

THE TOUR TELLS THE STORY

How a building tells the truth

It's a typical Tuesday at Gotham Medical Center (GMC). There is the usual bustle of caring for patients, but also throughout the day there are important people taking tours of GMC. There are expectant mothers with their nervous spouses touring the obstetrics floor, there is a third grade elementary school class taking a wellness tour with a public relation liaison, and there is a case worker showing the family of an elderly cancer patient the oncology floor and reassuring them that GMC can provide the care and support that will be needed in the difficult months ahead.

The CEO, along with the Medical Director, is showing a cardiologist around. He is currently with a competing hospital but they hope to entice him to move to GMC in order to bolster an emerging practice area. He would bring his whole team so he wants to see GMC from top to bottom. GMC's Director of Nursing is taking the cardiologist's head nurse on a separate tour, spending more time in the Cardiac Diagnostic Center, the Cardiac Rehab Center, and the ICU. They've stopped in the sunny cafeteria to chat over a cup of gourmet coffee.

The Board Chair and the Fund Development Director are leading a group from a regional foundation through GMC. They want to convey that GMC provides quality care, is a solid community player that supports local wellness initiatives, and has the leadership capable of seeing the big picture.

The CFO is showing GMC's investment banker around the new Women's Center. They stop for lunch in the cafeteria and after they sit down they begin to discuss the funding necessary for a new patient tower.

Each of these tour guides know that their tour needs to be inspiring, memorable, and reassuring. The tour has to demonstrate and embody the organization's vision of success, that the culture is positive and professional, and that the quality of care is evident in the people, technology and the in the spaces that form the medical center.

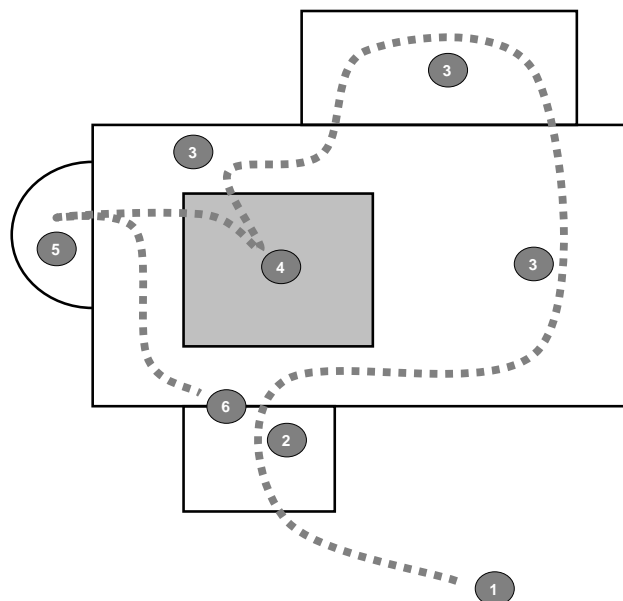
The tour is your story

The tour tells the true story about an organization. With good design and careful planning, each stage of the tour can be made part of the hospital's story: "this is the strength of our commitment, here's how we work, here's how we treat each other, these are our values, and this is how we connect to our community." A good tour is not what one sees on the surface; it is not dressing up or covering up. A good tour in a good building tells the hospital's story by being efficient, genuine, and thoughtful—not dazzling or fancy or expensive.

The six stages of every tour

Every tour has six stages:

1. Approach
2. Entry and greeting
3. Work places and patient care
4. Meeting
5. Socializing
6. Exiting and last impressions

