

The State of Service Culture in Healthcare

A Summary Analysis of Independent Research



Study Parameters:

Participants: Healthcare executives and managers in inpatient and outpatient facilities
Survey dates: November 23-December 4, 2009
Survey area: United States
Conducted by: Integrity Healthcare Services

Study Approach:

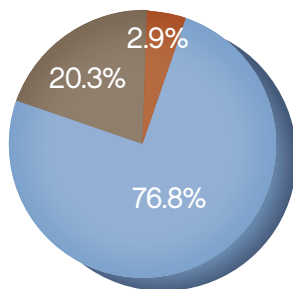
The primary intent of the study was to gather information on the perception of service culture and customer service in healthcare facilities within the US. Invitations to participate were sent to 7,400+ healthcare leaders in hospitals, medical centers, health systems, outpatient facilities and post acute facilities. An internet based survey was conducted based on a battery of 12 multiple choice questions and one open ended question. A five point, balanced Likert-type scale was used.

Summary and Analysis: Customer Service is Important, but with Mixed Results

Overall, respondents are extremely positive about the importance of service culture in their institutions. But, far fewer are actually satisfied with the level of service in their facilities:

- On the *importance of customer service*, 97.1% of all respondents felt customer service is considered to be either Very Important or Important to their organization. Broken down, 76.8% of all respondents indicated it is very important and 20.3% stated customer service is Important. The remaining 2.9% were neutral on the question.
- Only 54.4% of respondents indicated they were either Very Satisfied or Satisfied with the *level of customer service* in their facilities, while 23.5% expressed dissatisfaction and the remaining 22.1% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

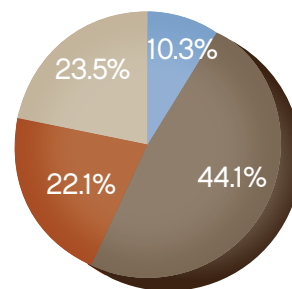
How important is customer service to your organization?



Very important
Important
Neutral
Not important
Not very important

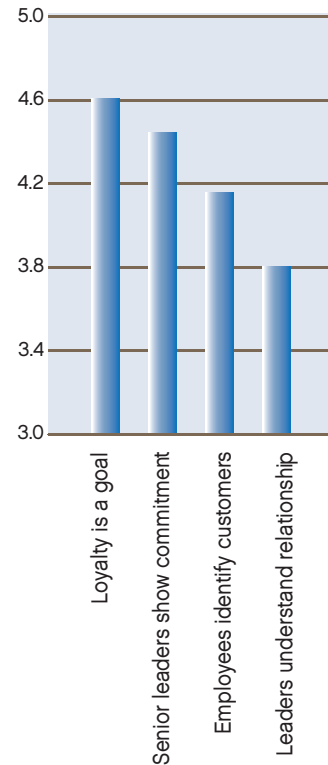
Very satisfied
Satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Very Dissatisfied

How satisfied are you with the level of customer service in your facility/facilities?



Setting the Stage for Service Culture Change

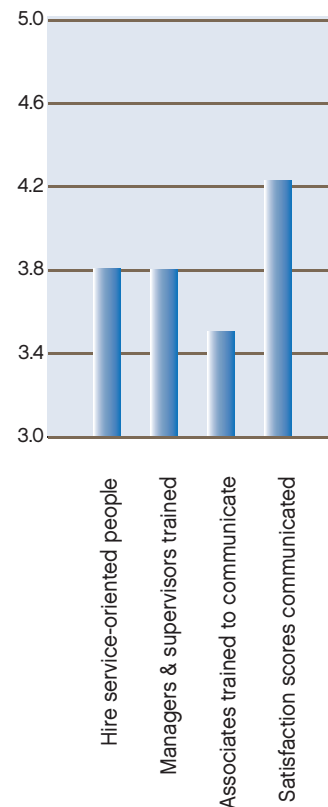
- Respondents feel strongly that *building customer loyalty is a strategic goal* in their organizations. Out of 5 possible points, the question scored 4.6, the highest scoring question.
- There is also a belief that *senior leaders have communicated a commitment to patient-focused service*, 4.4 out of 5 points.
- However, respondents aren't as positive on *employees being able to identify their customers and knowing how their job impacts satisfaction*—scoring 4.1.
- Similarly, respondents do not feel that leadership understands *the relationship between employee satisfaction and patient satisfaction*, earning a score of 3.8.*



Putting Thoughts into Action

There appears to be less satisfaction in terms of actually executing customer service plans and initiatives. The four questions in this section had the lowest overall mean score.

