



HeartBeat

ON THE QUALITY PATIENT EXPERIENCE™

Insights, tips, tools and resources to help you achieve the unparalleled patient, family and employee experience

**RESHAPING
THE CULTURE
OF CARE**



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 SOAPBOX:
YOUR WRITING IS AN EXPERIENCE!

- 2 QUOTEWORTHY

- 3 NEWSBYTE

- 4 HOT NEWS!

- 5 I LOVE THIS APP FOR PHYSICIANS

- 6 BERYL INSTITUTE PATIENT EXPERIENCE (PX) LEARNING BITE

- 7 STAFF MEETING IDEA

- 8 FREE WEBINAR OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE OF CARING PROGRAMS

- 9 WEBINAR: "COACH ME TO A 5!": HOW TO FOSTER A FEEDBACK-RICH CULTURE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Soapbox: Your Writing is an *EXPERIENCE!*

By Wendy Leebov, Ed.D., Partner; Language of Caring, LLC

I'm fascinated by the written word because of its extraordinary power. I'm fascinated more than ever now that email and texting so often replace phone calls and face-to-face conversation.



Our written words have our fingerprints all over them. Whether we're writing an email, a book, a flier, a form, a text message, a letter, instructions, or anything else, the reader has our text, can revisit it, can show it to others, and can refer to it in their own writing with quotation marks around our words. In our rush to whip off an email or a text, consumed by task-orientation, we often lose sight of the person on the other end and the tangible, retrievable imprint we leave with them.

When people read what we've written, they have an experience.

Readers read between the lines and feel our caring, or not. And their experience affects whether they respond to us, cooperate with us, and respect us.

What's needed? Greater consciousness about what we say in writing and how we say it.... And specifically, a deliberate effort to make our writing accessible, our caring visible and our respect for people's time apparent.

My Personal Rules of Thumb

I've been writing for decades, and I've received a load of helpful feedback about my writing. At this point, I try to follow these Rules of Thumb to make my writing accessible, my caring visible and my respect for people's time apparent.

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a colleague?

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| Rules of Thumb for Person-Centered Writing | |
|---|--|
| 1. Before writing, fill your head with thoughts about the reader. | Too often, we fixate on the message we want to send, and we neglect to think about what the readers really want to know. Who are they? What do they already know? What are their sensitivities? What drives them? Effective writing is a two-way relationship. |
| 2. Make your tone empathic and conversational. | Your reader will be more likely to embrace your messages and requests if you communicate empathy and caring and not just curtly address the business at hand. You can do this in short phrases—“Hope all’s well with you; Please; Happy to help; Eager to hear your thoughts; I’m so sorry, Thanks so much!” |
| 3. Make your writing readable and accessible. | Don’t try to impress people by sounding formal and academic. The best practice for business writing these days is straightforward, direct, active (not passive) voice, short sentences, and personal words. Do a quick test of your writing by copying a block of it into the Gunning Fog Index . You’ll get instant feedback about how foggy your writing is. |
| 4. Use personal pronouns that keep your focus on the other person. | Use the power words <i>you</i> and <i>your</i> , not the impersonal words <i>they</i> and <i>their</i> . Beware of a predominance of self-oriented pronouns (I, me, my, our, and us) |
| 5. In emails, show respect for the reader’s precious time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to the point immediately. Don’t force the reader to read on and on before he or she knows why you’re writing. • Make clear where you’re heading, using subtitles and bullets. When people open an email and see huge blocks of text, they sigh with fatigue and might resent you or even push “delete.” • Make the subject field of an e-mail message descriptive. “Oops, did it again!” will get the receiver’s attention, but it doesn’t enable the reader to prioritize. Also, you’ll make it harder (for them and you) to find your email if needed in the future. • Restrict yourself to one topic per message. Send several messages if you have several subjects, each with a description of the topic in the “subject” line. This makes it easier for the reader to respond and track your requests, because they don’t need to read through a long email to find the part they’re seeking. |
| 6. Reread before pushing “Send.” | Proofread—typos look unprofessional. Did you forget anything essential? Repeat yourself? Also, reread for tone: a reader might not understand a joking tone in the same positive way you intended. Reread your e-mails and text messages before pushing “send” to make sure they won’t create unintended negative consequences. |



Sensitive matters require special care.

