consistency. After all, that is the essence of a high reliability organization. It is important to hold everyone accountable for certain service behaviors to ensure that they happen consistently. The goal is that, with repetition, the behaviors become so engrained that everyone performs them almost without thinking about them. The term hardwiring has become industry jargon. There is a lot of merit in hardwiring behaviors, but it's equally important to heartwire. Help people to see the why behind what you are asking of them and connect to the bigger goals, mission, vision, and values.

I like to think about this as *heart-wiring* because as I've worked with people in various settings over the years, as a clinician, a leader, and now as a consultant, I've found that without a personal connection to purpose, service tactics can just feel like more work for employees. There are two key operating assumptions at work here:

1. Everyone wants to matter; every employee wants to make a difference. I don't believe I've ever met an employee who got up in the morning and thought: "Gee, I sure hope I can tick off some patients and co-workers today." Employees *want* to succeed—they need our help in doing so.
2. Everyone wants to be a member of a winning team. Your employees want to work for the best healthcare organization in their community—in fact, they'd love to work for the best healthcare organization *in the nation*. Wouldn't we all? And, as part of that organization, they want to know that what they do—whether it's taking care of patients or taking care of the people who take care of patients—is contributing to the organization's success.

Healthcare leaders' ability to "heartwire" behaviors and actions is part of an ongoing process. There are three essentials for heartwiring desired behaviors. They are:

### 1. Hiring

Heartwiring starts during the hiring process. It involves careful selection of employees that mesh with the organization's mission, vision, and values, as well as the department's culture.

- Find out what draws the candidate to healthcare and how he/she makes a difference in the lives of patients.
- Have individual conversations that explore the candidates' unique interests, hopes, and desires for the work they do and their career aspirations.
- Ask how they have driven high quality care and exceptional service experiences for customers in the past.
- Discuss what the mission, vision, and values of the organization is and how their role will contribute.

### 2. Coaching

Once hired, it is the ongoing coaching and feedback that will help to cement desired behaviors and actions throughout their employment. Coaching provides a series of continual conversations, connecting the work being performed to the bigger picture. Coaching can help employees to see that what they do and the organization's success are intertwined.

### 3. Recognition

We all like to get kudos every now and then. Recognize the behaviors you want to see more of. Employees need to know they are valued and appreciated. Recognition lets them know that you see them and appreciate them.

Tactics alone won't engage the heart. In fact, tactics that aren't clearly connected to purpose sometimes fuel resentment. When laid out as an edict, they can be seen as just more tasks layered on an already over-stretched team. Help your team make the connection between the tactic, the purpose, and the organization's mission, vision, and values. That way, they see how their work connects to the big picture. That's heartwiring—that's how you can ensure that each and every one of your employees not only knows what is expected of them, but believes that their actions make a difference. That's how ensure that employees know that, through their actions and behaviors, they are impacting the patient experience.

Want to improve your skills mentioned in this article? [Be the Leader Nobody Wants to Leave](#) delves more into:

- Hiring for fit
- Recognition
- Connection to purpose
- Coaching

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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.