

## Learning from What Went Right



The tragic aftermath of Hurricane Katrina holds many valuable lessons. Learning from mistakes is sometimes the only productive step to be taken. The shock felt by the world when the water began to rise, and the horror when it finally receded has not completely gone away. With another hurricane season upon us, there is a renewed interest in finding ways to prevent future storms from becoming living nightmares for those caught in their wake.

Identifying and correcting problem areas are important steps in preventing tragedies from recurring. One lesson that should not be overlooked, however, is identifying and reinforcing what went right.


The uniquely vulnerable position of New Orleans area hospitals during the Katrina crisis left many physicians and staff members feeling as though they were thrust into a war. The Ochsner Medical Center was no exception. There was one significant difference at Ochsner, however: the harmony of dedicated teamwork rising above the crisis. Assisting with rescue efforts, actor Sean Penn referred to Ochsner as “the most prepared place” that he had been, even going so far as to call it “an oasis in this hell.”

What went right at Ochsner is just as valuable a lesson as what went wrong elsewhere. It was only days before this powerful storm hit that a group of leaders and physicians from Ochsner attended a retreat hosted by Integrated Loyalty Systems, Inc., ([www.wecreateloyalty.com](http://www.wecreateloyalty.com)) an Orlando based consulting group dedicated to helping organizations achieve world-class service. The theme of this retreat was How to Go from Good to Great.

The key components include recognizing that every person within the organization plays a vital role in the customer’s (or patient’s) experience. The invisible walls that divide specialties and responsibilities serve as roadblocks to streamlined operations. Workshop attendees were given the opportunity to identify problem areas, the freedom to troubleshoot, and work together to overcome those challenges. Each department identified areas within their control, and then determined what steps were necessary to stop the common practice of buck-passing. Building the spirit of teamwork and finding a way to say YES, it can be done, is the result of the ILS program at Ochsner, “Creating a Culture of YES.”

Ochsner CEO Patrick Quinlan, M.D. says of the days immediately following the storm, “It was an honor to be here.” Dr. Quinlan’s commitment to supporting the employees at Ochsner provided a strong foundation for ILS to build upon. “We are all a team; this is a level playing field. We may wear different uniforms, but we are equal members on a team with different jobs.”

Dr. John Cole, Hematology/Oncology section head, considered the Culture of YES to be an “unbelievably liberating experience” during those post-Katrina days. “Knowing we were going to say yes, no question, do whatever it took to take care of them, provided us with an immediate organizational approach to those patients.”



Ochsner Urologist Chris Winters described the importance of each department by comparing them to puzzle pieces coming together to create a work of art. If even one piece is missing, it remains just a puzzle. Senior Vice President of Nursing, Nancy Davis, R.N., agreed, “The whole leadership team and the staff seemed to be in a groove to make it happen.”

This philosophy was exemplified by Jonathan Nussdorf, an Ophthalmologist at Ochsner. Eye surgeries were postponed during the hurricane, so Dr. Nussdorf was happy to help out in the hospital kitchen. There were still over 400 patients to feed, as well as the hundreds of staff members working around the clock to help them. Tulane University Historian Douglas Brinkley expressed that the post-Katrina state at Ochsner was “the single best, most professional job in the city.”

The goal of Ochsner Health System was to create a corporate culture dedicated to the happiness and peace of mind of their employees, patients, and their community. By enlisting the help of Integrated Loyalty Systems, Inc., that goal was realized beyond traditional measure. “The (Ochsner) founders would be proud of what we did,” said Ochsner Cardiologist Hector Ventura. Working together during those difficult days immediately after the storm, the Ochsner Team rose to the enormous challenge placed before them. Facing the worst, they found the way to be the best by saying YES, I’ll step up and make it happen!

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