

10 Ways to Make Your Service Effort Be More Than the Flavor of the Month

1. Focus Your Vision

Recognize that customer service efforts don't just happen. They are the result of a focused leadership effort that places customer service at the core of everything the organization does. Work with your customers and your internal team to define the focus of your vision.

2. Define Your Strategy

A service effort that truly stands out is one backed by a detailed plan that includes goals, measurements and tactics to carry them out. Once you have your vision, work to make it come alive through your strategy.

3. Set Goals

Don't just set goals—set aggressive goals. Set goals that will make people stretch beyond what they ever thought possible. Communicate those goals widely, but with an emphasis of the role that everyone, including leadership, will play in making them happen.

4. Appoint a Champion

Customer service is everyone's job, but it's important to make certain that one senior management person leads this effort. If the leadership role is placed at any other level, your effort will be short term. Make certain that your champion is respected in the organization and models the service behaviors you would like to see in the organization.

5. Select and Train the Right People

We have plenty of people in hospitals running around with the right credentials for their jobs, but how many have the right service credentials to do their jobs? How many combine the skill with the ability to deliver? Develop or seek ways to select the best staff by identifying the traits that are modeled in your best employees. Invest in them by affording them opportunities to hone their skills through training.

6. Reward and Recognize

You know the old saying, "What gets recognized gets repeated." Too often, it's our poor performers who get our attention. We leave our great performers on their own because we know we can. Take the time to reward your employees who exhibit the behaviors you would like to see repeated in the organization. Think of how much more you can achieve by focusing your efforts on those who already "get it."

7. Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

In other words, compensate your team. Build service expectations into your performance appraisal systems, so that people see the importance that you place on them to deliver service well. Reward at both the team and individual level.

8. Communicate

Make certain that all your communications reflect your commitment to service. From internal signage to external newsletters, letters and overall community image, service should be evident. Place reports of service outcomes on equal footing with the financial report at organizational meetings.

9. Measure and Report

Your service effort is only as good as the results you show. Define measurements that include: patient satisfaction, employee/associate satisfaction, physician satisfaction, community attitude toward your organization, fiscal and quality measures. Define milestones along the way to the end goal so you can track your progress and celebrate accordingly.

10. Celebrate!

Take the time to celebrate the successes that your organization will experience with a long-term, committed service effort. Also, take the time to learn from the mistakes that you will make and build upon them going forward. Some of the best learning comes from dissecting what went right and what went wrong on a daily basis. That continued focus is how everyone will continually grow and learn on the service journey.



Catherine Baumgardner is a consultant with Corporate Health Group (CHG). She works with hospitals and health systems that desire to create the total customer experience. She is a popular author and speaker on customer service topics in health care. Catherine can be reached at 888-334-2500 or www.corporatehealthgroup.com.