

Improving Courtesy and Respect of Staff

Overview

A request was received to search the literature for effective courtesy and respect techniques that health care professionals can use to improve patient relationships and satisfaction within the clinic setting.

The BW Enterprise website is an excellent resource on how to provide exceptional customer service. Bryan Williams, whose credo is that "we exist to serve others so they may better serve the world," is a well-known speaker within the service industry. Dr. Williams is credited with coining the Double Platinum Rule: "Treat others the way they don't even know they want to be treated." Reliable and practical solutions to improving your patient experience are available through Dr. Williams's service excellence consulting, service excellence training, and organizational excellence coaching programs. His company's website has a wealth of other service excellence resources, from books to video vignettes highlighting practices that demonstrate exceptional customer service.

Williams, Bryan K. (2009). Engaging Service: 22 ways to become a service superstar. BW Enterprise. More info at: <http://www.bwenterprise.net>.

Quint Studer and his consulting organization, Studer Group, are well known within the healthcare industry for revolutionizing service excellence. One of the most well-known mnemonics in healthcare is Studer's AIDETSM.

A	Acknowledge the patient and family member.
I	Introduce yourself by name and role to the patient and family member.
D	Duration of care or experience within the field of care being provided.
E	Explain the care/procedure/diagnosis to the patient and family.
T	Thank the patient and family for entrusting you for their care.

The Studer Group website, www.studergroup.com, offers excellent resources and services that can enhance your customer service for patients and families.

Studer, Q., Robinson, B., & Cook, K. (2010). The HCAHPS handbook: Hardwire your hospital for pay-for-performance success. (pp. 205-232). Gulf Breeze, FL: Fire Starter Publishing.

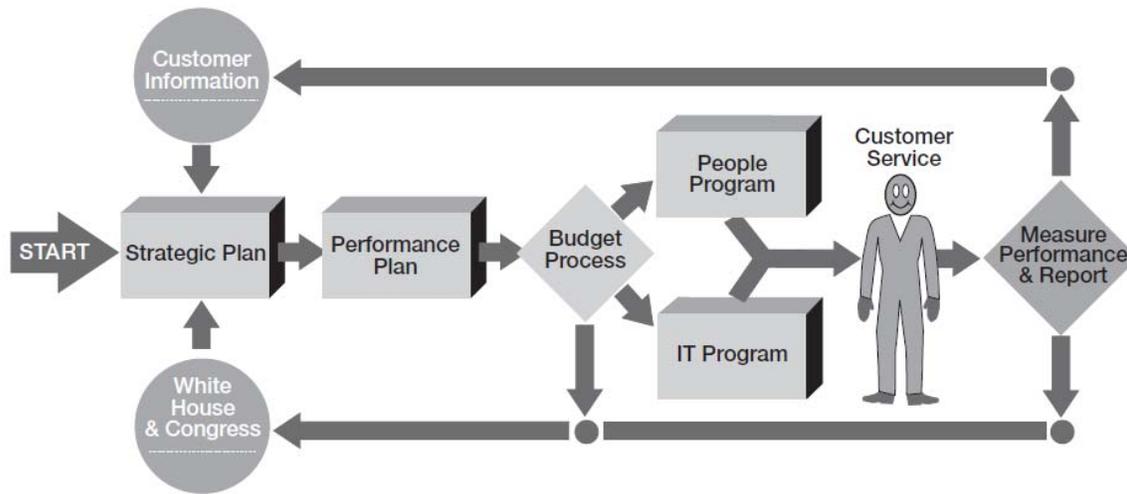
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In 1997, the United States government produced a detailed report on how to improve the customer service aspects of government agencies. Today, this report remains a relevant, valuable resource for all professionals looking to support courteous, respectful service orientation among their staff. Highlights of the findings are reviewed below.

- **Treat People Well:** Provide service that allows customers to smile when they leave. Be friendly in your interactions, and smile when you greet a customer. Exceed the expectations of your customer: help someone when they are waiting by opening another service counter or getting them something they need. Make a memorable moment for your customer.
- **Training Our People:** Not everyone has the talent or knowledge for serving customers. Take the time to invest in all your employees and make sure to include all departments and roles.
- **Recognizing and Rewarding Quality Service:** When you reward and recognize people for providing a quality service, the desired behavior gets repeated. Create an award meaningful to your organization and publicly recognize individuals for outstanding performance. An example of this might be a “People’s Choice Customer Service Award” or “Bravo Award.” The goal of recognition and reward is to encourage best performances and produce pride within the organization for service.
- **Align Systems to Serve Customers:** The following illustration highlights how the government aligned their internal processes to meet the needs of the customer. The flow is circular as the feedback from customers flows directly into how strategic plans, performance plans, budgets, and programs are designed to meet the needs of the customer. The key is to have a measurement of performance in place so that you can improve and understand what your customers are requiring.

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Align Systems to Serve Customers



- **Promise to Your Customers:** Understand what is important to your customers and then create service or behavior standards for your employees that meet these needs. Constructing a written promise or manifesto that outlines the standard provides a visual and a common goal for your employees.
- **Using Complaints as Gifts:** Do you have a way to capture complaints? What do you do with your customer complaints? The report indicates that the best service businesses make it easy for customers to complain and then use that information to fix problems and improve service. The government is using six fundamental guides to handle complaints:
 - Choices
 - Fast response
 - No hassles
 - Empower employees
 - Train employees
 - Customer database
- **Capitalize on Technology:** Utilize today's technology to create a seamless customer service interaction. Customers should only have to share their personal information and story once during a visit or call. Exploit your databases to capture personal preferences and other important aspects of your customer to help meet their needs.

