



How to Create a Patient Satisfaction Epidemic

By Wendy Leebov

If a manager is failing to inspire better performance, encourage others within the organization to create a groundswell of change.



Wendy Leebov

Many health care organizations start off culture change strategies with a bang, then allow them to fade quietly into disillusionment. Multiple priorities and battle fatigue make it difficult to stay focused, persist and strengthen strategic effort. I've seen this time and again with service excellence and patient satisfaction strategies.

Square Pegs in Round Holes

Effective follow-through depends on managers to lead the charge, engaging their teams to redesign behavior and master skills. Yet, even with substantial training and coaching, many managers prove unable or unwilling to inspire their teams. Maybe they aren't focused on it. Or they aren't inspirational by nature, or maybe performance management is not their forte and they don't devote time and skill to it.

You might be thinking, "These managers must be held accountable. If they can't lead the charge, then they need to leave the organization." That's easy to say, but usually, for a whole host of reasons, executives hang on to managers who just don't do what's needed. Haranguing executives about this hasn't worked.

Daring to be controversial, I'm suggesting that we need to find creative approaches to "spread"—to earn the gradual involvement of everyone until the change strategy has permeated the organization. We need to expand the internal capability of skilled people who champion the cause and can apply nuts-and-bolts skills to redesign key service interactions, rehearse and master improved approaches, and cement new habits.

I want to be realistic. When managers fail to inspire, this approach is a way to keep your patient satisfaction strategy moving instead of letting it die on the vine.

Mobilize Squads of Employee Champions

I hope you read the terrific book *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell shares evidence that significant culture changes reach a tipping point not as a result of a linear, planned change process, but because a critical mass of people with certain predilections all apply their energies, even unconsciously, to bringing about the change. Their natural style, which they can't resist because that's who they are, pushes the change they want over its tipping point, causing it first to spread like an epidemic and then to stick.

Gladwell says that a critical mass of three kinds of people who may not even know or communicate with one another lead a culture change to its tipping point: connectors, information mavens and promoters.

Connectors tend to be extroverts. They network with others constantly and greatly enjoy connecting people to each other.

Information mavens are resourceful people who love know-how. They're always engaged in learning something new, and they collect and savor concrete tools for accomplishing things important to them.

Promoters are people who can sell anybody on anything. They have contagious enthusiasm for what they believe in, they know how to sell the benefits and they inspire others to buy in.

Instead of labored strategies to deepen patient satisfaction, how about a tipping point approach? Why not identify connectors, information mavens and promoters from all levels of your organization—especially from front-line staff—and focus them all on the same goal: enhancing the patient experience? Why not take the principle Gladwell identified as an *organic* approach to change and employ a *deliberate* strategy to trigger that organic approach when it isn't happening by itself? This might sound like a paradox, but I've found that it works.

Build and Set Loose a Squad of Peer Coaches

How can you take on this deliberate strategy to trigger a powerful organic change process? By developing and proliferating squads of

employees whom you develop as "peer coaches." Develop them to do three things:

- Strengthen their role as informal opinion leaders: Heighten their passion for enhancing the patient experience so they cannot resist making their views contagious.
- Equip them to design good-to-great performance.
- Train them as performance coaches for individuals and job-specific groups of peers.

Suggested Steps

1. Ask around and identify your organization's connectors, information mavens and promoters.
2. Invite them to be part of a pilot boot camp for peer coaches. Tell them they have been identified as opinion leaders. Explain that you want to enlist their help in enhancing the patient experience in ways that will be fun and enriching to them.
3. Engage them in an intensive off-site boot camp experience.
4. Convene managers and orient them to the boot camp process. Have peer coaches talk about their training and their commitment as well as what they think they can do to help managers engage employees and improve performance.
5. When others in the organization ask why they weren't invited, tell them that the first round was a pilot. And that now you would be glad to include them in the next group.

Set up one boot camp after another to mobilize increasing numbers of the amazing and committed people you have in your organization.

