



Once You've Got Them, How to Hang On to Them

By Susan Saldibar

I had a great conversation a few weeks ago with Lynne Adame, Director of Brand and Communications for [Sodexo](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner). Lynne is one of the original architects of a program created for Sodexo employees called the Sodexo CARES program. It is used to help Sodexo identify, recruit, train and retain individuals with “hospitality hearts”.

Lynne sat down with me to share the philosophy and some of the techniques used in the CARES program. Anyone who wants to hire caring individuals for their community could use some of these pointers. At the very least, it gets you thinking.

So how do you train and reinforce a hospitality heart?

In my first article about the CARES program, Lynne described how they go about attracting and recruiting those unique individuals with “hospitality hearts”, more specifically, how they weed out those who are not comfortable with a warm, fuzzy approach. Where the rubber meets the road, however, is in the Sodexo CARES training program. After hearing about it, I can see why it has been so well received.

Here's how it works:

Focus on Service Spirit (FOSS): This includes 10 modules that cover all aspects of customer service. One module is delivered each week and includes a video segment illustrating the key points of the session topic, an instructor-led discussion, and a learning experience. All are designed to involve the employees in the learning process and lead to buy-in – in 30 minutes!

CARES Training: Using the six modules in the series, (Introduction and one module for each CARES Behavior), each is designed to last 30-45 minutes. The unit managers work with their employees, both new and veteran, to further develop their existing service-oriented talents. The purpose is for them to

gradually become a habitual part of their daily routines. The ultimate goal is to make Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Enthusiasm, and Service default responses when interacting with residents.

Empowering people to be their “best selves”? How do you do that?

Lynne explains the process, “We ask our team members, for example, ‘what does “compassion mean to you?’ We help them explore that attribute within themselves as well as their own behaviors that exhibit compassion, such as listening, body language, helping someone without being asked and so forth.”

“The CARES program encourages people to listen to their best instincts and empowers them to respond to the needs of residents, staff and family members,” says Lynne. “You model, through your own behavior, how you want them to respond and think of themselves. So, when someone says, for example, ‘I’m just a housekeeper or I’m just a dishwasher, we tell them, ‘You are so much more than that. You are in the forefront, making sure everything is clean and sanitary so that our residents are safe. You are a very important part of creating a great resident experience.’”

So, the entire process is more than a training course; it’s about creating a culture of caring, as Lynne describes it. The messages are reinforced through regular team “huddles” with on-the-spot questions, such as “What does respect mean?” and sharing of CARES stories by all members of the staff, top down.

Treating great employees like rock stars. Maybe that’s the difference.

But the program doesn’t stop there. Not by a long shot. Managers and other unit team members are encouraged to submit stories about how their employees demonstrated one or more CARES attributes to improve the life of a resident.

Each Region is responsible for submitting the best CARES stories for consideration, which are then reviewed by a Senior Leadership panel for the segment. They rotate the selection committee, to give each member of the leadership team the opportunity to review examples from the field. The segment CARES winners are recognized at the Seniors Segment Cornerstones of Care ceremony, in addition to being submitted through Sodexo for national recognition. Wow. Who wouldn’t love that?

“The winners are Sodexo rock stars,” says Lynne. “And they are treated as such at our conference,” she adds. There, they are wined and dined and officially recognized for their contributions to Sodexo and to those they serve.

Clearly this program has made a huge difference at Sodexo. It showed up in their survey results, with employee engagement scores exceeding expectations. As for their clients, Lynne tells me community administration and staff members appreciate their support staff’s dedication to residents. .

“Our team members’ ability to engage meaningfully with residents supports our clients’ missions,” says Lynne. “It has made a real impact throughout our client communities and supports Sodexo’s promise to improve Quality of Life. Of all of the things I’ve been associated with in my career, CARES is what I am most proud of.”



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