





# ACHIEVING PATIENT (aka Customer) EXPERIENCE EXCELLENCE

Lessons From a Successful Cultural  
Transformation in a Hospital



# ACHIEVING PATIENT (aka Customer) EXPERIENCE EXCELLENCE

Lessons From a Successful Cultural  
Transformation in a Hospital

Rhonda Dishongh • Qaalfa Dibeethi  
Kalina Janevska • Gregory D. Erickson



CRC Press

Taylor & Francis Group

Boca Raton London New York

---

CRC Press is an imprint of the  
Taylor & Francis Group, an **informa** business  
A PRODUCTIVITY PRESS BOOK

CRC Press  
Taylor & Francis Group  
6000 Broken Sound Parkway NW, Suite 300  
Boca Raton, FL 33487-2742

© 2014 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC  
CRC Press is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

No claim to original U.S. Government works  
Version Date: 20130503

International Standard Book Number-13: 978-1-4665-8313-9 (eBook - PDF)

This book contains information obtained from authentic and highly regarded sources. Reasonable efforts have been made to publish reliable data and information, but the author and publisher cannot assume responsibility for the validity of all materials or the consequences of their use. The authors and publishers have attempted to trace the copyright holders of all material reproduced in this publication and apologize to copyright holders if permission to publish in this form has not been obtained. If any copyright material has not been acknowledged please write and let us know so we may rectify in any future reprint.

Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Law, no part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

For permission to photocopy or use material electronically from this work, please access [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com) (<http://www.copyright.com/>) or contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400. CCC is a not-for-profit organization that provides licenses and registration for a variety of users. For organizations that have been granted a photocopy license by the CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at  
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the CRC Press Web site at  
<http://www.crcpress.com>

---

# Contents

---

Dedications and Acknowledgments .....	vii
Preface .....	xi
About the Authors .....	xv
The Story—What Really Happened ... ..	xix
<b>1 Begin to Spark.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Personalize to Motivate .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Introduction .....	9
The Story: What Really Happened ... ..	9
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	15
<b>3 Serve to Lead .....</b>	<b>21</b>
The Story: What Really Happened ... ..	21
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	27
<b>4 Connect to Engage .....</b>	<b>33</b>
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	39
Appreciation .....	43
Active Observation/Listening .....	44
<b>5 Fail, Then Account .....</b>	<b>47</b>
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	51
<b>6 Succeed, Then Recognize.....</b>	<b>59</b>
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	63
<b>7 Inject Fun to Release Pressure.....</b>	<b>71</b>
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	74
<b>8 Measure to Coach.....</b>	<b>79</b>
The Lesson: What You Need to Know ... ..	83

<b>9</b>	<b>Action Program Spirit to Achieve Excellence .....</b>	<b>89</b>
	The Lesson: What You Need to Know .....	96
<b>10</b>	<b>Get Help to Be Independent.....</b>	<b>105</b>
	The Lesson: What You Need to Know .....	108
	<b>Epilogue: One Year Later—Making It Stick Even When It Gets Sticky.....</b>	<b>113</b>

---

# Dedications and Acknowledgments

---



## Rhonda Dishong's Dedications

There are many people who have made me who I am and continue to shape me into a better me. I would like to thank my parents, Kenneth and Elaine Spann, who always gave me the courage to be different and to take chances. They have been proud of me and given me opportunities they did not have. My sister, her husband, and my beautiful niece and caring nephew—Laura, Gregg, Sarah, and Gregory, respectively—never have to say a word because just being there has spoken volumes. My brother, Kenneth Spann, makes me feel protected even to this day. Stephen Nunenmacher has shown me that doing what is right is always more important than self-gain. It has also been his incredible music and lyrics that have served as my muse during some late nights of writing. Julie Nunenmacher exudes grace and resilience in her very character and has taught me the importance of those characteristics; their baby, Jude, lights up my life.

I would like to thank my staff and peers, past and present, from whom I have learned everything I know. Karen Haney, George Gaston, and Keith Parrott gave me my first chance in Patient Experience; Louis G Smith, Jr., and Linda Stephens every day provided encouragement, guidance, and acceptance of my big, big, big ideas. Helen Powers told me I could do anything and insisted I believe it. Thanks to John Murray for always being a phone call or text away and Greg, Qaalfa, and Kalina for always putting up with the weird way I see the world.

