



The Challenges of Excellence

How to Maintain the Success You've Worked So Hard to Achieve

For a brief shining moment in history, IBM ruled the personal computer market. They saturated the airwaves with bold marketing campaigns, and for a while Big Blue was the way to go if you were looking to buy a computer. In fact, IBM was once considered as synonymous with 'computers' as Kleenex® is with facial tissue. So what happened? While they had mastered the art of achieving excellence, they never tackled the obstacle of maintaining excellence. More agile and innovative companies yanked the entire PC market from under IBM's feet.

Being in the lead doesn't always guarantee a win in the race; in healthcare, the race *never* ends. While it is essential to celebrate the achievement of success, it is just as important to be mindful of the new challenges that come with simply being at the top. With so many of HealthStream Research's clients improving survey after survey and quarter after quarter, it is time to explore the challenges that come with maintaining excellence.

Challenge #1: Excellence outlines a path for your competition.

To be a successful healthcare organization, you must have quality care, effective (and efficient) brand equity management, satisfied patients, and satisfied (and engaged) employees and medical staff. So what is the danger here? While it took all of human history until 1954 to run a mile in under four minutes, the record set by Roger Bannister was shattered in less than a month. By achieving excellence, you have just provided a detailed roadmap to success for all of your competitors. Moreover, when you succeed you have just proven to everyone that success is possible. Once the impossible is done, everybody jumps in to build a better mousetrap.

Solution: HealthStream Research believes (based on hard data) that a trifecta of survey research (across all key components: patients, employees, physicians, and the community), goal setting, and brand equity management is the best defense against losing ground. With reliable survey research, your hospital can become its own toughest competitor, and goal setting is an important exercise for every hospital—it's the difference between *going somewhere* and *ending up* somewhere.

Challenge #2: Complacency

Complacency is quite possibly the 'carbon dioxide' of any successful organization—it is truly the Silent Killer. Deprived of external feedback, organizations can naturally and easily slip into 'coast' mode, where the actions that brought you success are continually used without adjustment. Meanwhile, your competitors are using your previous successes as a blueprint to adjust their own practices to surpass you. A combination of complacency and Challenge #1 is certain to lead to organizational mediocrity.

Solution: Goal setting comes into play again here, as having challenging (yet attainable) goals provides the framework for continued success. "We found that just by setting goals, the staff responded by meeting and exceeding them. Before, we weren't tracking 'door to provider' time, for example, but as soon as we set a time target everyone became aware of the time. Now, if anyone sees that a

patient on the board getting close to the time limit, they spring into action,” said Dr. Gail Cunningham of St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson, Maryland.

Challenge #3: “We are the best, so what we are doing is obviously the best way to do things.” Success comes from what you have done; maintaining success is about what you are *doing*. Conceit can be a natural reaction to success, which is why it must be actively fought against. It is different than complacency only in that it is the *root* of complacency. There is an old tale of a hunter with a talking dog; when the dog comes back empty-pawed from a rabbit hunt, the hunter asks, “Why didn’t you catch the rabbit?” The dog replied, “I was running for your dinner—the rabbit was running for his *life*.” Any successful, first-rate hospital too smug to be “running for its life” will soon be running to catch up.

Solution: With a comprehensive learning culture, healthcare professionals get the knowledge and tools to create safer environments for patients, increase clinical competencies of its workforce, and facilitate the rapid transfer of the latest information and technologies. A true learning culture leads to improved business outcomes and improved clinical outcomes, and with *continuous* learning you can maintain your achievements. For example, [HealthStream’s online Advanced Fetal Monitoring & Assessment Program](#) led to a 40% reduction in perinatal malpractice claims for a large healthcare system.

Bringing It All Together

By regularly surveying your key constituencies (patients, employees, physicians, and community), constantly setting challenging goals, and creating a learning culture, any successful hospital can maintain excellence. It’s all about feedback—like a compass, constant feedback will let you know the direction you’re headed.

Through comprehensive research, you’ll know when and where you need to change your approach—and with a learning culture, you’ll have the tools to effectively and efficiently bring about those changes.