While I try to apply the above Rules of Thumb to all of my writing, certain situations require extraordinary care and caring, such as responding to a complaint. Often, as patient experience change agents, we help people learn skills for handling complaints in person. Less often do we make sure that people’s written responses to complaints are patient-centered. Fact is, our written responses have a life of their own and a huge impact, because people pass them around for others to see.

Here’s my personal template for a written response to a complaint.

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Written Response to a Complaint: Suggested Approach

1. Thank the person for speaking up. Express appreciation! For example, say: “Thank you so much for letting me know about your frustration with _____. I appreciate knowing what disappointed you, because we want to improve our services when there are problems.” Summarize or paraphrase the specific complaint. If you are not specific, he or she will see your response as a script or template and feel disregarded.
2. Apologize that the person’s expectations were not met or that he or she felt frustrated, inconvenienced or upset. You can apologize without admitting that the person is “right.” For instance: “I’m so sorry we did not meet your expectations.”
3. Express empathy. For instance, “It sounds like you felt very frustrated and annoyed.”
4. Explain what you did or will do about the complaint.
 - Did you investigate? If so, how? What did you discover? What did you do about it?
 - Explain alternatives at this point, if any. Tell what can you do to fix the problem for this customer and what can you do to fix the problem for future customers. If you can’t do anything to fix the problem for this customer, tell him or her what you will do to prevent the problem in the future.
5. Express your hope that your letter helps and thank the person again for caring enough to voice dissatisfaction. For instance: “Again, I appreciate you sharing your concern with me, as it gives me an opportunity to take action.”
6. Offer further contact, if the person seems to want it. For instance, “Please don’t hesitate to call me if you would like to discuss this further. Also, if I can do anything to help you and your family in the future, please let me know.”

Tips:

- Use “personal” words (I, me, we, and you). If you use words like “our patients” or “management,” it sounds to the reader like a stiff and impersonal response.
- Make the tone conversational. Don’t sound formal or bureaucratic.

Does your writing spark the feelings you want the reader to have, the actions you want the reader to take, and the impression of you that you want to leave behind. If the answer’s no, the experience you’re creating for your reader is unlikely to get the results you want. Remember that your fingerprints are all over your writing.



“When action meets compassion, lives change.”

Dave Ramsey



Celebrate Patient Experience Week

April 25 - 29, 2016

Don't miss the chance to celebrate accomplishments, reenergize efforts and honor the people who impact patient experience everyday. **Thanks to the Beryl Institute, you can [click here](#) to see** how others celebrated this special week.



Red Cross Implements Language of Caring Nationwide!

On March 15, 2016 the American Red Cross announced its decision to implement the Language of Caring for Staff program nationwide. Language of Caring's powerful, evidence-based program will help approximately 7,500 Red Cross blood collections professionals improve the quality of their communication with donors, volunteers and each other.



To read this exciting press release [click here](#)



Empathic Communication: Three Strategies for Making It an 'Always' Event

[Watch as Jill Golde, Partner, Language of Caring](#), discusses how empathy expressed by care and service providers has a powerful impact on many of healthcare's most important objectives, including high patient ratings and improved patient outcomes. In this Beryl Institute Patient Experience (PX) Learning Bite, Golde shares three strategies for making communicating with empathy an 'always' event in your organization.



[Watch now.](#)



MedIntw

MedIntw (for iPhone and Android) is a practical aid for the medical student/ intern, specialist-in-training or physician who wants to prepare in less than 15 seconds to be patient-centered in a medical interview. As the APP description explains, “Patient-centered interviewing is a respectful way of communicating in which you adapt to the patient and the situation he or she is in. As a patient-centered health provider, you try and identify the patient’s perspective. You want to go beyond understanding the patient’s condition, to also understanding his or her underlying need. You also want to achieve mutual understanding and agreement, share control and responsibility with the patient and encourage the patient’s problem-solving ability and self-efficacy.”