Most of all, thank you to my husband and children, who have waited at dinner for me or let me work late into the night and early in the morning. Drew is a beautiful, passionate young man who has already made a big difference in our world at eighteen years of age. I cannot wait to see him leave his mark on the big world. Steven shows compassion and caring in all of his interactions, even on the football field. I

respect his opinion, and I am so glad he is confident in sharing it. Rachel, who will always be my baby girl, makes my heart sing. She is so smart and accomplished and knows no fear. My husband, Malcolm, has been by my side and in my heart forever. We met as teenagers, and I do not know what I would do without him. These five people have been my constant support and have truly made this come true.

I would like to dedicate my portion of this book to my grandmother, Ruby Jean Dixon. Without her example of loving and taking care of the masses, I would not be who I am. I dedicate my career to making her proud every day.



### **Qaalfa Dibeethi's Dedications**

I dedicate this book to those who helped me in my own transformation by motivating and engaging me, holding me accountable, and recognizing my talents: Mom, Dad, Rock Brailsford, Mrs. Thigpen, Lt. Col. Willie Bratcher, Prof. David Morse, Prof. Philip Ramsey, Dr. Cordia Beverley, and Yumiko Ogawa. Thanks to the institutions that have been important backdrops in my life: Memorial Hermann Hospital, Law Elementary School, Texas Children's Hospital, Johnston Jr. High, Lamar Sr. High School, Houston Community College, State University of New York–

New Paltz, City University of New York, the City of New York, New York University, Metropolitan College, Beyond Philosophy, and the City of London. Thank you to my coauthors and friends: Rhonda, for being what Patient Experience is all about; Kalina, for the therapeutic camaraderie and feedback; and Greg, for being the best Patient Experience convert ever.



### **Kalina Janevska's Dedications**

I dedicate this book to my parents, Vlado and Vesna Janevski, and sister, Dafina Janevska, for inspiring my life choices and showing me continuous care and nurturing.

Qaalfa Dibeethi has given me opportunities and pushed me to develop my talents so that the future Kalina can admire and be proud of the present Kalina he helped grow.

A sincere thank you to Rhonda and Greg for selflessly sharing their story and making me part of it.

And finally, a thank you to the people in my life who have inspired and motivated me to give more and be more: my friends, my teachers, and my family.



## Gregory Erickson's Dedications

There are many people who I would like to acknowledge who have helped me along the way. I start with my brother, John Christopher Erickson, who has been by my side through this entire journey called life. My best friend, who started as my brother in the Navy, Jim Brekhus always believed in me and showed me a good time. Thank you to my in-laws: Raymond, for stepping into the role my father had to leave too soon, and Nelda, for always making sure I justified my reasons.

My professional career was formed with the help of many individuals but none so much as Louis Smith and Heath Rushing, understanding leaders who held me as accountable as I held others. Jessica Wooten was my balance that made success easier. Derek Hebert and Stephanie Foster were my comrades at work on many occasions.

My wife of more than twenty years, but my purpose for twenty-four, Stephanie Erickson, gave me direction and strength. My son, Trenton, has shown me that he can do anything that he sets his mind to. My belief in him has given me the courage to believe in myself. Kadyn, my youngest son, has the energy and passion for life that I wish I had. If I am half the father to them that they are sons to me, it is an amazing feat.

I would like to dedicate my portion of this book to my father, John Erickson, who was taken away from this world when I was only sixteen. It was the circumstances of his death that gave me the direction I needed in life. It was the person that he was along with my mom, Nelda Joan Erickson, who has gone to be with my father, who gave me who I am and the power to be anything I want to be.



---

# Preface

---

Patient Experience management has always been a part of healthcare work since interacting with patients has always underlined giving consideration and care to their experience to varying degrees. However, until now, Patient Experience has been left to what we can call an intuitive style of management. This means that the nature of the experience delivered has been heavily determined by a mix of circumstantial factors mainly related to the individuals behind the experience management's personal interpretations, the employees' moral compass, and current resource restrictions that affect ad hoc decisions. As a result, two basic problems arise:

- The Patient Experience effectively becomes a series of individual transactions even though the patient perceives the experience as a whole. The end result is that the patient is often confused, frustrated, and alienated by the inconsistent experience.
- Well-meaning healthcare professionals can all be fully intent on delivering the best possible Patient Experience, but they do not really appreciate how to calibrate the experience they deliver with that of others or even know what a great Patient Experience is beyond a good clinical outcome.

