



Why 93 Out of 100 People Won't Talk to Us

By Susan Saldibar

At the recent Senior Living Innovation Forum, Kian Saneii, CEO and Founder of [Independa](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) asked the crowd, “By show of hands, how many of you think we are in an innovative industry?” While the camera never pans to the audience, you can see the response just by the look on Kian’s face. Not a lot to count.

So why are we smothering innovation instead of giving it room to grow?

The answer to that question has a few moving parts.

First is our understanding of the definition of “innovation”. After sharing the official Merriam-Webster definition, Kian adds his own: “a practical, possibly novel solution to a problem”. The operative word here is “solution”. He points to lots of things, particularly technology, which can be interesting, unique and creative without solving a problem. And he shows the audience some hilarious “bad ideas” visuals to make his point.

The main problem, however, is our chronic focus on actions rather than outcomes, according to Kian. That’s what kills innovation. Why do we do it? “We do it because it is easier,” he tells the audience. Instead here is the formula Kian suggests senior living communities should focus on:

Beliefs > Behavior > Actions > Outcomes

The idea, which makes a lot of sense, is that if you focus on beliefs and on behavior that stems from those beliefs, then by the time you get to “actions” they will be more innovative, helping to solve problems in more unique ways.

What better example to use than that of Blockbuster and Netflix. Both saw streaming video coming. But Netflix added “belief” and “behavior” to guide their actions. The Netflix CEO went to his board and told them about his belief that, once streaming media content got stronger, people would want to use it to access TV shows and movies. Blockbuster, as you may recall, opted to add other retail amenities and accessories to their stores. So, Netflix identified a belief as well as anticipated behavior. Everyone knows who won that market.

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And, Kian gives even more great examples, Amazon’s Echo being one. He makes the bold assertion that Amazon has solved more senior living problems than communities have. The Amazon Echo is enabling all generations to be able to order things, get help, and obtain remote and local services to enable seniors to stay in their homes longer. He challenges the industry leaders to think about that. Where does that leave senior living?

“93 out of 100 people who would normally need our services aren’t even going to talk to us. We’re competing for the 7 that do,” Kian states in the video. “But if that turns to 94, 95, 96 because of technology that allows high touch, high tech, how is that going to affect the industry?”

Good question.

The key is to create room for innovation.

For senior living operators being squeezed by competition and chronic <90% occupancy doldrums, finding the room in an organization to grow a culture of innovation isn’t easy. Too many fires to put out, too many immediate issues to attend to.

That needs to change, Kian urges. “It’s not about what ‘must’ be done today,” he says. Operators need to somehow make room in their busy environments for creativity and great solutions to grow. Also, he reminds leaders that great ideas come from everywhere. Not to be hierarchical about them. Don’t be afraid to fail. As Bill Gates told us “Success is not a good teacher.”

Nor is culture a strategy. It goes much deeper and must come from the top down, Kian tells the audience. “You can’t sit there and dictate, ‘We’re going to be innovative, starting Tuesday’,” he says.



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