

How can I help employees manage up?

“Managing up” occurs when we highlight positive aspects of our service or organization. Many organizations are faced with challenges, from old facilities to high turnover rates, so they hesitate to use this approach for improving perceptions. These same organizations forget they still have many aspects of excellence – experienced nursing staff, caring physicians, or dedicated volunteers. Talking about these areas of special value puts patients’ minds at ease.

When leaders present the concept of managing up to employees, some equate managing up with “not complaining” or “not trashing coworkers,” for example. **Managing up is more than not managing down.** Consider these examples:

Managing Down: “It’s going to be another 20 minutes. Dr. Jones is always late.”

Better: “I’m sorry it’s going to be another 20 minutes. Is there anything I can do for you while you wait?”

Managing Up: “I’m sorry it’s going to be another 20 minutes. Dr. Jones is a very thorough physician who will provide you the same great care as soon as she is available. Is there anything I can do for you while you wait?”

Whether patients are in our care for a minor outpatient procedure or a long inpatient stay, they are in a foreign environment. Not every healthcare encounter involves patients shaking with fear, but it likely involves patients in unfamiliar territory. We can help patients acclimate to foreign environments by providing information in a positive way.

Managing Down: “Sorry it’s chilly in here. The building is pretty old and drafty.”

Better: “I’m sorry it’s chilly in here. Can I bring you a blanket?”

Managing Up: “I’m sorry it’s chilly in here. The good news is that this department works really well together and you’ll be done quickly. Can I bring you a blanket while you are waiting?”

Every employee should know something about their organization or area of service that puts patients at ease. Many employees, however, are not practiced to speak up in this manner. A few activities can help prepare employees to manage up:

Activity #1: Think of positive ways to describe your co-workers that would help patients relax and manage up the care they receive. Write down descriptions. Share with the group.

Activity #2: Think of positive ways to describe the best aspect of your job that would help patients relax and manage up the care they receive. Write down descriptions. Share with the group.



By framing the setting, caregivers can dramatically impact perceptions. The first impression most patients have about our healthcare organizations comes from us. These activities not only prepare employees for speaking positively about their organization, but also build teamwork and a sense of pride in their service and organization. By managing up, we can all go somewhere new – a place where employees and physicians choose to work and patients choose to be treated.