With the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) firmly in place in the United States, efforts to manage the Patient Experience became mandatory and business justified. Reimbursement to hospitals is now partially dependent on how well patients feel they have been treated. Naturally, that puts Patient Experience management at or near the top of the priority list for hospitals.

In the United Kingdom and Europe, patient satisfaction has been a matter of attention since the 1990s, being widely accepted as an outcome measure in trials testing new drugs or interventions as well as a measure of quality of care.\* In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service (NHS) 2010–2015 plan highlights

---

\* Delnoij, Diana M., Measuring patient experiences in Europe: What can we learn from the experiences in the USA and England? *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 354–356, 2009. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the European Public Health Association.

the need to significantly expand the measurement of patient satisfaction and links significant portions of provider income to Patient Experience. This means, for the first time, connecting the level of patient satisfaction with hospital income. Over time, up to 10% of hospital income could be dependent on patient satisfaction.\*

Unfortunately, this new high priority does not readily translate into guaranteed collaboration, understanding, or clarity of action for executives, managers, or other employees within hospitals. In fact, for many it became a difficult task of balancing lofty goals with budget, time, and resource capacity restraints. It would be no issue to achieve the highest marks if the organization could freely invest time and resources to focus on getting those goals achieved. However, reality requires a more skilled juggling effort among the clinical, business, and experience aspects of hospital work. Moreover, it requires a different kind of mindset, decision-making model, and overall approach to how employees behave within the organization. This different approach should naturally and intuitively lead to an optimum balance between patient satisfaction and business benefit when put into practice on a daily basis. In addition, this will allow, enhance even, the best clinical outcomes.

Putting both business and Patient Experience knowledge into action is the challenging part. Furthermore, that difficulty is compounded by the need to embed that culture across the organization such that it becomes “a way of being” rather than just another set of additional tasks to pile on the heap of existing programs and initiatives. Task orientation leading to ineffectual ongoing training, consultants, and projects that absorb money and effort is harmful, although it can appear to be forward moving simply because the language sounds good and the activity looks busy.

The original idea of this book was to help healthcare professionals understand the components required to build a customer-centric (i.e., patient-centric) culture and inspire action. It quickly became clear that the lessons that would make a patient-centric cultural transformation successful are similar to those that would make any customer-centric transformation successful.

In this book, we uncover how one such cultural transformation was successfully achieved in a hospital setting. As stated previously, the lessons learned can be applied anywhere (hospital, retail services, contact center, etc.) and in any industry (healthcare, telecommunications, financial services, etc.).

Rhonda and Qaalfa first worked together in 2005. Qaalfa was a consultant hired to help the hospital system improve its customer experience. That work was very successful. Since that time, Rhonda has applied the learning to a variety of hospitals within the system. Specifically, the system took over management of a community hospital (which we henceforth refer to as “Community General”), which had twenty years of inconsistent financial and patient satisfaction performance.

---

\* The NHS 5 Year Plan. [http://patientexperiencefeedback.com/measuring\\_patient\\_satisfaction/the\\_nhs\\_5\\_year\\_strategic\\_plan.html](http://patientexperiencefeedback.com/measuring_patient_satisfaction/the_nhs_5_year_strategic_plan.html) (accessed November 2012).

Rhonda was brought onboard at Community General to bring the magic that had helped improve other hospitals in the system.

This is the story of how Rhonda first and Greg as an ally worked with and led a team to create a culture in which things are not allowed to just happen but an experience is deliberately created. The story is told from the point of view of two people. However, the story was not created by those two alone. It took the efforts and knowledge of many leaders, support people, and frontline team members.

Rhonda Dishongh and Greg Erickson's story is a rich source of instructive lessons. Qaalfa and Kalina summarize the learning into several key points each healthcare manager should know and act on when creating a culture of service excellence.

For the remainder of the book, we use avatars to make it easy to identify whose point of view is being told:



Gregory Erickson



Kalina Janevska



Rhonda Dishongh



Qaalfa Dibeethi

In each chapter, we start with the story of what happened in the words of the Patient Experience practitioners, Rhonda and Greg, who lived it day in and day out. They uncover the situation as it unfolds, showing not only what they did but also why they did it and, importantly, what it felt like. Achieving a cultural transformation is hard work. It is not rocket science, but it is really easy to miss the key lessons because most people are so focused on the tactics to implement that they forget the intent of the tactics. Thus, Customer Experience experts Qaalfa and Kalina follow up each chapter's story with the key lessons.

