



QTIP: how to stay cool

by Joan Fox

when the situation is hot

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Anyone in the healthcare industry has likely experienced times when an unfortunate sequence of events causes a patient to become quite upset. This point in time is known as a critical touchpoint—it is a “make it or break it” moment where the things we do and say next are crucial.

If this moment is handled well, statistics show that the patient’s loyalty will actually become stronger. We know that seventy percent of complaining customers will look to us again in the future if their complaint is resolved to their satisfaction. This figure jumps to 95% when resolution is immediate. Only 36% of customers with minor problems, who do not complain at all, will come back. The reason for this is simple. Complaining customers give businesses a chance to rectify the problems while non-complaining, dissatisfied customers may not be angry enough to complain, but are often unhappy enough to switch providers.

So should we be happy when patients complain? Not exactly--that would be a pretty big stretch. However, we must be open to complaints, willing to put effort into resolving the issues and handle the interaction in a positive way. This can be tough to do especially when one of those complaining patients is right in your face.

Responses to patients using emotionally charged language can be defensiveness, anger or even tears. When patients are upset they often verbalize things they regret later. However, in the moment, it all seems real and typically the person the angry words are directed toward internalizes the comments and takes them personally.

At the heart of a good service recovery is an idea called the “QTIP” principle. Q-T-I-P is an acronym which stands for Quit Taking It Personally.

It is imperative to think with your head and not your heart when a patient is hurling verbal daggers. When you use the QTIP principle, your response will be more rational and you will be able to provide better solutions. When you use the QTIP Principle, you have a real chance of making the patient an advocate because you heard the message beyond the emotion.

Like many worthwhile things, this is much easier said than done. But once you master the QTIP principle, dealing with upset patients will be a lot easier. Although we all do our best to provide an excellent patient experience, unfortunate things still happen. Keep a Q-TIP in your pocket or by the phone as a reminder to not internalize negative, hurtful comments. Both you and the patient will benefit.

