

“I CAN’T GET NO... SATISFACTION”

A Case Study on Communication

Connie Flict, RN slams down the phone and shouts, “I’m sick and tired of those incompetent slackers in the pharmacy. How am I supposed to get my work done when they don’t do theirs?” As misery loves company, two other nurses nearby join in the commiserating and began to list all the ways the “other” department has failed to do their job lately.

Iva Haddit, RN jumps in. “It’s just not right”, she declares, “We bust our tails all day, cover for their incompetence, take the heat from patients and doctors when treatment is delayed, get behind in our own work, have to stay late to finish charting and then get in trouble because we have overtime!”

The next 20 minutes are spent discussing the relative merits of the two departments with the nurses finally deciding that the employees in the “other” department have none and are unworthy of breathing the same air.

Meanwhile, in the pharmacy, Tech Ted jerks the phone away from his ear shrieking in pain from the sound of a slamming phone. Talking to his coworker, Tech Tom, he laments, “I’d sure hate to be married to her! You know, I don’t get paid enough to take this kind of harassment. I’m doing the best I can over here. They have no idea what it’s like to do this job. I can’t do anything until they enter the physician order in the computer. Sometimes an hour goes by from the time an order is written until I see it over here. About half the time I have to call the unit for clarification, since they didn’t enter complete information. Then the secretary has to find the nurse to find out what the order *should* say. More time wasted. On top of that, I’m dependent on my supervisor to verify new orders and he’s so busy he can’t always get over here right away. There are just too many barriers to my doing the job the way I’d like to do!”

Both Connie Flict and Tech Ted go in search of their managers to solicit their help on straightening out the other department.

Questions:

What is the relevance of the mode of communication (phone) in this situation?

- *The phone does not allow for the most effective dialogue, particularly in conflict.*
- *Both parties are inclined to be more aggressive than they would be if they had to discuss the situation face-to-face.*
- *The phone creates a barrier behind which each party argues with a “them” rather than a real person.*

What role do beliefs, biases and preconceived notions play in this situation?

- *Each party assumes that the other will be difficult to deal with*
- *Each assumes that they are working harder or having a more difficult time than the other*

What are the ramifications of this unresolved conflict within each department? Between departments?

- *Lost productivity*
- *Low morale*
- *Low satisfaction with work environment*
- *Low trust*
- *“Us vs them” thinking and behavior*
- *Delayed care/ treatment for patients*

Discussion Points:

Discuss the concepts of culture, context and relationships as they relate to this situation.

- *Culture: How is conflict resolved in this organization? Who holds power and authority? Is there a common mission, vision, values? How are people held accountable for their behavior? What value is place on internal customer service?*
- *Context: The urgency of the situation, the stress in the individual departments, the heavy workload, systems issues (computer, etc.)*
- *Relationships: A trusting, collaborative relationship would lay the foundation for resolving this issue or even prevent it from occurring at all.*

Discuss the concept of Interests vs. Positions as it relates to this situation.

- *Both parties have a common **interest** in getting the medication on time to the patient. However, they hold different **positions** on how to accomplish the work.*

Discuss the different responses to conflict being used in this scenario.

- *Competition- Win/Lose*
- *Avoidance- Ignoring the conflict vs working toward a resolution*

Discuss the steps for effective resolution of this conflict.

- *Focus on problem, not the people*
- *Focus on interests not positions*
- *Refer to established Mission/ Vision/ Values, Policies & Procedures, Ground Rules for Interaction*
- *Identify possible alternatives*
- *Agree on a resolution*
- *Develop action plan and followup*

Discuss this scenario from a “systems thinking” perspective.
(see Discussion under “Systems Thinking” Case Study)

Discuss the implications of a shared governance model on this scenario.

- *Partnership- strong relationships working toward mutual outcomes; recognition and appreciation of interdependence*
- *Equity- every role is valued; focus is on services and customers*
- *Accountability- defined by outcomes with each role responsible and accountable for their contribution; peer accountability*
- *Ownership- individuals feeling responsibility/ ownership for the whole*