We hope this book will help you start a change toward achieving Patient Experience excellence.

Let's begin . . . .



---

# About the Authors

---



## Rhonda Dishongh

While studying communication at Houston Baptist University, **Rhonda Dishongh** aspired to be a disk jockey for a heavy metal radio station. She began working as a registration representative in the emergency room of a hospital to earn extra money while in school. In those three years, she was bitten by the healthcare bug, forfeited the plan to be a disk jockey, and continued her career as a manager in the business office.

Interactions that occurred during her beloved grandmother's death inspired her to dedicate her career to designing desired experiences in healthcare. With twenty-five years of service at the various hospitals and system offices, Rhonda has been an instrumental part of the leadership team. Rhonda has contributed to teams' successful outcomes, receiving national recognition for performance in quality and customer experience. Rhonda continues to serve as the director of Customer Experience Design and Patient Business Services.

On a personal note, Rhonda has been married to her high school sweetheart for twenty years and spends her personal time documenting a pictorial history of her two sons and daughter.



## Qaalfa Dibeethi

**Qaalfa Dibeethi** (pronounced “alfa dibay-i”) is a recognized global expert in Customer Experience with more than twenty years of experience in the customer-related space with particular emphasis on the special problems and sensitivities of organizations that have a dual commercial and social/community responsibility.

He is the chief operating and consulting officer of Beyond Philosophy, the Customer Experience consultancy. He was previously a managing consultant with Round, the customer centricity consultancy. While

there, he helped develop an assessment tool that eventually won a 2003 Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Innovation of the Year award. His experience also includes senior roles at Fulcrum Analytics, where he was director of their consumer and strategy consulting practices in New York and London, respectively. He has held senior strategic planning and analysis roles with Schering-Plough Pharmaceuticals and Citibank. In the early 1990s, Qaalfa worked for the city of New York and was responsible for medical, physical, and psychological occupational health standards.

He is coauthor of the book *Customer Experience Future Trends and Insights* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). He has been keynote speaker at a number of conferences, is frequently quoted in the international press, and has authored and published a variety of white papers and magazine and journal articles. Qaalfa is also an award-winning university professor.

He has an MBA (international business and management) from New York University and master's degrees in statistics, psychology, and health administration from the City University of New York, having graduated with departmental distinction from the State University of New York. Qaalfa is a world traveler and has lived and worked in the three of the world's great cities (New York, London, and Tokyo).



## Kalina Janevska

**Kalina Janevska** is a business psychologist with expertise in analyzing and designing emotionally engaging customer experiences. She has experience helping companies in a variety of industries (e.g., healthcare, telecommunications, financial services, retail) and geographies (Europe, Africa, Asia) achieve cultural transformation.

Kalina has successfully designed and delivered tools and programs for employee engagement, experience assessment, journey mapping, and customer experience redesign.

Coming from a family of physicians, Kalina developed an interest in helping people better their lives at an early age.

Her curiosity to discover the root causes of people's decisions and behavior led her to study psychology and work as a teaching assistant in social psychology at the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia, her home country. This is when she became trained in assessing and managing human psychology, interaction, and behavior.

Kalina moved to London to complete her master's degree in business psychology, which introduced her to her job as a Customer Experience consultant in Beyond Philosophy, a Customer Experience consultancy with a global footprint.

Since that time, Kalina has been the project lead on programs aimed at improving organizations' customer experiences to drive customer loyalty and greater business outcomes.



## Gregory Erickson

After attending Lamar University, **Greg Erickson** joined the U.S. Navy and trained to become a nuclear medicine technologist. When his service to his country was complete, he settled in Houston, Texas, with his family. He started his postservice career as an assistant director in the Nuclear Medicine Department of Texas Children's Hospital. Due to his natural leadership abilities, he quickly moved from supervisor of a single modality to director of the Imaging Department.

In 2004, he took his talents to Community General as the director of Imaging and Cardiac Cath Labs.

During the next three years, he held the unique position of leading a successful department in a struggling hospital. When the Hospital System acquired Community General some years ago, Greg quickly rose to the top at the new organization. He has been instrumental in leading the facility to a top performer in his system and community, with the facility receiving national recognition for its performance.

On a personal note, Greg has been married to his high school sweetheart for twenty years and is the father of two athletes in the making. Greg enjoys hunting, watching sports, and coaching his sons in their various sports, including football, baseball, and basketball.

