

Service Excellence

Sharing the Secrets

What can a hospital learn from a hotel? “Plenty!” says Alan Cooper, Ph.D., vice president of the Center for Learning and Innovation at North Shore-LIJ Health Systems.

When the health system wanted to improve its service levels to patients, they contracted with Ritz Carlton to conduct customer service seminars for about 600 of its employees. Representatives from various hospitals attended the sessions to find out how the luxury hotel group delivers its world-class service levels to hotel guests. The attendees, ranging from management to line employees, were considered to be influential in each of their work units. During the workshops, attendees took the hotel practices and brainstormed how to implement similar practices for their patients within each of their own departments. They were then sent back to their departments to implement their ideas.

They also looked within their industry to a health system that scores in the 99th percentile for patient satisfaction: Baptist Health System in Florida. Coincidentally, Baptist also tapped into ideas from the Leadership Center at the Ritz Carlton to craft their patient service practices.

Next North Shore-LIJ created a Service Excellence Workshop. In addition to teaching the five best practices for service, the three-day workshop also covers in-depth measures of patient satisfaction as well as how to implement change and collaborative problem solving so that good ideas coming from the workshops could be successfully implemented. Each hospital leader selected two of the five practices to implement. Attendees brainstorm on how to specifically implement these practices in their work units and create action plans to do so. The five practices selected by the health system were:

SCRIPTING requires creating “scripts” for the most common patient interactions



to help guide employees toward service excellence when in contact with patients.

ROUNDING WITH A PURPOSE is when managers and leaders visit with employees throughout their departments and hospitals to ask how things are going and what could be done differently.

ANTICIPATION OF PATIENT NEEDS asks employees to consider each patient's situation and be proactive in meeting their needs. In a hospital, this means things like being prepared to administer the next dose of pain medication before the pain sets in, or having the necessary supplies on hand based on the patient's condition.

SERVICE RECOVERY MODEL prepares employees to make things right when something has gone wrong. Ritz Carlton allows employees to spend up to a designated amount to correct a guest's concern. In the health system, employees might give gift certificates to the coffee shop, gift shop, Starbucks, etc. In this practice, they also learn the LAST approach when hearing about an issue — Listen, Apologize, Solve and Thank.

LATERAL SERVICE has two components. One is that employees are charged with assisting each other to solve customer satisfaction issues that may be in or out of their areas of responsibility. All are empowered to help. The second component is one of accountability — if an issue was brought to your attention, you need to respond — you own it.

In addition to impacting patient satisfaction, the health system is also hoping to impact employee satisfaction. Why is this important? Happy employees are more likely to treat your customers well. When managers are regularly asking employees what they think, and are willing to listen, employee satisfaction is likely to rise. And, when service levels are high, employees generally feel more pride in what they do and are encouraged to continue to provide strong service — it's a self-reinforcing process.

It also transforms the culture. That's why the Ritz Carlton is willing to share its ideas with anyone who attends its Leadership Institute.

After attending a workshop, each participant is sent back to their hospitals to implement their plans. They have some incentive to see these through. After six weeks they must report to hospital leadership on what was done, what was implemented and the results.

Is North Shore LIJ happy with the results so far? According to Dr. Cooper, senior management is thrilled. More importantly, patient scores have also increased in the units in which new practices have been implemented.

Companies are best served by encouraging their employees to find and apply great ideas wherever they can. For more information on the Ritz Carlton's Leadership Center, go to their website at <http://www.ritzcarlton.com/corporate/leadership/default.asp>. ♦

— DIANA RIVENBURGH