

Baptist Leadership Group

Prioritizing the Patient Experience

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July 2013

You have probably read countless books and columns on business that explain how our people are the most valuable resource we have. This statement is undeniably accurate yet, as Baptist Leadership Group continues to find, the potential of that resource continues to be underutilized throughout the healthcare industry. Despite tremendous achievements in quality, technology, and improving access to care, a significant opportunity still exists for health care organizations to revitalize their workforce to navigate the uncertain landscape of the industry. We must continue to make gains in the improvement of the patient experience.

With priorities continuously competing with your time, it is difficult to remain focused on the most important things. And, for leaders, it is especially important to focus your staff on the top issues at hand. So what differentiates the best organizations from the rest? The answer is having the right people doing the right things in the right way.

There are four ways health care leaders and staff can prioritize the patient experience toward becoming a more productive, better performing organization. By focusing on goals, measurement, time studies, and coaching employees toward progress, you will find employees are much more engaged in aligning their efforts to the most important processes to get results.

Here are Four Ways to Prioritize the Patient Experience:

1. Target

Ask yourself these two questions: 1) Do I and my team know the specific goals my organization is trying to accomplish over the next 12 months? 2) Does my organization's performance evaluation system objectively measure an employee's performance? We see a direct correlation between answering these questions affirmatively and performing at a high level. High performing organizations employ a goal setting process for their divisions and departments to ensure alignment of goals and accountability to the most important factors. Additionally, the most successful companies have implemented an objective leadership performance evaluation system. The key to creating a culture of accountability and ownership is leadership alignment. The absence of aligned goals and/or an objective evaluation is similar to taking a cross-country road trip with no map and no destination in mind. You will work hard to get there, but you don't have good feedback on milestones and necessary corrections.

2. Track

Imagine two air traffic controllers working side by side. They obviously share common goals. However, suppose one of the two is significantly better than the other at using their tools to coordinate the flights and communicate information to pilots. The second controller

is not only less skilled but also lacks understanding of all of the information he should use to do the job well. This is unfortunately a very common scenario in health care with regard to how people use quality and satisfaction data to improve the patient experience. For every expert who is highly skilled at using systems and communicating results to others, there is another who lacks those skills.

The best way to alleviate this problem is to ensure consistent usage of reporting and action planning. Baptist Leadership Group's Patient Satisfaction Action Tool™ is one way its partners are improving performance in CAHPS and patient satisfaction. Your organization likely has a standardized report for financial performance that gets sent to each department leader. We have found that deploying a similar strategy (consistent reporting and training for subject matter experts) to act upon data regarding the patient experience is the best way to enhance performance in a sustainable way.

3. Time

Do you have a good understanding of how you spend your time at work? Through time studies and related process improvement activities, we have consistently found that employees can find additional time currently being "wasted" on non-productive activities or duplication of effort. Even something as simple as jotting down time spent on activities throughout the course of a day can uncover opportunities to save time. The next time you or your team feels pressed for time, try to follow these steps:

- Create and follow routines: Find the best way to do something and repeat it.
- Identify essential and non-essential tasks: Time studies can help uncover time spent on things that are not helping achieve critical goals.
- Get to know team strengths and leverage them: Far too many leaders are unwilling to do this. The best leaders not only identify the strengths of their team members, but they play to them. There is a reason Aaron Rodgers is a quarterback and not a punter.

4. Talk

Through the research of our Patient Centered Excellence Survey™ we have found that one of the single most important indicators of engagement is the degree to which employees feel their input is valued. High performing leaders not only understand this, but they act on it. Regardless of whether or not you enjoy the spotlight, each of you appreciates being reminded just how valuable you are. The best organizations are comprised of leaders who have meaningful conversations with their staff and show appreciation for doing the right things in the right fashion. We all entered into the world of healthcare with a passion for making a difference in the lives of others. Unfortunately, given the challenging realities of the industry, it is becoming more difficult to remind ourselves of that passion. As soon as

you finish reading this column, you can go find one of the bright spots on your team and recognize them for what they do. When we allow ourselves to focus our time on celebrating the successes of others instead of becoming consumed with their problems, we can achieve great things.

All across the country, health care organizations are battling a host of competing priorities. In order to succeed, you cannot waste time. By refocusing ourselves on the most important things, you can be more successful and, most importantly, you are improving the patient experience. And that, above all else, is why we are here.