Introducing Peer Coaches

Here is a sample of a promotional flier given to managers to explain how peer coaches can be of help to them and their teams.

Peer Coaches Available!

Managers, here's what peer coaches can do for you:

1. Peer coaches will be role models. They will demonstrate service excellence skills with patients, families and other customers. They will make exceptional service their standard practice.
2. Peer coaches will promote a culture of service excellence. They will express their commitment and share personal testimonials about how this process is affecting them, how it is connecting with their personal hopes and vision for their work. They will do their best to address other people's resistance with courage, tact and compassion.
3. Peer coaches will provide skill coaching in a supportive, helpful and non-threatening way. They will help people in their own and/or other departments with:
 - keywords design;
 - group rehearsals; and
 - individual coaching.

The peer coaches will *not*:

- communicate performance expectations;
- discuss the timeline whereby performance changes must be made;
- confront low performers about their performance problems;
- manage ongoing performance; or
- hold people accountable.

These continue to be the manager's responsibilities.

The manager's responsibilities:

- Prepare a Peer Coach Request form (included).
- Identify the people who will receive peer coaching.
- Set up meeting times and places.
- Invite people to attend; communicate the purpose to them.
- Get people to show up.
- Thank the people who participated.
- Work with people afterward. Follow up; find out what happened. Proceed with performance management (e.g., install keywords as expectations, communicate expectations, recognize improvements and hold people

accountable).
 - Thank the peer coach for his or her help.

Below is a memo that can accompany the promotional flier. It gives managers more details on how peer coaches can help and what managers need to do in working with peer coaches.

Peer Coach Service Options		
Service option	Manager's duties beforehand	Manager's duties afterward
Designing job-specific keywords with groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit Peer Coach Request. - Attach existing keywords (to be improved). - Set up meeting; prepare attendees in upbeat way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank people for participating. - Send personal thank-you note to coach. - Review results and fine-tune. - Talk with people about expectations. - Manage performance. - Hold people accountable.
Conducting group rehearsals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit Peer Coach Request, attaching keywords that people are supposed to rehearse. - Set up the meeting. - Prepare those involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank group for participating. - Send personal thank-you note to coach. - Talk with people about expectations. - Manage performance. - Recognize improvements. - Hold people accountable.
Coaching with individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit Peer Coach Request (without name of person) - Describe your goals for coaching. - Provide information to help peer coach. - Attach relevant keywords. - Prepare the individual receiving the coaching: Say "I've asked ____ to help you strengthen your performance. Here's why..." - Reassure that the coaching will be <i>confidential</i> and of a <i>supportive</i> nature. - Reiterate your hopes and your confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank employee for participating. - Send personal thank-you note to coach. - Review results. - Communicate your expectations. - Manage person's performance. - Recognize improvements. - Hold person accountable.
Orienting new people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit Peer Coach Request - Describe your goals for coaching. - Provide information to help peer coach. - Attach relevant key words. - Prepare the individual receiving the coaching: Say "I've asked ____ to talk with you about our service excellence process and review with you how you can be a key contributor." - Reassure that the coaching will be <i>confidential</i> and of a <i>supportive</i> nature. - Reiterate your hopes and your confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank employee for participating. - Send personal thank-you note to coach. - Talk with new person about your expectations. - Manage person's performance. - Appreciate effective performance. - Hold person accountable.

Here is a sample of a Peer Coach Request form that compels managers to think through their goals and provide the peer coach with relevant resources that already exist.

Peer Coach Request	Date _____	
Manager's name _____	Dept. _____	
For scheduling/questions: Phone _____ E-mail _____		
Your goal for peer coach:		
Background facts:		
Number of participants _____ How were they selected? _____		
Service option	Required attachments	Attached?
Designing job-specific key words with groups	Existing keywords, if any.	
Conducting group rehearsals	Keywords to be rehearsed.	
Coaching with individuals	Keywords to be rehearsed.	
Orienting new people to caring culture and job-specific keywords	Keywords to be reviewed.	
I agree to the following:		
- I will prepare all employees who will be coached so that they know why they are involved.		
- I will make it clear that they will be helped by peers who will keep specifics confidential and serve as a guide/coach.		
- I will make it clear that the coach is not responsible for implementing the results; I am.		

