



The Secret to Finding Team Members with Hospitality Hearts

By Susan Saldibar

I just asked my 24-year old daughter and three of her female friends who dropped by the following question: “For about the same wage, would you rather work behind the counter in a store or fast food restaurant or work in a senior living home, helping seniors live a better life?”

To give them credit, they took a moment to think about it. One even said, “Oh wow.” But, the answer was unanimous, “Behind a counter.” I pressed for reasons. In a nutshell the response was, “I love my grandma but to be around elderly people all day, it might be depressing.” She added, “But I think it’s really awesome, people who can do that kind of work.”

I “conducted” this totally unscientific poll the day after talking with Lynne Adame, Director of Brand and Communications for [Sodexo](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner). Lynne, I am almost positive, wouldn’t bat an eyelash at my experience. She would probably say, “Nothing wrong with them. They just don’t have ‘hospitality hearts’.”

How do you go about finding hospitality hearts?

Lynne is one of the original architects of Sodexo’s CARES program: Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Enthusiasm, and Service. And there are real concepts behind each. This is a real program with real objectives and impressive outcomes.

Sodexo's Healthcare segment began its journey back in 2005, which involved basically throwing out the old employee binders and starting from the ground up to determine the key characteristics of people "who can do that kind of work". CARES was a result of the task force's findings.

Without giving away the "secret sauce" here is what Lynne stresses senior living leadership needs to do to find those hospitality hearts:

- **Toss old employee recruitment manuals and onboarding manuals.** Be brave. Start over.
- **Get senior management on board.** "There is a direct line between how the CEO treats front line employees and how they treat residents," says Lynne. "To change the culture, you have to get up to the highest possible level. If there is a Board, get the board involved."
- **Change the way you interview.** The CARES program, for example, shows prospective employees a video that depicts caring people in various senior settings. "We found that the video does a great job of separating those who may excel in this work from those who won't," says Lynne. "Some will say, 'That's a little too warm and fuzzy for me'. And we let them go on their way. You have to be prepared to say 'Thank you and goodbye'."
- **Conduct a detailed behavioral interview.** "We put them through a series of creative scenarios to gauge how they react and what actions they might be likely to take," Lynne tells me. "Once again, this is a good way to weed out those who aren't likely to go the distance." Another thank you and goodbye.
- **Orientations are more hands on and less sit and listen.** "This is why it is so important for senior management to be on board," says Lynne. "They need to take an active part in the culture and lead by example."

By the time orientation is over, according to Lynne, there may be a bit more fall out. But, for the most part those who make the cut are well positioned to thrive.

The question is: Who CARES at the top?

The real key to the CARES program lies in the training programs. Without giving away any of the inner workings, the Service Spirit Training program Lynne describes is anything but conventional. Intensive and extensive, it works with new employees to help them further develop their service-oriented talents and hits repeatedly on each of the key behaviors that comprise the CARES acronym.

There is much more to the training piece that cries out for a second article. But, after speaking with Lynne about finding and recruiting individuals with "hospitality hearts", it got me thinking about what would happen if we weeded out of those in senior management who find all this too "warm and fuzzy".

How many hospitality hearts do you think we'd find sitting in our CEO or Executive Director offices? Are they people who "can do that kind of work?"



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