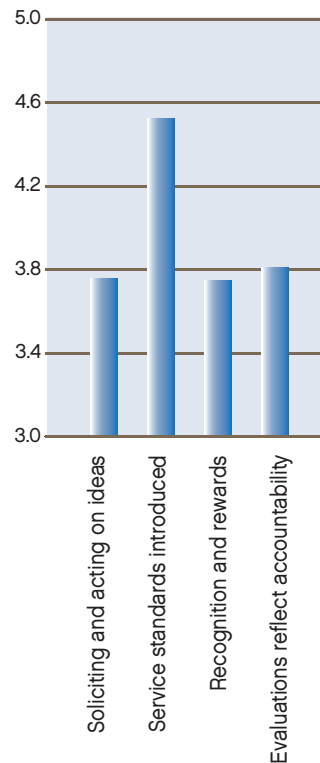
- Hiring practices don't always include *screening for service-oriented people*, receiving a score of 3.8 out of 5 points.
- Improvement is also needed in the area of *managers and supervisors being trained to understand, model and coach service behaviors*, scoring 3.8.
- The lowest scoring question on the survey reflects a training gap: *associates have been trained to effectively communicate with patients and solve their problems* scored only 3.5
- On the positive side, it appears that most healthcare providers are *regularly communicating patient satisfaction results to staff and developing strategies for improvement*: 4.2 out of 5 points.



Communications: The Critical Component

Respondents have varying opinions on communications issues within their organizations:

- Respondents aren't optimistic about *actively soliciting and acting upon ideas for improving service from employees, patients and others*, scoring 3.7 out of 5 points, tied for the second lowest score in the survey.
- However, they are also extremely positive about *new employees being introduced to service standards*, scoring 4.5, the second highest overall score.
- It's generally felt that feedback to the employees needs improvement. *Recognizing and rewarding employees for outstanding customer service* scored only 3.7, tied for the second lowest survey score.
- Performance evaluation systems are seen as needing improvement in the area of *reflecting accountability to exemplary service behaviors*, scoring 3.8.



Improvement Ideas Were Plentiful

When asked to name one thing to improve customer service in their facilities, respondents had much to say!

- By far the number one response involved additional training/education of staff and leadership. Three times as many respondents mentioned training as any other improvement idea. Although most responses had to do with staff training for customer service, many comments also involved leadership training, including coaching and modeling.
- The second most frequent improvement idea involved leadership accountability, support and involvement. This reflects the critical aspect of leadership “walking the talk” on a 24/7 basis. Employees are very perceptive and know when leadership is not supporting service excellence efforts, and they will follow suit. Deliberate, concerted effort must be initiated with leadership for any service culture change to take place. One respondent's comment was typical of others: *“Have leadership actively model and encourage specific examples of service behavior.”*
- Another frequently mentioned improvement focus was accountability at the staff level, including hardwiring service expectations into other institutional components like service standards and performance evaluations. Frustration could be felt from many of the responses, such as: *“Keep only engaged employees!”* and *“Improve focus on the patient and not so much on our own issues.”*
- Other frequent responses included improvement in communications, increasing staff, breaking through old employee habits, improved hiring processes, and increased resources dedicated to service improvement efforts.

Conclusions

Based on survey respondents, customer service is important. Although nearly one quarter have some level of dissatisfaction with customer service at their facilities, the majority is satisfied with the level of service. The concerning aspect is that nearly a quarter of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their customer service, indicating much room for improvement.

It appears that healthcare providers could benefit from establishing a foundation for service culture change. Areas of focus include

- Effective training of leadership and employees
- Recruiting and selection of staff
- Reward and recognition systems
- Accountability
- Performance evaluation systems

These foundation blocks should be “hardwired” to one another: service standards directly integrated into performance evaluation systems and training; accountability tied into service standards, performance evaluation systems and reward and recognition.

Based on the data, facilities would be well served to continue focusing on training to identify who customers are, understanding their needs, communicating effectively with them, and empowering staff to solve patients’ problems. Training must focus on behavior change to break old habits and create new, service focused behaviors. The need was summarized in one respondent’s frustrated comment: *“Find a way to reach those hardened employees who’ve been there, done that.”* Such behavior change is possible with concerted, systematic training processes.

“ The central issue is more than strategy, structure, culture and systems. Although these are important, the core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people.”

—John P. Kotter, *The Heart of Change*

The Service Solution

More than 150 healthcare providers have partnered with Integrity Healthcare Services to help change the service culture and increase patient satisfaction in their organizations. Integrity’s proven approach addresses all three dimensions of a person. Skills, attitudes and values each has a unique focus. And the one-of-a-kind six week follow up program ensures that you’re not wasting your training investment. You’ll see the results, guaranteed.

Let Integrity Healthcare Services partner with you to change the service culture in your organization.



Please contact us at:

800-646-8347

info@integrityservices.com

www.integrityservices.com

*To learn more about this topic, email us at info@integrityservices.com and ask for our whitepaper entitled *“If Satisfaction Drives Loyalty, What Drives Satisfaction?”*, Part 3 in our Whitepaper series.