



“By using their Legendary Service skills, employees are empowered to look for things that are getting in the way of providing excellent service.”

Client Story

A United Front at Tower Health Medical Group

Tower Health has always realized the importance of listening to patient feedback to improve medical care. But in a period of hyper growth, that feedback became even more important to ensuring their future success. Tower Health is a regional integrated healthcare provider comprising six hospitals and 103 medical offices throughout the southeast Pennsylvania area. Their growth strategy relies on the acquisition of medical practices. The practices in the Tower Health network provide a full range of medical services for children and adults including family practice, diabetic clinics, neurosurgery, dermatology, cardiology and plastic surgery to name a few.

“We aren’t a franchise operation where we give someone the model and they build a facility or find a location,” says Joe Berger, director operational excellence. “We buy existing practices that have their own cultures and processes already in place. Our challenge at Tower Health is to create a signature experience for patients and staff and to present as one organization adhering to our brand promise when we are made up of so many unique practices.”



Joe Berger

Inconsistencies Revealed

When Berger reviewed data that had been collected from patients about the Tower Health customer experience, he found a huge discrepancy. In measuring the possibility of a patient recommending the practice to others, some practices ranked at 99 percentile nationally but others performed at only the 2nd percentile.

Berger knew a patient's perception of the quality of care they receive can suffer if the patient isn't happy with the entire experience. More important, he also knew inconsistent care can have a negative impact on the health of the patient. A range that extreme would make it difficult to create a signature patient experience that would improve the quality of patient care and help grow the Tower Health brand. It also would limit the ability to negotiate insurance contracts, which would affect the overall business health of each practice.

Berger's first goal was to create some consistency between practices. "I looked into all the activities that combine to create the customer experience: how appointments are made, how patients are greeted at the office and prepared for their appointment, the actual visit, and data about the patient word of mouth. Knowing that changing any one thing wouldn't have a significant impact, we decided to visit the entire experience. We started with the fundamentals, recognizing that if we gave our medical office staffs the building blocks to create a superior patient experience, Tower Health could brand that experience and grow the practice through patient referrals. Having had experience with the Legendary Service customer service training program from a previous job, I knew it was exactly what we needed to deliver to our people."

The Legendary Service program from Blanchard® teaches people how to consistently deliver ideal service that will keep both internal and external customers coming back, creating a competitive edge for their organization. Many programs focus on delivering service to external customers but don't address the importance of serving internal customers. When employees understand that they need to serve each other, it creates a dedicated support team that collaborates to serve the client.



Rolling Out the Training

The goal: to train all personnel including front staff, patient service representatives, clinical assistants, nurses, and the practice manager who oversees operations. Tower Health offers the Legendary Service class in two half-day sessions. Because each practice runs a very lean operation, it was necessary to get buy-in and support from each practice manager to send people through training. "We worked with each practice to determine a schedule for sending staff members to training," says Berger. "When someone is out, there isn't necessarily a designated backup person to handle the workload, so another staff member must pick up the slack. Breaking the class into two half-day sessions was the best delivery method for us."

Berger also felt it was important that classes were made up of people from different practices, which would help build camaraderie within the Tower Health brand instead of perpetuating an independent practice mentality. "We kept the classroom size small, so people would have a chance to share stories and realize how similar their office experiences were. It wasn't uncommon for someone to describe a situation and others to agree that the same thing happens in their practice. Participants could commiserate a bit, build relationships, and come up with solutions together. We also customized practice session scenarios to the participants' workplace—it made sense for them to be specific to health care."

Berger opted to have facilitators from Blanchard deliver the training. In the first year alone, they held 38 workshops and trained more than 700 people. “By tackling this aggressive schedule, I recognized that we can scale the training—which is critical as we continue to grow,” says Berger.

One of the most powerful exercises in the training program is an empowerment exercise. Participants are challenged to identify what is getting in the way of their ability to deliver Legendary Service, both on an individual and practice level. They learn that some things are beyond the scope of their control but other things are within their control—and that they can help improve the operation of the business practice. “One systemic issue that was identified was the need to provide language training for staff members. We have a high percentage of Spanish-speaking patients, and some people were not proficient with the language. That can be uncomfortable for both the patient and the staff member. Offering language training is just the courteous and respectful thing to do. Our Spanish-speaking patients are more comfortable with the experience when they know they are communicating effectively with someone who understands them,” explains Berger.

“Another issue was very personal to the front office staff, and that was the uniform policy. Clinical staff is comfortable with uniforms since scrubs are standard everywhere, but office staff is not. So, when we created the policy of polo shirts as the uniform for the front desk, it was a misstep for us. Feedback during training indicated that front office staff didn’t feel professional in a polo shirt and that it had a negative impact on their performance. So, we asked them to come up with another solution, and they did. It was a big issue with a simple fix that helped empower the team,” says Berger.

“I can’t express enough how important the fundamentals of this program are in helping us to identify the existing service champions and elevate those who were struggling only because no one taught them how to design a better way.

Kathy Cuff and Vicki Halsey, who are coauthors of the program and facilitated the training for us, are phenomenal presenters who can read an audience instantaneously to assess how to get concepts defined, understood and practiced. The pillars of Legendary Service are all important, but some need more attention than others. Through feedback and class engagement, Kathy recognized that we needed to go deeper into the emotion involved in a doctor’s appointment. Anyone who’s been to a doctor’s office recently understands that it’s a throughput operation. There are more patients requesting services than most practices can handle so the job becomes very production focused. By getting staff to see that, to train them on how to stop, be present and acknowledge just what’s going on in a patient interaction, the whole experience changes for everyone involved. Patients feel better, staff feels better and we get many more ideas now about how to be Legendary.”

The Results Are Impressive—and Sustainable

Tower Health has several strategic performance metrics, including these measurements for each practice:

- Is the registration staff friendly and courteous?
- Is the nursing staff friendly and courteous?
- Does the staff work well together?
- Would you recommend this practice to others?

“When I started this job, the numbers were not encouraging. Nationally, we were below 50 percent in every category. Our registration staff was performing at the 40 percent level, nurses were at 29 percent, the team working together was 49 percent, and the likelihood of patients recommending the practice to others was at 49 percent,” explains Berger.

"I wasn't sure I could help us break that 50 percent barrier within the year. So, I was thrilled when I saw the quarterly numbers after we piloted the program. We saw a huge spike in every category. Staff numbers increased from 40 to 48 percent, nurses from 29 to 40 percent, staff working together moved from 49 to 64 percent, and the likelihood to recommend elevated from 49 to 58 percent! And it gets better—by the end of the first year, we were able to meet all targets for the first time ever."

As training continues, Berger has determined that the numbers are sustainable. Not only has there been a spike in metrics after training, but the organization is maintaining those numbers quarter to quarter—and continuing to improve. Additionally, they have reduced the variability between practices. The lower scores are now at 20 percent, which is a huge improvement over the previous 2 percent.

"I've loved seeing how much frontline employees want to collaborate and be part of the solution for making their practice a high performing operation. People want to have a great day at work. By using their Legendary Service skills, employees are empowered to look for things that are getting in the way of providing excellent service, proposing a solution, or asking a manager for help. They are in control of having a great day at work. That benefits the individual, the patient, and Tower Health."



Enable leaders at every level to become the ultimate agents of progress and transformation for your organization. Visit us at www.kenblanchard.com to learn more.