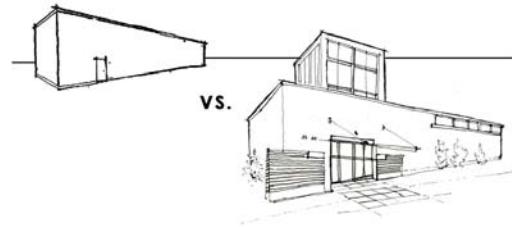


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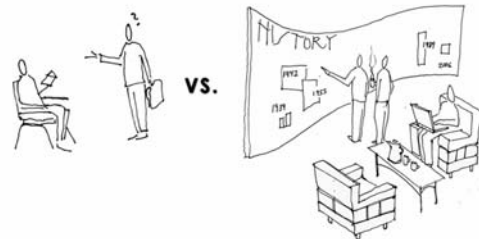
1. Approach

A hospital's exterior sets the first impression. To be approachable, the building's massing (its basic shape) should preview what's happening inside. The entry should be obvious and signage and lighting can attract attention from a distance. A hospital should have outdoor spaces which comfort patients, family and staff; landscaping can ease the transition, and should change with the seasons. The architecture should tell the Hospital's story—and not express the architect's own style.



2. Entry and greeting

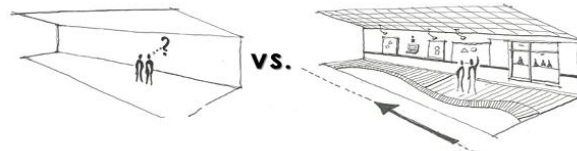
Entering, waiting, and being greeted make powerful impressions on every visit. While waiting, the patient or visitor is in close physical contact with the building—even the feel of the door handle is a powerful tactile message about quality. Because patients and family are anxious and distracted, it is essential they feel physically oriented and at ease as soon as possible. A big atrium may be alienating instead of reassuring.



Create a history display in the lobby with testimonial letters, photo murals of patients and staff: A colorful time line is a great way to give people who are waiting something interesting, informative, and reassuring to see and read.

3. Visiting work places

Well-designed work places create and convey efficiency. Cleanliness and tidiness are tremendously important to making a good impression. Good wayfinding and circulation keeps patients, families, and staff from being confused and reinforces feelings of purpose and efficiency. Layouts, colors, and signage keep everyone grounded. Even staff-only areas benefit from consistent and clear direction.

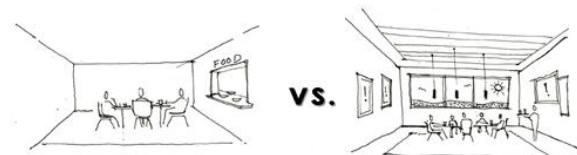


4. Socializing

The cafeteria and other break areas are where families and staff relax, reenergize, learn from, and comfort each other. Sharing a meal is an important social function: where we eat speaks volumes about our culture. Dining is affected strongly by sounds, smells, textures, natural and artificial light, as well as the furniture.

5. Meeting

People are literally closest to each other in meeting rooms, so details are critical. The finishes, furnishings, and decorations should be stimulating, but not overwhelming; each room should have some reminder of the hospital's values.



Meeting spaces should set the tone for the seriousness and professionalism of the ideas being discussed. Round tables promote conversation; rectangular shapes are more conducive to presentation.

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6. Exit

The last impression is often the only one the visitor remembers. It's important to walk through the lobby in both directions, making sure that the spaces and signs are as friendly to people leaving as they are to those coming in.

Ideas and tips

It's not always possible to move walls to improve the tour, but changes to finishes, colors, details, and furniture can make a big difference. If you can't change the building you can adjust your tour and your script. It's vital to literally script the tour step by step. Take the entire management team and mark up a floor plan as you go. Think about you want to say and what you want the visitor to think. You'll know your building tours well when you find that you don't have to backtrack or skip spaces. No one should be getting lost or having to ask for directions because a good building explains itself with minimal signage. If you are building new, make sure that your architect creates a compelling tour.

Summary

Leaders should think through the *psychological* functions of each stage of the tour. What should their visitors feel and think at each stage of the tour? At the entry, the visitor should be led to feel welcome, impressed, and informed. Touring the work places, everyone should feel oriented and full of purpose; they should be thinking, "This is an organization that works efficiently and intelligently."