Signed,

Manager

A Quickie Tool Kit

Here are some tools that should make the process much clearer.

Peer Coach Boot Camp: Sample Agenda

Day One

1. Introduction/overview

- Kick off the boot camp, explaining why it's necessary; outline hopes.
- Give goals and roles for peer coaches.
- Explain *Tipping Point* and the power of connectors, information mavens and promoters.
- Have people do some self-analysis to share their strengths.
- Present three main roles for peer coaches (providing inspiration and serving as a powerful role model as well as a performance coach with peers).

2. Becoming an inspiration

- Have attendees share personal stories about their commitment to health care and high points in helping.
- Let them try out on each other an inspirational, personal statement of their commitment to elevating the patient experience.

3. Becoming a powerful role model

- Help people realize the vast difference between inoffensive behavior and amazing, impressive, compassionate behavior.
- Have small groups do *bad, good* and *great* skits—stretching from awful to wonderful.

4. Becoming a peer performance coach

- Explain the service options and process for getting assignments from managers.
- Explore a set of tools peer coaches can use (meeting formats, rehearsal exercises, tips for script development and more).

5. Developing coaching skills

- Focus on the skills involved in being an effective coach, paying special attention to being an empathetic listener, asking instead of telling, giving constructive feedback and the like.

6. Inspire others

- Design and deliver "elevator speeches"—quick personal rationales and statements of commitment to improving the patient experience.

Homework Between Sessions

- Sharpen your own skills to be an effective role model. Use your *great* greetings, handoffs and goodbyes in your work.
- Watch for others' examples of *great* greetings, handoffs and goodbyes.
- Find an opportunity to advocate for service excellence.
- Tell someone with whom you work about your peer coaching training. Say what's exciting.
- Come to Day Two prepared to share your experience.

Day Two (a month later)

Share homework experiences.

Keywords design: Demonstrate how peer coaches can lead individuals and teams in identifying best practices that result in consistently positive perceptions by patients and other customers. Best practices include scripts or impressive words for key interactions, such as greetings, transferring a call, making a handoff to a co-worker, handling a recurrent complaint.

- Discuss how to run performance rehearsals.
- Outline characteristics of a helping/coaching relationship.

Review the tools: What are we saying peer coaches can do?

- Practice handling co-worker resistance: Some co-workers, when assigned to a peer coach, might feel defensive, annoyed, insulted or resentful, and might say things that make it difficult for the peer coach to stay focused on the goal.

Strength bombardment: To build this group of coaches as a team, here is a great exercise to help them appreciate each other. Ask peer coaches to identify one or two strengths they see in each of the other peer coaches—strengths they think will make that person effective and inspiring as a peer coach. Then the whole group takes turns delivering positive regard to each peer coach.

Management briefing at end of day: All managers arrive, and peer coaches orient them to ways they can help them.

Follow-up

- Have periodic check-in meetings with peer coaches, swapping stories of success and giving mutual support.
- In management meetings, feature managers who have benefited from peer coaches and spread the word.

Create a Healthy Epidemic

Get it going and hope that other employees will ask, "Why wasn't I chosen?" Then, develop another group of peer coaches, and another, and another. Imagine growing numbers of employees (not only managers) who are all inspired, mobilized, helping and leading the way!

Developing a squad of peer coaches can help you deepen and expand your change strategy by engaging more and more people who eventually move your hoped-for change to its tipping point—when you see it really take hold.

Wendy Leebov, Ed.D., is president of Wendy Leebov Inc. in Philadelphia. She is also a regular contributor to H&HN OnLine.