



Service Strategies

*Health Care's Resource for
Service Excellence*
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Fostering Exceptional Patient Experiences: 7 Steps for Health Care Leaders

There are many leaders in health care environments – each with an opportunity to exert positive influence on those who follow them. If you're in a position to guide and shape the behaviors of those around you, here are some specific things you can do to help foster exceptional patient experiences:

- 1) **Set the expectation.** Leaders may have a strong internal commitment to the patient experience, but they sometimes fail to explicitly convey that commitment, along with their expectations. Don't assume that your staff knows what is expected of them. You need to clearly communicate your expectations.
- 2) **Get out of your office and talk to patients and staff.** Leaders can't influence from behind their office doors. You need to get out of your office and interact with both patients and staff to help reinforce your expectations and commitment to a positive patient experience. And above all listen and learn about the needs and expectations of those you serve as a leader.
- 3) **Do an attitude check.** Attitude is everything. As leaders we have to develop a mindset of being service excellence champions ourselves. That starts with an attitude check on ourselves beginning with the question: "Do I have an attitude that conveys that I expect excellence?" Saying it is one thing. But, it is what we *do* that most influences those who follow us. Do you have a crusader mentality – an attitude that communicates to everyone around you that a positive patient experience is a must and that you're going to do whatever it takes to make it happen?
- 4) **Get out of the way.** It's an old and often over-used term, but organizations that really, truly, *empower* their staff to make decisions on the spot and on a day-to-day basis, will provide exceptional service. They are rare, but they don't just happen spontaneously. They are developed at the hand of strong leadership that has the confidence to get out of the way and let their employees do their jobs, including whatever it takes to create exceptional patient experiences.
- 5) **Recognize and reward the behaviors you wish to see.** Catch people doing something right. And when you catch them, recognize and reward them. This can happen in large and small ways. A simple, sincere and specific "thank you for..." means a lot to an employee and reinforces the behaviors and actions you want to see again and again from each and every individual in your organization.

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- 6) **Hold people accountable.** The flip side to recognizing and rewarding the behaviors you want to see is swiftly addressing the behaviors you *don't* want to see. As leaders we need to have a zero tolerance for things that overtly conflict with our organization's mission, vision and values. If we've hired people who reflect our mission, vision and values; clearly and explicitly communicated our expectations; and provided the training and tools they need to meet those expectations then we need to hold them accountable. This may be both the most challenging – and the most impactful – leadership action we can take. Nobody likes to think of themselves as being deceptive. But, for every day that we tolerate behavior that is inconsistent with our mission, vision and values, we're being deceptive. We are deceiving people into thinking that these behaviors are permissible when they are not.
- 7) **Create a cultural expectation** that everyone in the organization is responsible for spotting, recognizing or correcting actions and behaviors they see every day. Anybody walking through the organization, from the housekeeper to the CEO, that sees something amiss should feel a sense of responsibility to do something about it. Just as our collective consciousness was raised after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 to be alert to suspicious activities that might suggest terrorist behavior, as health care leaders we need to have a heightened awareness of the patient experience – really seeing and experiencing every interaction through the patient's perspective.

Whenever we fail to convey our expectations, model our expectations or hold people around us accountable for meeting those expectations, we fail our patients, our staffs and ourselves. We owe it to them – and to ourselves – to take our role as health care leaders seriously and to take steps every day to build a culture of service excellence.

For more information on how you can cultivate a culture of service stars in your organization, you may be interested in my 90-minute CD, with pre-session activities and workbook – [Harnessing Energy](#), with guests Brian Jones and Pam Bilbrey, co-authors of *Ordinary Greatness*. Bring an exceptional training program to your staff for only \$89 – materials are appropriate for both self-directed learning and group training sessions.