

What Football Can Teach Us About Healthcare Branding



We are well into football season this year, and I started to think about the similarities between successful, popular NFL teams and hospitals with strong brands. Before I go into that, I want to clarify that when referring to a brand, I am not just referring to their marketing strategies. Branding is not what you tell others you are, rather what others believe you to be. Therefore, when we talk about what goes into a healthcare brand, we include the perceptions of employees, physicians, patients, and the general public.

For as long as I have liked football, I have been a fan of a particular NFL team that has a history of not being very good. I have seen them go from coach to coach, draft quarterback after quarterback, and remain unsuccessful on the season. There is an old sports saying, “Defense wins championships,” while others say that games are won in the trenches. Every team seems to want to get the top quarterback prospect, yet there have been numerous teams (much like my favorite team) who are not good, draft a top quarterback, and only mildly improve, if at all. Meanwhile, there have been many teams who have strong offensive lines and strong defenses who win with a mediocre quarterback deemed a “game manager.” These quarterbacks are good enough to not make mistakes, but they are not hall-of-famers, either.

Additionally, even if you earn great talent on the offensive line and defense, it still takes great coaching to nurture those positions and bring out the best in them. Bad coaching can ruin any talent a team may have on their roster. When teams with strong coaches and strong foundations add their franchise quarterback, that is when they become dynasties.



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This got me thinking about what PRC has been preaching for many years. Think about marketing as the “skill” positions such as quarterback, patient experience as the trenches and defense, and employee experience/physician engagement as the coaches. A great quarterback cannot make up for a team that struggles in the trenches, much like great marketing cannot make up for a lack of perceived quality in patient care. Additionally, a defense and offensive line cannot thrive without great coaching, much like hospitals cannot provide the highest level of care without having employees and physicians who are engaged and wanting to ensure such care is being delivered.

The best football teams will start with strong coaches who draft the best talent for both their offensive plays and defensive side of the ball. Coaches will ensure a strong foundation on their team if they want a chance at the Lombardi Trophy. Once the foundation is there, a great quarterback will take them over the top and help them become that dynasty.

The best hospitals start with ensuring their employees and physicians are engaged in their work and practice. These engaged employees and physicians will ensure that the best patient care is being delivered and that every interaction with patients is perceived as excellent. Hospitals with a strong engaged staff and a strong foundation of care will succeed, but once that foundation is in place, strong branding will take the hospital over the top and help them become the first hospital that consumers in the market choose when care is needed.



If your hospital or health system is not performing at a level you feel it should, you may have a brand issue, but not necessarily a marketing issue. Before going directly into marketing and branding changes, you need to determine the strength of your foundation of care. If patients feel you are excellent, but the consumer perception does not match, then you do have to look at your brand messaging. However, if there is room to improve the patient experience, you must build that foundation first. To build that foundation, you must look at the engagement of your employees and physicians. If you have engaged staff, but the patient experience is still lagging, you may need to make operational changes, or perhaps there are environmental issues or other factors that need to be addressed. These external issues can be pinpointed with PRC data. However, if employees and physicians are not engaged, you must do the work to increase engagement before you can expect patient experiences to improve. The interactions patients have with hospital staff is the most important factor in their experience.

PRC has solutions to help healthcare organizations measure their current employee experience, physician engagement, patient experience, and consumer perceptions to ensure you can work to become the:

- best place to work
- best place for patients to receive care
- best place to practice medicine
- most preferred and chosen hospital in the market

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