- [For Iphone](#)
- [For Android](#)



What’s Your One Word for the Year?

These days, there are so many things pulling for people’s attention. How can you help people focus on what’s most important and not allow the forces competing for their attention pull them in unfruitful directions?

I learned this ritual from a friend. Every year, she chooses one word as her theme for the year. One year, she chose “Simplicity.” Another year, she chose “Fun.” And another year, she chose “Relationships.”

If you lock one word in your brain, it will be there in your subconscious helping you find ways to bring it into your life. Also, it will make it more likely that, your efforts and decisions will drive you in a direction important to you.

Engage your team members in identifying and sharing their “One Word for the Year”

Instructions:

Have people pair up and interview each other using these warm-up questions:

1. What have been a few of your achievements over the past year (large or small)?
2. What are a few things that you didn’t get done that you now wish you had gotten done?
3. What’s one good decision you made?
4. What decision did you make that you now regret?

Then, ask people to identify their ONE DRIVING WORD for the coming year.

Share these in the large group. Comment that, by sharing these, people will, without even thinking, help each other pursue their focus.



**Are Language of Caring Programs Right for Your Organization?
REGISTER FOR A FREE 30-MINUTE WEBINAR OVERVIEW TO FIND OUT.**



OR



Overview of Language of Caring for Staff®
April 20, 2016
12-12:30 PM (EDT)

REGISTER NOW- SPACE IS LIMITED!

Overview of Language of Caring for Physicians®
April 26, 2016
12-12:30 PM (EDT)

REGISTER NOW- SPACE IS LIMITED!

Interested in a free, 30-minute private consultation and webinar for your organization? [Sign up here.](#)

- Discover how these blended learning programs are helping organizations achieve breakthroughs in the patient experience and patient/family-centered care, as measured by CAHPS improvement
- Learn how these programs work and their specific components
- Preview our awesome Client Portal for easy access to videos, all materials and and sustainability resources
- Get to know our implementation services that help you jumpstart your strategy and accelerate your results
- Ask your questions!

SIGN UP TODAY!
SPACE IS LIMITED



LANGUAGE OF CARING WEBINAR SERIES PRESENTS...

WEDNESDAY,
May 25, 2016
1-2 PM
(EDT)

“Coach Me to a 5!”: How to Foster a Feedback-Rich Culture for Continuous Improvement

Imagine an organization where open, thoughtful and helpful performance coaching conversations happen every day. What if these conversations focused on performance improvement and enhanced our interactions with each other as peers/colleagues, providers and patients? Attend this webinar to learn strategies, success factors, and tools that foster a feedback-rich culture that produces improvements in performance, productivity, job satisfaction and the patient and family experience.

Highlights

- Strategies that create and sustain a feedback-rich culture
- Success stories/case studies from other organizations who have successfully installed ongoing approaches to effective performance feedback
- Feedback tools and resources to use with colleagues, providers and patients

**SPACE IS LIMITED
REGISTER NOW!**

INDIVIDUAL \$49
GROUP (PER CALL-IN LINE) \$199

If your system wants to purchase several call-in lines, [contact us](#).

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- CNOs, CHROs, Patient Care Managers, Patient Experience Leaders and Team Members, Educators, Training and Organization Development Faculty

WEBINAR FACULTY



Presented by the Language of Caring team:
Dorothy Sisneros, Partner and SVP-Client Services
Philippa Kennealy, M.D., Senior Physician Coach
Janice Ganann, Senior Coach

Contact Us!



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Jill Golde, MS, Dorothy Sisneros, MS, MBA and Wendy Leebov, EdD—partners at Language of Caring.

Spread the Resources

- Forward this month’s Heartbeat email to others.
- Share and tweet the following link:
Your Writing is an Experience

<http://www.languageofcaring.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/your-writing-is-an-experience.pdf>

Join our LinkedIn Group “**Quality Patient Experience and HCAHPS Improvement**” and add to the rich discussions.

PLEASE FOLLOW US!

