


The Dirty Secret about Assisted Living

 seniorlivingforesight.net/the-dirty-secret-about-assisted-living/

By John Gonzales

July 11, 2013

The dirty little secret about our business is that, despite a company's size, corporate mission, experience, capital resources, quality brochures and even flashy media, this industry lives and breathes based on the actions of a caregiver, making \$11.25 an hour, doing the right thing at 3 am...night after night.

As a 27 year veteran of the senior living industry, holding community level positions from Caregiver to Executive Director, and spending the last 13 years as COO for a mid-size national provider, I feel it's time to let the cat out of the bag. The dirty little secret about our business is that, despite a company's size, corporate mission, experience, capital resources, quality brochures and even flashy media, this industry lives and breathes based on the actions of a caregiver, making \$11.25 an hour, doing the right thing at 3 am...night after night. For years I've been asked for advice by friends who are seeking placement in a senior community for a loved one. Beyond my opinion of the potential community, the fees and charges, etc., I strongly advise my friends to request to meet with at least two of the community's third shift employees, even if it means a late night visit. I implore them to meet the staff members who will be assisting with medications, assisting with baths and bringing your loved their meals. Ask these folks how they like their jobs, how the process works, and ask them for their ideas for how things could be improved if they could make the decision. It's a given that as a prospective family member you will meet and spend time with the Marketing and Executive Director, and maybe even be introduced to one or more other staff members. If that isn't the case, your foul weather warning flags should be flapping in the breeze. But meeting community management should just be the "starting point" of your decision process. The critical "touch points" of your loved one's life will occur during bath time, meal time and potentially, when there's a problem, at 4 am.

These are the staff you should meet. Our business is dependent upon these individuals, and I've been blessed to know many who are dependable and dedicated and who accept this responsibility because it fulfills a need to live with a servant's heart. A few minutes spent speaking to these staff members will illuminate whether or not these qualities exist.

Unfortunately, all too often these positions are filled with individuals who do not possess these qualities. The fear for any family member should be the third shift employee who is battling their own personal demons, who has a full-time day job, and for whom caring for your loved one is a "second" or "side job." Remember that your tour of the community and meetings with the management and sales counselor are scheduled to accommodate your schedule – and theirs. Your loved one's time with the community staff will run 24 hours a day. When the phone rings (or e-call button is pushed) at 3am, who will be answering? It's worth finding out.

How would you react of a prospect wanted to come visit your community at 2 am in the morning? How would you feel if you discovered one of your hot prospects paid a late night visit?