



Playing the Health Card: Why Aren't We Doing This?

By Susan Saldibar

Why aren't senior living communities selling "health and wellness"?

In an industry hungry to learn more about what will motivate and engage a new generation of workers, why doesn't health play a bigger role? After all, providing a deeper bench of health-centered services and programs seems, in so many ways, to be a natural fit for health conscious millennials. And aren't they the people you want?

Can "health" become your winning card?

I spoke recently with Carolyn Reynolds, Director of Marketing, Senior Living, at [Sodexo](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) on the topics of workforce engagement and quality of life, both areas where Sodexo excels. The discussion moved to the importance of a health and wellness to many millennials.

Health and wellbeing of your employees is an important component to the success of any organization, especially senior living. Sort of that winning card you play to lure talent away from the competition.

Senior living communities are great at selling a healthy environment to residents and their families, with terms like "healthy dining" or "air purification for health" or "health and fitness classes". But what about prospective employees? The ones who are now mandated to get health insurance and would love to keep costs down?

Leveraging health as an amenity.

"Health and wellness goes beyond just diet and exercise," says Carolyn. "it's an integrated approach which impacts day to day living for everyone, including prospective care givers."

Carolyn suggests that we look at how health impacts day to day living and how it can be positioned as an advantage to prospective caregivers.

1. **Environment:** Creating a healthy environment is more than picking up trash and opening up windows. Sodexo recommends promoting an environment where health is the driving force. Of course air and water quality are key, as well as using lighting that aids vision and reduces eye strain. But how about bringing more of the outside into the communities? Gardens, waterfalls, living walls and aerponics; all can contribute to make the environment one you want to work in.
2. **Personal Fitness:** Giving not only residents but staff members opportunities to stay in shape is important. Providing discounts at the local gym and encouraging them to take walks on their lunch breaks with the residents keeps them engaged. And it helps them get and stay in shape during their work hours.
3. **Healthy Nutrition:** Include your team in health and nutrition seminars. Make healthy snacks available on a regular basis. Sponsor fitness challenges for employees and residents.
4. **Emotional Wellbeing:** Often when a new employee comes “on board” he or she is given a perfunctory orientation and then left to navigate the early days on their own. Caring for employee wellbeing is just as important as caring for new residents. Mentoring, providing support to reduce burn-out, and providing programs that encourage employees to get together regularly, during and after hours, can provide them with an overall positive work/life experience.
5. **Lifestyle Health:** Flexible shifts, online training at their convenience, and getting employees more involved in navigating their own career paths.

This is all great, but no one knows about it!

The problem is that all those great benefits available to employees in senior living are not getting the exposure they need to attract and engage new workers.

Senior living community operators are great at promoting the care they provide to residents. So maybe it's time to turn some of that spotlight on promoting the things they are doing to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees. Why not put all of these great “amenities” out there; on websites, HR pages, as well as brochures and advertising?

Of course, not all communities have good health and quality of life programs (that's where partnering with providers like Sodexo can help). But for those who do, there is an opportunity to get health conscious millennials to take a second look at senior care, before they opt for less stressful, but less rewarding “behind the counter” jobs.

Wouldn't that be a great step forward?



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