



## Starts with Me

By Wendy Leebov

Give employees permission to stop problem behavior among colleagues as soon as it starts.



Wendy Leebov

"If it is to be, it starts with me." Wouldn't it be great if every person on our health care teams approached patient satisfaction with

It's a mind-bending challenge to hold employees accountable for service standards--for performing consistently in ways that foster Here are just a few of the reasons managers give for insufficient accountability:

Why Accountability Is So Hard
"I'm not there to see. And if I am, they behave better while I'm watching. Also, I might see some people, but miss others, and I don't want to be accused of being unfair."
"It's the customer's word against the employee's. There's no way to know the truth."
"If I confront the employee, they and their co-workers might resent it. Then, they'll act even worse. I can't afford to lose the respect of my team."
"With the staffing shortage, I can't afford to alienate anyone. A warm body is better than nobody."
"It's an endless, tedious process, and I don't have time. You have to go through hoops because of HR policies."

Health care executives can present arguments to counter these excuses. They can also harangue managers to stop rationalizing for the sake of patients and the team. That is important, but it hasn't proven to be enough.

Many managers at all levels cringe at the thought of what they view as heavy-handed accountability tactics. And people at all levels (that's the majority) feel frustrated when their co-workers behave inappropriately with patients and customers and suffer no consequences.

How about taking an approach to accountability that doesn't fall on managers' shoulders alone? How about putting a tool and process in place when they see problem behavior and want to nip it in the bud, they have permission and an agreed-upon way to do it?

### The Peer Feedback Approach to Accountability

In my experience, great employees get frustrated with managers who fail to hold people accountable. And when it comes to customer service, it ends up with twice the work because customers and co-workers alike seek them out, making end runs around the more frustrating

**Develop and promote a co-worker feedback process.** Engage your team in committing to an agreed-upon method everyone know the co-worker or not. This will help alleviate a sense of powerlessness and discouragement among the many people who behavior.

#### Keys to Shared Responsibility for Accountability

- 1. Commitment:** Agree that responsibility for accountability starts with every member of the team.
- 2. Common language:** Agree on language and signals everyone can use when they see both negative and exemplary behavior on the part of others who do not report to them, others they might not even know. Steep managers in skill-building and practice so they can be effective models and coaches of both negative and positive feedback.
- 3. Communication and spread:** Spread the goal, the expectation and the language throughout the organization.
- 4. Team gain sharing:** By tying compensation to overall patient satisfaction, further encourage people to speak with each other to achieve impressive performance across levels and department lines.

**Diagnose problems and missed opportunities.** The following worksheet can help you review current practices and surface tl

The situation: Who behaves inappropriately?	Example of uncaring behavior or missed opportunity for caring behavior:	What do managers do now when they see it?	What do you think <i>managers</i> should do when they see it?	What do <i>st</i> wish <i>st</i> do when they see it?
1. Your own employee				
2. Another manager				
3. An employee who reports to another manager				
4. An administrator				
5. A physician				
6. An employee widely known to be rude or having a bad attitude, and who continues to act that way. This person's manager appears to be doing nothing about it. It really bothers you.				

**Develop shorthand signals.** It's very helpful to agree on language shorthand everyone can use to make it easier to speak up.

- Negative feedback shorthand: Develop a constructive, caring signal people can use in an "oops" situation to alert another person misses an opportunity to be caring. This might be a gesture such as raising an arm, stretching, scratching an itchy nose; or it might be a "bing." Also agree on a caring opening line that frames specific negative feedback positively. For example: "I know you care. So..."
- Positive regard shorthand: Agree on a shorthand people can use to call a co-worker's attention to something very positive that they see. It should be on an opening line that frames the appreciation well. For example: "I saw you \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm impressed."

The next worksheet can guide creative brainstorming of possible language signals people can use to give caring feedback to others.

#### Let's Design Shorthand for Caring Feedback

Feedback Type	Example of Shorthand/Signal	Your Ideas Go Here
Positive	- "WOW!" - "Impressive!" - "Kudos to you!"	
Negative	- "Oops" - "Star situation"	

	- "Notice"	
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**Develop a language model.** In many cases, the shorthand will be all that people need to use because the use of the shorthand what they did. In other cases, they might not realize the problem. So, the feedback giver will need to explain further. Agree on 2 prompts people to describe behavior and consequences if the person they're addressing doesn't instantly realize what they did

### Great Language Model for Peer Feedback

Feedback Elements	Your Ideas Go Here
1. Opening: - "I know you care. So, I think you'll want to know...." - "I noticed a missed opportunity...."	
2. Describe behavior: "I saw/heard...."	
3. Consequences (for me, patients, families, team, organization):	
4. Pinch of empathy: "Now I realize...."	
5. Suggestion or request: "I think you could show more empathy by.... I'm asking you to ____ in the future."	

### Practice Makes Proficient

Because giving feedback, especially peer feedback, tends to fall outside people's comfort zones, it's essential to provide practice worksheet that can be a template for language practice in work teams.

### Feedback Practice

Comment or Action	Feedback: What can you say to the person to call their behavior?
1. "Look, we're really busy. We've had several people call out, and we don't have enough staff."	
2. While taking a patient down a hallway, the employee stops to talk with a friend, taking focus away from the patient.	
3. To a request for help, employee responds, "That's not my job."	
4. "Oh no! Another patient!"	
5. Another manager's employee is rude to a patient.	
6. "That department is <i>always</i> late!"	
7. In the elevator, staff talk about a patient (with strangers present).	
8. Executive walks past employees without acknowledging them in any way.	
9. "Look, you're not our only patient!"	
10. Doctor treats an employee with disrespect.	

You can use a similar template to engage people in practicing positive feedback as well.

### Yes, a Culture Change

Let's face it: Many traditional approaches to accountability are cumbersome, negative and avoided. And the burden on management is unrealistic. It's time to empower all the wonderful people on our teams to help--by giving them the tools, coaching, role modeling will get their co-workers on to achieve impressive service and patient satisfaction.

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