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National Performance Review. (1997). Putting Customers First '97: Standards for serving the American people. (Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President). Searchable database available at <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/custserv/index.html#search>.

In correlation with aforementioned report, the government also released a report on creating and implementing world-class courtesy with your customers. The website recognizes high-performing service organizations and their standards for providing exceptional service. Within the findings, the government outlines the following characteristics required to successfully create and implement world-class courtesy for customer service:

- Creating World-Class Courtesy
 - **Leadership:** It starts at the top. Modeling of desired behaviors must occur at all levels of the organization. Incorporating the “servant-leadership” model is a great way to demonstrate service to your customers through empowerment and growth of your employees.
 - **Organizational Courtesy:** Courtesy does not just occur with your customers. To create organizational courtesy, you need to have courteous behaviors occurring between your employees, customers, and the community at large.
 - **Hiring Techniques:** Be selective in your hiring process and hire employees with excellent skills in courtesy. Utilize personality testing tools to screen potential employees. It is important to “hire right” rather than hire to just fill a position. Verify technical skills and knowledge but then look for a proven record of successful customer relations to land an ideal candidate.
 - **Training:** Training should be viewed by the organization not as an expense but rather an investment in the employee and organization. Training should be specific to the behaviors you want displayed by your employees. Training should occur at the time of orientation and then be ongoing. Create innovative and interactive training to engage the employees in the content.
 - **Performance Measures:** It is important to note that customer satisfaction, and specifically courtesy, is measurable. All high-performing service organizations have systems and databases in place to measure courtesy. In healthcare, we obtain this through CAHPS surveys or other measurement tools to gather feedback from patients. Beyond surveys, collect feedback through comment cards and focus groups.

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- **Customer/Patient Loyalty:** The clear message from all high-performing service organizations is that courtesy increases customer loyalty. Studies by high-performing organizations have revealed that customer loyalty significantly increases only when courtesy is exceptional.
- Implementing World-Class Courtesy
 - **Quick Tips for Improving Courtesy:** Courtesy can be difficult because it may be perceived differently by your customers. In order to improve courtesy, you must make sure your organization is flexible, is willing to take risks to delight and surprise your customer, utilizes great nonverbal cues such as genuinely smiling when interacting with customers, develops a team focus to incorporate employee ideas on improving, and adopts the “servant-leadership” mentality.
 - **Developing Strategies for Implementing World-Class Courtesy:** The government's research has identified several key strategies for providing exceptional customer service with courtesy and respect. First, establish credibility. Arm yourself and your organization with knowledge of great courtesy and start a collection or library of resources. Second, understand your organization's current mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. Then determine your organization's attitude towards courtesy and how it fits with the aforementioned aspects. Third, determine a starting spot within your organization to begin the transformation. Make sure the department of choice has a desire to change or improve. Take a snapshot of the current state and compare results after implementing changes. Finally, make a plan to share and broadcast the changes and success. Make sure to spread changes that were effective, promote the positive effects of the changes, and share!

A Tool Kit For Creating a Patient and Family Advisory Council is an excellent resource for understanding the role of the Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC), as well as how to start one at your organization. A great way to clarify what courtesy and respect mean to your patients is to ask them, and a PFAC can help to facilitate this dialogue.

The benefits of a PFAC to the healthcare organization include:

- Providing a forum for receiving and responding to your patients' and families' input
- Increasing understanding and cooperation between patients, families, and caregivers
- Creating, strengthening, and promoting partnerships within the community

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- Developing programs and services that are relevant to what patients and families prefer

In addition, a PFAC also provides benefits to patients and families. Some of these include:

- A better understanding of the healthcare system
- Opportunity to become an advocate within their community
- New relationships and friendships with members of the community
- Opportunity to engage and become more active in their own healthcare
- A skill-developing opportunity for patients and family members

The article further details pertinent information regarding how to implement a PFAC at your organization. Topics addressed include required resources, expected timeline, member recruitment and screening, facilitation, and marketing materials.

A Tool Kit For Creating a Patient and Family Advisory Council. (2009). West, Meghan and Brown, Laurie and Skunks Team. Available full text at: www.theberylinsitute.org/resource/resmgr/webinar_pdf/pfac_toolkit_shared_version.pdf

Fred Lee is a well-known speaker on improving the patient experience and is also the author of the book *If Disney Ran Your Hospital: 9½ Things You Would Do Differently*. Lee discusses three levels of care that impact the patient experience. The first is competence – what I do, and skills and knowledge that come with my ability. The second level is courtesy – what I say has an impact on the patient and their experience with care. Finally, the third level is compassion – what I feel while providing care. Fred notes that caregivers need to assess emotional cues from patients, which, if done correctly, can help ease the patient's anxiety and provide a more positive perception regarding courtesy and respect. More information about Lee's book and speaking engagements can be found at www.patientloyalty.com.

Lee, Fred. (2004). *If Disney Ran Your Hospital: 9½ Things You Would Do Differently*. Bozeman, MT: Second River Healthcare Press.