



Wendy Leebov's

*HeartBeat*

On The Quality Patient Experience

[www.quality-patient-experience.com](http://www.quality-patient-experience.com)

## Wendy's Soapbox

### Regular Features

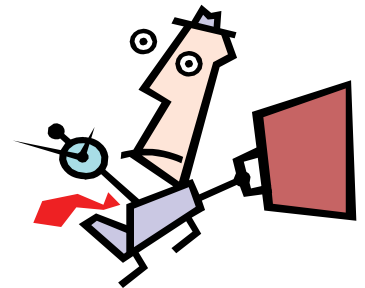
- Wendy's Soapbox
- Ask Your Team  
This Cage-Rattling  
Question
- Stressbuster
- Quoteworthy
- I Wish I Loved  
This Video
- SHCA Annual  
Conference
- Coming Up
- Patients Speak

### The Million-Dollar Question:

#### "How Can We Get Our Senior Leaders to Hold People Accountable?"

I presented a webinar on the Nuts and Bolts of Accountability in late January. In the week after the webinar, I received the same question (worded differently) from many different viewers:

- "How can we get our senior leaders to hold people accountable?"
- "How can we convince senior leaders that accountability for behaviors is a must?"
- "Can you have accountability if senior management is weak in holding people accountable?"



These questions triggered a vivid memory from the year 1982. My team and I were conducting **HOSPITALity** workshops for all employees in our hospital. In several workshops, when we talked about senior leaders' commitment to raising the bar on service, people asked, "Does that mean the president is going to make Sheila (not her real name) behave like a human being?" This question was asked so often that I finally made an appointment with the president. Because this situation was so emotion-laden for me, I have a particularly vivid memory of that conversation.

**Me:** "I'm in a tough position and I need your help. In the **HOSPITALity** workshops, I'm passionately conveying your message about wanting people to provide exceptional service. And some people are asking, 'Does this mean the president is going to get rid of Sheila?' As you well know, Sheila is notorious around this medical center for being uncooperative and abusive. And yet, she is still here—seeming to be untouchable. What am I supposed to say to people when they ask me whether our new standards apply to her too?"

**Him:** (sighing, gripping his forehead in pain): "But she's so good at her job!"

**Me:** "So, if others are good at the technical requirements of their jobs, but horrendous with people, is that okay? It seems like you're saying that the **JOB** is the technical work, and great service is nice, but not essential."

**Him:** "No, it **IS** essential."

**Me:** "Well then, you see how you hurt your message by exempting your own secretary?"

**Him:** "I see that, but it really gives me a headache to think about losing her."



## The Million-Dollar Question: "How Can We Get Our Senior Leaders to Hold People Accountable?" (continued)

**Me:** "So, what should I say when employees ask me about her and whether you will apply our standards to her?"

**Him:** "Tell them that it's a change for all of us to treat great service performance as a requirement of the job and that it's a must for the sake of our mission and professional pride. Tell them we need to show some compassion and patience as leaders begin to deal with performance issues we've let slide in the past. Tell them I realize it needs to start with me and that I definitely will apply the standards to my own staff."

After shaking in my shoes throughout this conversation, I continued to shake in my shoes, wondering if he would follow through and deal with Sheila who had become the symbol of the president's double standards. The good news: Two weeks later, Sheila was gone. Because human resource actions are confidential, I don't know what happened behind the scenes. But I do know that within 24 hours of her departure, word had spread around the whole organization, "WOW, the president is really serious! SHEILA is gone!" And suddenly, our new standards appeared to have teeth. I truly believe this led to a giant step forward in our quest for the great patient experience.

So, when asked about how to influence senior management accountability, I suggest planning an "intervention" and raising the issue directly with the chief executive first, and later (if invited) with the whole executive team. An intervention about what? The disconnect!

