

Magic of Rounding

By Quint Studer

As a sales or service team leader, you want your people to be happy, productive, and loyal. Indeed, it's your job to create conditions that facilitate these qualities. The reason you're not always as successful as you'd like to be boils down to two factors: *information* and *time*. It's hard to know what problems your team is facing, solve them, show your people you care, *and* handle all the other tasks on your plate.

The good news is that there is a proven way to stay on top of what your people want and need. It's a concept from the health care arena called rounding. Rounding is what doctors in hospitals do to check on patients. The same idea can be used in business, making the rounds to check on the status of your people. Rounding is all about gathering information in a structured way. It's proactive, not reactive. It's a way to get a handle on problems before they occur and also to reinforce positive and profitable behaviors. Best of all, it's an efficient system that yields maximum ROI.

In business, rounding involves taking an hour a day to touch base with your employees, make a personal connection, find out what's going well, and determine what improvements can be made. It's a way to gather the information you need to do your job and do it well—in a timely and efficient manner.

When done properly, rounding is more than surface “face time” put in by leaders. It's meaningful. And it's the heart and soul of evidence-based leadership—a term inspired by another health care concept, evidence-based medicine. The “evidence” is the data collected from studies to determine what people really want and need from their leaders.

What Your People Want

Here are the five critical things your employees want from you, along with an explanation of how rounding helps you accomplish them:

1. *Employees want a manager who cares about and values them.* The number one reason people leave their jobs is because they feel they are not valued. What's more, people don't leave their team—they leave their direct supervisor. Taking the time every day to make a human connection with your employees—and to listen and respond to their needs—counteracts that perception. When you round properly, you automatically and naturally build strong relationships with all of your employees.

2. *Employees want systems that work and the tools and equipment to do the job.* Obviously, a big part of job satisfaction centers on being able to actually *do* your job. From time to time, most companies experience equipment breakdowns that stymie and frustrate employees. In some cases, people have complained for years about inefficient systems and processes. Rounding solves these problems and gives productivity a boost. "When you ask people, 'Do you have the tools and equipment you need to do your job today?' and they say

yes, it's a win for everyone. If they say no, you can fix the problem and turn it into a win.

3. *Employees want opportunities for professional development.* Rounding is a natural avenue for discovering whose skill sets need improvement and for instigating professional development discussions. When you're making your daily rounds, it's easy enough to suggest training to someone who clearly needs it, or to ask one employee to mentor another. Rounding also gives you many opportunities to help high performers move to an even higher level. Just say something like: "We want to keep you here and are committed to helping you excel personally and professionally. Is there any training that you feel might be helpful for you?"

4. *Employees want to be recognized and rewarded for doing a good job.* Part of the rounding process involves asking people who among their peers has exceptional performance—and then passing the compliments on. It's a brilliant way to build morale, as praise from one's peers is the most meaningful kind. It makes an employee feel great when a leader says to her, "*You know, Carla told me you did an outstanding job getting the marketing report together last week.*" It makes her feel good about Carla for recognizing her hard work, and it makes her feel good about her manager for sharing the information. It builds an emotional bank account that's invaluable for productivity and morale.

5. *Employees don't want to work with low performers.* Nothing makes employees as discouraged and resentful as having to co-exist with people who don't pull their own weight. In fact, low performers usually drive high performers right out the door. Rounding naturally solves this problem. When you're in touch with all your employees on a daily basis, it doesn't take long to see which employees are slacking off or making life difficult for everyone else. Sometimes people will tell you outright. Of course, once you find out who the low performers are, you have to move them up or out.

Nine Steps

To benefit more from rounding, you must standardize rounding skills, teach them to all managers, and hardwire it into your culture. Don't assume that rounding is easy. It isn't. It requires some serious training and self-discipline—but, over time, you'll see that the results are worth the effort.

1. *Give your employees a heads-up.* Before you start rounding, tell your employees what you plan to do. Any time a leader changes his or her behavior, employees tend to get jumpy. Be honest. Tell them up front: "I want to be a better leader and I need your help. I am here to recognize and reward people and to find out what's working well in this company—and what's not working so well."

