



Seeing Beyond Time (2019), pencil sketch. Artist: Stephanie D. Gingerich

WHAT ARE THE BROKEN CLOCKS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

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Abstract

The author reflects on the value of partnership approaches to ensure that the Broken Clocks, or gaps that become background to those immersed in the work within each organization, are identified for improvement. Incorporating partners who encounter the physical space with varying perspectives can bring the Broken Clocks back to life once again.

Keywords: partnership, quality improvement, process improvement, key stakeholders, varying perspectives, hierarchy, equality

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Tired and hungry, the surgeon dropped into a chair in the recovery room alcove to document on his last patient's surgery. Barely grumbling a hello to the tired nurse next to him, he logged onto the computer and began to document on the surgery, while keeping in mind his overbooked schedule. "I need to get back to the OR - what time is it?" he asked, looking around for a clock. The clock on the blue wall directly next to him had a single piece of 8x11 paper taped over it stating, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day."

"You know what is ridiculous?" he said to the nurse, who was concentrating on her own documentation at the end of a very long shift. She looked up, confused. "That clock. It's a disgrace to our patients." She looked around, not sure to what he was referring.

"That clock." He pointed up at the broken clock. She chuckled, "Oh that? Geez, that hasn't worked for years."

"Exactly. That clock does not mean anything to the people who work here. However, to the patients, it may mean everything. They may be looking at it to tell them how long their loved ones have been in the OR, estimating how much time they may have left to wait. Instead of providing them with a tool to support them, we simply shrug our shoulders and forget about it. It's background to us, but it may be front and center to them."

Consider this for a moment. As we encounter our environments day after day, various aspects become background to us. We focus on the aspects that are integral to us, and become less concerned with what provides us little value. This focus becomes biased, albeit unintentionally. Our patients and clients encountering our space have not yet become familiar with the ins and outs of the environment, and therefore, everything may provide value, until it doesn't. Our patients and clients are not yet biased in the way we are. In the recovery room described above, parents anxiously await news of

their children in surgery, wait for the pain to subside in their 2-year-old who just had a tonsillectomy, or wait for discharge medications to arrive so that they can leave. This may be their first time within the surgery department, or even their first time in the hospital. Something that is a day-to-day routine for us may be incredibly frightening and disorienting to those whom we serve.

As we consider improvements within our organizations, we should incorporate the key stakeholders, and this includes our clients and our patients. Why? Because we have lost sight of our Broken Clocks that these individuals may see right away. They can help us identify aspects that could and should be changed, when we have long forgotten they even exist.

To truly partner with those encountering our environments, we must create a partnership-based culture as described by Eisler and Potter (2014). Within this culture, the perspectives of everyone involved are considered equal, regardless of their backgrounds, roles, gender, age, religion, or other personal attributes. Each individual can contribute, as his or her perspective is unique and valuable. In the Broken Clock parable, every patient who encounters the recovery room has a unique perspective on what may improve the quality of their visit. Likewise, a parent caring for a child in the recovery room may also identify unique ways to improve the environment.

In putting these concepts into action, we must be mindful about the value placed on the relationships involved. Do we place higher value on an individual's perspective simply because that person speaks English as a primary language? Is any perspective more valuable than another simply because of the person's gender or role? In an environment based in partnership, hierarchies are flattened and power is used to inspire and support, equal partnership exists for all, abuse and violence is not tolerated, and relationships are mutually respectful (Eisler & Potter, 2014). In order to identify the Broken Clocks we fail to see, a partnership environment should be created to allow others to disclose their unique perspectives.

Environments of this kind will allow perspectives to emerge without fear of retribution. These varying perspectives provide insight into what could be improved, and it is essential to provide the environment that allows these insights to be heard. It is everyone's responsibility to engage with, listen to, and learn from those who are new to the environment. Only then can freedom exist and change emerge. Partnering with those who encounter the physical space with varying perspectives can then bring the Broken Clocks back to life.

Reference:

Eisler, R., & Potter, T. (2014). *Transforming interprofessional partnerships: A new framework for nursing and partnership-based health care*. Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing.

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