



## The One Thing You Can Do to Radically Transform Your New Employee Orientation

A popular ad tagline reminds us that “you never have a second chance to make a first impression.” And yet, for almost all employees starting a new job in a health care setting, their first day impressions are largely based on a review of health insurance benefits, emergency preparedness protocols, infection control practices, and an introduction to privacy rules and regulations. This is all important information, to be sure. But knowing you only have one elusive chance to make that first impression, is this the *mission critical* content that will most effectively prepare your newest employees to be the standard bearers for your organization’s culture, reputation and brand?

### What is Mission Critical Content?

*Mission critical* content is the difference between an orientation program designed to elicit compliance versus one designed to elicit buy-in to the organization’s patient-centered mission and vision—in other words, the difference between a program that merely informs versus one that inspires.

*Informed* orientees will complete the orientation prepared to do the tasks set before them in the role they were hired for.

*Inspired* orientees, on the other hand, will complete the orientation energized to “*be*” the patient-centered care change vision articulated to them.

Examples of ways to emphasize *mission critical* content on an employee’s first day on the job include kicking off the orientation agenda with a personal welcome from the CEO who introduces the organization’s vision and what it means to be patient-centered. Encouraging participants to share personal stories about their interactions with the health care system can be a most welcome respite from the inventory of rules and regulations. Carving out time during the program for volunteers to provide orientees hand massages is an experiential and memorable way to underscore the organization’s commitment to caring for its caregivers.

When an organization re-engineers its orientation to emphasize this *mission critical* content, the impression that remains with new employees is profound:

“When I did orientation, I felt like ‘Wow, I work for such a great organization’. I was lucky to work for them. That’s a great feeling.”

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*"I came in so cynical because of my background. But at orientation, and now that I've been here for a while, I see how everyone lives and breathes Planetree."*

*"Orientation was three days. Very thorough and involved. You understand how important patient-centered care is in helping the healing process...You get a strong sense of what it's like as a patient entering the hospital."*

These quotes from staff members derive from focus groups facilitated by Planetree, a not-for-profit organization that partners with health care establishments to drive adoption of patient-centered care principles and practices by connecting healthcare professionals with the voices and perspectives of those on the "sharp end" of healthcare—patients, residents of long-term care communities, family members and staff.<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade, Planetree has facilitated more than 6,000 focus groups, capturing the stories and perspectives of more than 50,000 patients, family members and professional caregivers. Of those, nearly half the focus groups are conducted with professional caregivers. A common point of discussion is employees' initial impressions of the organization and their experience in the new employee orientation.

For employees who sat through a traditional orientation session, feedback in focus groups tends to be limited at best. There is not much to say when the experience left very little impression. Conversely, as the quotes above attest, efforts to create a meaningful orientation experiences that reflects the organization's patient-centered and caregiver-nurturing culture do not go unnoticed.

## The Singular Most Impactful Change You Can Make

But none of the program enhancements listed above will *radically* transform your orientation as the title to this piece suggests. While certainly a step in the right direction, a discussion of the importance of the patient experience presented by your CEO, administrator, Planetree Coordinator, Experience Champion or Chief Nurse Executive continues to perpetuate a well-intentioned, but misguided, line of thinking—that as patient-centered care champions, it is our job to represent the voice of patients. In fact, in a patient-centered culture, our role is not to speak *for* patients, but rather to listen to what patients have to say and to take to heart their unique insights about their health care experience. Drawing on this shift in mindset, *the one thing you can do to radically transform your new employee orientation is to invite a patient or resident (in a long-term care setting) to share his or her personal story* about what it is like to be a patient, what mattered most to them during their recent care experiences, what lasting memories were borne out of the experience (both positive and negative) and how they define a quality health care experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Frampton SB, Charmel PA, Guastello S. *The Putting Patients First Field Guide. Global Lessons in Designing and Implementing Patient-Centered Care.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, September 2013.



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Embedded early on in the orientation agenda, this one piece of the day can bring to life the concepts of patient-centered care like no video, no speaker and no set of PowerPoint slides ever could. The patient's story anchors discussion of topics such as the importance of handwashing, privacy and security as part of a very human experience. Furthermore, on an agenda crowded with your organizational VIPs, the inclusion of a patient sends a powerful message about who your organization considers an expert, a teacher and a partner.