2. *Prepare a scouting report.* Start with a basic knowledge of what the current problems are. For instance, if you know a department is short-staffed, put it on the report. Or if you know there's a chronic problem with equipment break-downs, note it. When you start rounding, you can talk intelligently about the issues. As you talk with each employee . . .

3. Make a personal connection. Ask how her sick mother is doing or ask him how his child did on college entrance exams. This is relationship building. Be genuine.

4. Mention an issue he or she raised during your last rounding visit. Show the employee that you have solved the problem or that you are working on it.

5. Ask five questions, keeping your tone and words as positive as possible: *What is working well today? Are there any individuals I should be recognizing? Do you have the tools and equipment you need to do your job? Is there anything we, the leaders, could do better? What else would you like me to know?*

6. When someone brings up a problem, assure him or her that you will do the best you can to get it resolved. Obviously, there will be circumstances you can't control. But people appreciate knowing that you will try. Sincere effort goes a long way.

7. Record issues that arise in a rounding log. This will help you keep what needs to be done top of mind. It will also help you hardwire the process into your company. Writing things down makes it more likely that they'll get done, and it makes things seem official.

8. Recognize and reward those who are identified by peers as high performers. This might mean conveying a sincere word of thanks—citing who complimented him or her—or it might even be a small bonus.

9. Repeat. Round daily, if possible. At least do it several times a week. Don't risk losing momentum or you'll give it up before you start seeing results.

“Rounding is a lot like exercise,” he explains. “If you don’t round every day, religiously, it will take much longer to accomplish your goals and it will be far more painful. You must make it part of your routine. But proactive leadership is far more effective than reactive leadership. It allows you to consciously and deliberately build the kind of culture in which people feel a sense of purpose, a sense that their work is worthwhile, a sense that they’re truly making a difference.”

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About the Author:

Quint Studer, a former hospital president and 20-year health care veteran, is founder and CEO of Studer Group headquartered in Gulf Breeze, FL. An executive coaching firm and national learning lab, Studer Group is devoted to teaching tools and processes that organizations use to achieve sustained focus on Service and Operational Excellence. Partner organizations see clear results in the arenas of higher employee retention, greater customer satisfaction, healthy financials and growing market share, and improvements in various other quality indicators.

A nationally recognized health care management thought leader, Studer was named one of the “Top 100 Most Powerful People” by Modern Healthcare. Studer has devoted his professional career to helping health care organizations become world-class leaders in Service and Operational Excellence. He has contributed to features in USA Today and Inc. magazine, and has authored in-depth feature articles on consumerism, service excellence, organizational alignment, and communicating quality to major health care trade journals.

Studer’s 20-year career in health care management includes positions as COO of Holy Cross Hospital in Chicago and president of the Baptist Hospital, Inc. in Pensacola, FL. As a result of Studer’s leadership, Baptist Hospital was awarded the prestigious Quality Cup by USA Today and the Rochester Institute of Technology. Studer led both hospitals to the top 99 percentile in employee and patient satisfaction as compared to hospitals nationwide in an independent health care survey.

Quint received the HFMA’s Helen Yerger/L. Vann Seawall Best Article Award for 2003-2004. This award—given for his article titled “The Value of Employee Retention,” published in the January 2004 issue of HFM—honors outstanding contributions to professional literature in the field of health care financial management.

The author of the best-selling book *Hardwiring Excellence: Purpose, Worthwhile Work, Making a Difference* and the recently-released *101 Answers to Questions Leaders Ask*, Studer received B.A. and M.A. degrees in education from the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. He has the honor of serving on the Board of Directors of the 32,000-member Healthcare Financial Management Association, a national professional organization of CFOs and finance executives in health care.

About the Book:

Hardwiring Excellence: Purpose, Worthwhile Work, Making a Difference (Fire Starter Publishing, 2004, ISBN: 0-9749986-0-5, \$28.00) is available at bookstores nationwide, major online booksellers, or directly from the publisher by calling (866) 354-3473. Copies also can be purchased online through the Studer Group website at www.studergroup.com.