

## Celebrating a Caring Culture



At the end of the day, when it is all said and done, what our customers want from us more than anything is to know that we **cared** about them when we “took care” of them. Rarely does someone comment on the “cure” or the “outcome” of a visit to a healthcare setting. Rather, when talking about an experience in a healthcare setting, whether or not the person had a positive perception is almost always hinged on how nice, gentle or kind the staff was. Even in the worst circumstances, when mistakes are made and tempers flare, it is the measure of our caring that determines our defined relationship with our customers.

If you took the time to ask your employees why they work in a healthcare setting, most of them would say because they care, because they want to help the patients and because they feel value in doing this kind of work. So, if we assume that **caring** is at the heart of our being better than a competitor and being a great provider of services, why is it that we don’t celebrate this enough? Even worse, why is it that we often overlook this important attribute to our work altogether and even disregard it?

A perfect example of this is the dreaded statement that we will often hear from a busy nursing staff during a challenging shift. Whether to other co-workers, families or residents, rest assured that sometime, somewhere the words, “Sorry I can’t, we’re short,” will leave someone’s mouth at just the wrong time, with the wrong tone. Inevitably, this statement will result in a chain reaction of complaints, judgments about care, opinions about staffing and dissatisfaction that will ultimately lead to the Administrator’s or Director of Nursing’s office. And the cycle of trying to contain the message, explain how we met basic staffing guidelines, etc... will ensue.

Consider this option as a different way to address this scenario and in the spirit of **Celebrating Caring**. Bring together a group of nursing staff and ask them to brainstorm with you about what drives a person to choose healthcare, in particular your kind of healthcare and what attributes people in this profession should possess. You will certainly have input from the group that supports the concept that caring people choose healthcare. Next, ask the group to answer the following questions in this order:

1. When we are short staffed, do we still care about our patients?
2. What do we do to care for our patients when we are short staffed that might be different from days when we are better staffed?
3. If we tell family members that we are short staffed, are we allowing family members to also see that despite our situation we still care for their loved one?
4. What other ways can we express to family members or patients that we care, even in the most difficult-to-manage situations?

Answers to these questions can lead to helping staff realize that the story they tell through the words they choose is entirely within their control. For instance, if someone in the group states that, “Even when we are short staffed, I always remember to hum Broadway Musicals for Mr. Jones, because he really likes them,” (or some related example), you can help the staff understand how to tell that story versus the “short staffed” story to a concerned family member. You might encourage staff to approach families by saying something like, “I didn’t get to spend as much time with your dad as I usually like, but while he was dressing, we got through three songs from ‘Annie Get Your Gun’.” By allowing the staff to identify their own ways of caring for their patients you can give specific examples to help them **truly celebrate their caring ways**. The end result is a more positive image for your facility with happier families, patients and staff.

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