## In Action

As part of the first day of new employee orientation at the Donald Berman Maimonides (DBM) Geriatric Centre, a Planetree Designated Resident-Centered Community® in Montreal, Canada, new staff meets with one of the residents of the long-term care community. For approximately 45 minutes, the resident shares his or her perspective on living in the community, imparting the unique resident perspective on things like what he feels when he is waiting for a call light to be answered and what went through his mind when he first moved into the community.

This practice has been in place in the community for approximately five years, generated out of an idea that came from a resident in collaboration with members of the nursing and human resources teams. The group felt that the most effective way for new employees to understand the resident experience is to hear about it from a resident. Today, according to Planetree Coordinator Joanie Robidoux, the resident story is consistently identified by new employees as the piece of the orientation that they value most, with comments on the evaluation form citing it as a "rare, unique and interesting opportunity." For those whose jobs don't necessarily entail their interacting with residents on a daily basis, feedback indicates that the resident story helps them to connect their job with the organization's overall purpose.

As Robidoux explains, staff learns from her about the Planetree philosophy earlier on during the day, but meeting with the residents binds new staff to the organization's mission and values in a very personal way. Recognizing that this role of storyteller and resident representative is not one all residents would feel comfortable taking on, the DBM human resources team works closely with resident volunteers to find a style and approach that works for each individual. The residents are coached to refine their talking points, and for those who prefer to adopt a more conversational tone, the session is structured as more of a Q&A session with the HR staff as interviewer. Orientees then have the opportunity to ask their own questions, often asking about the day-to-day life at DBM.

For Claudio Etauri, one of the residents enlisted to meet with new staff members during orientation, the focus of his remarks often veers intentionally away from what it is like living in the long-term care



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community. He prefers to spend the allotted time finding areas of commonality versus focusing on what makes him different from the new staff. This, he believes, helps to break down barriers between staff and residents and cultivates a more empathetic environment of care.

## **“It’s not education. It’s real.”**

At Shore Medical Center in New Jersey, awarded Planetree Patient-Centered Hospital Designation® in 2013, sharing stories at new employee orientation is among one of many ways that patients are engaged in supporting the organization’s patient-centered culture. Creating meaningful opportunities for patient advisors to make a difference in the organization while forging connections between former patients and new staff is a win-win, according to Planetree Coordinator Tami Kitchen. Doing so fuels the patient advisors’ work on the patient and family advisory council, and is routinely singled out by new orientees as “the best part of the day.”

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According to Kitchen, identifying patients who are a good fit for this role is crucial. They must feel comfortable sharing their story, and be able to discuss aspects of their care experience that did not live up to their expectations in a constructive way that is motivational for new staff. For this reason, patient storytelling is not a permanent part of Shore Medical Center’s new orientation agenda. Rather, it occurs as appropriate based on the availability of suitable patient advisor/storytellers.

When it does occur, though, the impact on staff is unmistakable, says Kitchen, energizing new employees to champion patient-centered approaches to care. As an example of *mission critical* content, the storytelling session stands out for orientees. “It’s not education,” says Kitchen. “It’s real.”



## Your New Employee Orientation Transformation To Do List

- Approach members of your patient and family advisory council to ascertain availability and willingness to share their stories as part of new employee orientation.*
- To prepare new storytellers, talk to them one-on-one to help them organize their story. Encourage them to include personal details and recollections. That is what listeners will connect to and remember. Stories that feel too generic will be soon forgotten.*
- Invite new storytellers to observe a more seasoned patient sharing his/her story at orientation.*
- Family members have powerful stories to share as well. Consider inviting a family member to tell his/her story.*
- Consider enlisting a panel of patients and family members to provide a variety of perspectives. Have the Planetree Coordinator, Patient Advocate, or HR team member facilitate the panel. Provide a set of standard questions in advance to all panelists so that they can prepare their thoughts.*
- Rotate storytellers in order to help keep the stories fresh.*