### The Accountability Disconnect

- Senior management says, "We hold you accountable."
- Managers don't hold their teams accountable and there is no consequence for them. Patient satisfaction continues to be disappointing.
- Frustrated, senior management repeats, "We hold you accountable."
- And so it goes.

### The Direct Approach with Senior Management

In a nutshell, in a genuine and caring fashion, ask, "How serious are you? Serious enough to create consequences? Serious enough to renew the focus on raising the bar and accountability with our entire management team?"

**Who can do this?** Someone with a lot of guts. Possibly you, possibly a committee (safety in numbers), possibly a service champion who is ON the executive team. You could bring to bear patient satisfaction data and complaints to position the problem as meriting attention.

**The purpose:** Help the organization achieve a breakthrough in patient satisfaction by strengthening accountability, starting at the top.

[For a sample presentation, click here.](#)

**A Diagonal Approach:** HELP senior leaders hold managers accountable. It's a given. Executives are swamped and just don't have time to design communications that will reinforce accountability. In my years as the executive team's strategy coach, I learned that if I wanted execs to communicate and reinforce the accountability message often, then I needed to design the communications that would make it EASY for them to do that.

[Click here for a sample letter from the CEO to managers](#) at the start of a new phase of their service excellence strategy. And [click here for a series of 25 email prompts](#) that I developed and dated to help the executive team stay focused and persistently reinforce their accountability message.



## Ask Your Team This Cage-Rattling Question: A Trigger For Crucial Conversations

**"What's the best compliment you ever received about your work?"**

Ask people to share their answer to this at a staff meeting. If your group is too big to have time to go around and give everyone a turn, then divide people into subgroups of 4 or 5 people.

By asking this question, you help your team learn more about each other and what each person values. Also, people who have a tough time answering will have food for thought about why they can't think of a really positive compliment.



## Stress-Buster

Laugh and help other people laugh with you.

Read this [wonderful George Burns and Gracie Allen skit](#) and then pass it along to the folks planning your Volunteer Recognition event. (April is Volunteers Month.)



## Quoteworthy:

**"Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better."**

—Sydney J. Harris  
Journalist



## I Wish I Loved This Video

### "If Air Travel Worked Like Health Care"

Do some deep breathing and then watch this on YouTube.

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=5J67xJKpB6c>

Hear Wendy speak at the 2010 Conference of the Society for Healthcare Consumer Advocacy April 14-16, 2010 in Pittsburgh.

**Topics:**

- Keynote: *Achieving Breakthroughs in the Patient Experience*  
Wednesday, April 14, 1:45-3:00
- Breakout Session: *Dealing with the Difficult-for-You Patient*  
Thursday, April 15, 11:00-12:15

For more information and to register, [click here](#).

## Coming Up

- Wendy's Soapbox: Communicating with the Terminally Ill Patient
- Patients Speak about Partnering in Their Care



## Patients Speak

### Family Members Speak About Their Experience

- "When my mother is in the hospital, I always stay over with her. I don't know how people can get their needs met unless they have someone advocating for them."
- "I want the staff to include me at every step. After all, I'm the one who is going to take care of my mother after she leaves."
- "I stayed all night to help my father, but the staff made me feel like I was interfering with their work."
- "It annoys me when the doctor talks to me about my father as if my father isn't there."
- "The doctor's office should have wireless internet, so when people's families have to wait, they can sign on and make the time go faster."



## THANK YOU FOR TUNING IN!

If you like this e-newsletter, please forward it to a friend/colleague. If someone else sent this e-newsletter to you, [please subscribe](#) by visiting our website. [Click here](#) to access back issues. We'd appreciate your feedback on this e-newsletter. [Click here to share](#).

Thank you!

Wendy Leebov

### Contact Us

Wendy Leebov and Associates  
Phone: 215-413-1969  
<http://www.quality-patient-experience.com/contact-us.html>



### We're on the WEB!

[www.quality-patient-experience.com](http://www.quality-patient-experience.com)

**Concrete, Sustainable Solutions  
For Your Healthcare Team**