



Lesson Learned

By Debby Burgett

Relationships Matter – Lesson Learned #1

Values, Vision and Cooperation

Building an empowered team to honor choice and individuality of elders is not instantaneous but is a process over time. To begin, every team must have a clearly stated vision identifying the ultimate outcome, and every vision statement being an expression of the values of the organization. The values of an organization and the vision statement are two key ingredients in building a framework that allows cooperation among a group of people that is newly forming or learning new information. I also have found to be true that cooperation is a very basic element that allows a group of people to begin to build relationships that will eventually lead to an empowering team. Leading and being part of any growing team requires cooperation among all and the ability to cultivate relationships.

Relationship Characteristics

None of us can succeed without the help of others, and we all depend on others to help us arrive to our destination. John C. Maxwell has identified five characteristics in identifying a solid relationship in his book [*Relationships 101*](#): respect, shared experiences, trust, reciprocity, and mutual enjoyment. Respect is seen as the foundation of a relationship with placing valuing on other people, but you cannot build a relationship with a person you do not know. It will take time to have shared experiences. For any relationship or team to thrive there must be reciprocity. A person cannot always be the giver nor should one person always be receiving. Relationships and teamwork are all about give and take. Maxwell's book is a great quick read and is very applicable for any person in any industry wishing to build relationships and create teamwork.

Step by Step

When building a team start with communicating a simple vision statement that embraces the values of the organization and have this be the framework in which all decisions are made. Secondly, allow for opportunities or even create opportunities in which the team can earn mutual respect and can build on shared experiences. Thirdly, trust will come over time and most of all remember to have FUN! Celebrate the successes!



Something Must Be Done – Lesson Learned #2

How do we create change within ourselves and in the organization that we work? How do we influence those around us so that they will embrace change? What is the catalyst that causes us to change our thinking and behavior? According to Chet Holmes, author of the [Ultimate Sales Machine](#), "It is only when we can clearly communicate the problem that people will stand up and say, "Something must be done!"

It is NOT an Institution

I can remember being the Administrator of a "traditional" nursing home when a peer referred to *my* nursing home as an "institution". I was offended that she would use the word "institution" to describe a place that I was very proud to be part of. For me, the word institution should be used to describe a prison or a facility for those that could "not function" in society because they were likely to harm themselves. In my mind, this did not at all describe the place where I worked tirelessly each day of the week. Every one of us on staff worked hard to provide good care and our surveys reflected this. The vast majority of our staff, residents, and families were satisfied and our census reflected this as well. The organization as a whole and in particular this home was respected and had a reputation of being "one of the best". How dare she call *my* nursing home an "institution"!

Challenge My Thinking

This peer did not persuade me to challenge my thinking and see *my* nursing home as she saw it. Why did she "ruffle my feathers"? She did because she saw a problem that I did not recognize to be a problem. Had she taken the time to communicate what she saw as the problem, help me feel the pain and describe to me "*what's at stake*" then she would have had the potential to capture my heart.

I am Persuaded

How I thought about *my* nursing home began to change a short time after the encounter with this peer, and it was not because of anything that she had persuaded me to be true. I had the opportunity to view a short video about a nursing home in Tupelo, Mississippi. This video told the story of [Mississippi Methodist Senior Services](#) and their journey in a new model of care called [The Green House® Project](#). I sat in my office and watched intently as this video showed the control their residents had over their day, and I am became aware of what little control our residents had during their day. Their residents had all private bedrooms and baths, no particular time to wake in the morning and there was such a sense of "knowing" among the residents and staff. Our residents had very little privacy in their semi-private rooms, had the "pleasure" of using a community shower down the hall, and were one of 120 residents. Their residents were enjoying their favorite foods in a residential styled kitchen and dining room surrounded by their loved ones. We started bringing our residents to the dining hall at 7 a.m. so that they could all eat breakfast by 8 a.m. In addition, very few of our family members ever showed up for meals much less partook in the meal being served. My vision was beginning to transition to a place



where control and decision-making was not at the level of the administrator, but with the residents or those working closest to them. I knew after watching this video that there could be a place where residents would not only be known by name, but people caring for them would know and honor their preferences, likes and dislikes. This would be a place where residents would be thriving, self-determining individuals!

Influence Change

Because of this video, I now saw the problem, felt the pain, understood what was at stake, and was ready to take action! My heart had been captured, and I saw the need to change an institution that I had once embraced. There was now a better way of taking care of elders and something was being done!

Therefore, the next time you want to influence change at work or even your personal life try following these three steps: 1. Clearly state the problem 2. Feel the pain 3. Explain what is at stake.

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