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Beyond Nurses Week: How (and Why) to Nurture Your Nurses All Year-Round

Just in time for National Nurses Week, acclaimed health care management educator Quint Studer spotlights the value of these men and women—and explains how to give them what they really want and need.

Gulf Breeze, FL (April 2006)—National Nurses Week begins May 6th, and you know what that means. It's time for health care organizations everywhere to toss metaphorical rose petals on those women and men who keep your operation running smoothly. That's great, says Quint Studer. No one is more deserving of a week of recognition and thanks. But if you focus on your nurses only once a year, you're missing a big, big opportunity.

“Nurses are the heart and soul of everything you do,” says Studer, nationally acclaimed health care management educator and author of *Hardwiring Excellence: Purpose, Worthwhile Work, Making a Difference* (Fire Starter Publishing, 2004, ISBN: 0-9749986-0-5, \$28.00). “Pay close attention to their wants and needs, and take meaningful steps to address them, and you can transform your entire organization. When nurses are happy, patients are happy—and everything else naturally falls into place.”

Studer offers five good reasons to nurture the nurses who nurture your patients . . .

- **They regularly carry out lifesaving procedures.** Nurses must do everything right: communicate vital information accurately, keep rooms clean and sterile, ensure that monitors are working, and so forth. Everything they do, down to the smallest action, is hugely significant.
- **They connect with families.** Just as much as patients, families depend on nurses. They depend on nurses to care for their loved ones, to keep them informed, to provide emotional comfort. (Remember, “client experience” is just as much about families as it is about the patients themselves.)

- **They function as the “eyes & ears” of your doctors.** Because they’re constantly in and out of the patients’ rooms, they pick up nuances of patient behavior that doctors may not notice. They know when someone is uncomfortable or unhappy—and their vigilance often saves lives.

- **They are your hospital’s information source for *everyone*.** Patients and family members may not know when visiting hours are . . . or where the cafeteria is located . . . or that smoking isn’t allowed on the premises . . . or that children aren’t allowed on certain floors. Nurses must constantly share the little details that keep your organization humming smoothly along.

- **They are your first line of public relations.** Your nurses are the face patients put on your hospital. If they remember nothing else, they’ll remember the kind smile and attentive ways of the nurses who cared for them.

. . . and five great ways to do it:

- **Practice the fine art of managing up.** “Managing up” means positioning people well. It means constantly looking for ways to accentuate the positive and build good will. Also, it’s a practical tool for reinforcing specific behaviors. You might publicly praise a high-performing nurse in front of her peers: “Margie, you did an outstanding job managing the accreditation meeting this morning.” Another great way to manage up is to praise nurses in front of patients and their family members: “This is Linda, one of our most outstanding RNs. She will take very good care of Justin—he is in great hands.”

- **Round on your nurses.** Health care leaders should make contact with all types of employees, but particularly front-line nurses, every single day. It’s called “rounding,” and it’s a technique Studer swears by. For an hour a day, touch base with your nurses in their everyday environment. Walk up to them and ask very specific questions: *Is there anything we can do better? Do you have the tools and equipment you need to do the job?* Then, do everything in your power to give them what they need.

- **Deal with your low performers and understand the impact they have on your nursing team.** Great nurses want to work with other great nurses and are extremely frustrated by low performers. Don’t be afraid to let disruptive people go. If you don’t, these low performers will affect your high performers, causing them to 1) leave the organization, 2) channel their positive energies into outside interests, or 3) pace themselves and slow down.

- **Send thank-you notes to nurses when they do a great job.** Nothing garners as much genuine appreciation and sense of pride as a personal acknowledgment of a job well done. Keep your eyes open for your hospital’s “superstars,” nurses who go above and beyond the call of duty. You might also encourage other leaders to regularly e-mail you about nurses who deserve a compliment. Ask them to include details so that you can write a descriptive message thanking the nurse for his or her contribution. Make sure the note is handwritten and mailed home—typed letters or e-mails won’t cut it! Also, share

stories of nurses who go “above and beyond” any time you get the chance. Not only will this inspire the “superstars” to keep up the good work, it will also inspire others to raise the bar in their own work.

• **Understand the connection between employee satisfaction and the bottom line.**

Remember, satisfied employees are always better performers. When employees feel appreciated and recognized by their leaders, they seek out opportunities to do good things for the company and its customers. They think like owners, not renters. “Remind yourself that nurturing your nurses is not just a ‘nice thing to do,’” says Studer. “There is a real, solid, measurable bottom-line payoff.”

“Start implementing these tools and techniques right away,” urges Studer. “Making this commitment at the executive level is a great way to make National Nurses Week truly meaningful. Yes, catered lunches and thank-you banners are nice—and certainly appreciated—but creating a high-performance organization is the best way to reward your nurses. You’re empowering them to do their jobs better . . . and that’s what they *really* want.”

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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,SM 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.

Studer's newest book, *Results That Last: Hardwiring Behaviors That Will Take Your Company to the Top*, will be published by Wiley in December 2006.

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.