Book: *Achieving Service Excellence: Strategies for Healthcare*

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This book serves as a wake-up call to those who are entrusted to run the healthcare institutions in our country. Whether you are a Board Trustee, CEO/Administrator, Executive team member, a middle manager or a front line manager this book is a must read. Why?

Very simply Doctors Fottler, Ford, and Heaton have taken the needed but unorthodox approach of looking at the delivery of healthcare services through the eyes of the patients and their families. They put forth a proven theory from the commercial world that it is the customer's perception that determines whether the service received was of excellence or mediocrity. To make this point, they use the customer service excellence of Disney, Nordstorm and Southwest Airlines as organizations from which healthcare should take its cues in developing service excellence programs.

The major theme in the book is that the healthcare industry have neglected the one who matters most in creating our definition of quality customer service, the recipient of our care. The quality standards set forth by such organizations as the JCAHO, NCQA to name a few have become our service delivery focus. Fottler, Ford, and Heaton rightfully point out that these organizational standards meaning nothing to our patients for several reasons. First, they are never communicated to the patient in any manner that makes sense. Second and more importantly, these standards do not in the eyes of the patient and their family give meaning and value to the healthcare experience.

So what is the solution to this problem? The authors state we must have a paradigm shift and view the delivery of healthcare as an experience for the patient and their families. This experience should be one that meets their expectations of quality that is delivered with a personal focus, not an artificial standard created by management. The bottom line is to give the patient who is the consumer, value across the board.

In getting to this new paradigm the authors have spelled out fifteen points in the chapters of their book that serve as a roadmap to achieving the level of service excellence that can be applied to any healthcare organization:

1. Healthcare and the New Consumerism
2. The Customer As Guest
3. Meeting Customer Expectations Through Planning
4. Creating a Healing Environment
5. Developing a Culture of Customer Service
6. Staffing for Customer Service
7. Training for Customer Service
8. Motivation and Empowerment
9. Involving the Patient and Family in Co production
10. Communicating Information to Customers
11. Delivering the Service

12. Waiting for Healthcare Service
13. Fixing Healthcare Service Problems
14. Measuring the Quality of the Healthcare Experience
15. Leading the Way to Healthcare Excellence

In working one's way through these fifteen points one will see examples of management and leadership that went wrong in their organization. Now they can also see ways to effectively correct the past as they work toward creating the quality healthcare experience.

At the beginning of this review I stated that this is a must read and it is important to restate this point for another reason; financial survival. Our industry is faced with increased competition: corporate owned hospitals versus doctor owned; hospitals versus ambulatory facilities (surgery centers, imaging centers, birthing centers and GI centers); and sophisticated multi-service group practices versus solo practitioners. Along with this increased competition is the reality of declining reimbursement. Those healthcare organizations that adopt the new paradigm put forth by Fottler, Ford, and Heaton will be those that will be financially successful in the years ahead.