



This Gives Activity Directors a Big Break

By Jane Kincaid

Walk into senior care community, one can immediately get a sense of its vibe by watching staff and residents interact and seeing how happy residents and staff members look. A lot of factors play into that vibe. In addition to residents who are satisfied and well cared for, staff members who feel appreciated and empowered to live out their passion play an important role.

Interactions play a part too. While residents and staff are connected via daily one-on-one interactions, activities in which they both participate allow them to immerse themselves in something different, learn from one another, and grow.

The Heart of the Team

At the heart of any activity is the activity director. Also known as life enrichment directors, these individuals have a mission that is all-inclusive for every resident, staff member, family member, and volunteer. They are project managers, entertainers, creators, and event planners. They look for the strengths in residents, cheer on fellow teammates in a competitive event, and tap into the creativity and imagination of everyone.

“Recreation and activity professionals play a crucial role in the lives of the clients that we serve,” says Alisa Tagg, president of the National Association of Activity Professionals, in the April 2018 issue of *Activity Director Today*.

The all-inclusive approach of the activity director also has to do with education, says Tagg. “Activity professionals who remain active and current in their educational pursuits are knowledgeable with cutting-edge approaches and ensure both purpose-driven and meaningful experiences for all residents,” she says. “These learned skills serve as a vital role for each health care community’s interdisciplinary team; a true and necessary asset to the company and its clients.”

For activity directors, sometimes a new skill includes taking up a new tool or system that not only enhances the lives of residents and staff, but also improves efficiency. That’s because time is one thing that activity directors could use more of: time during the day to spend with residents; time to better plan the month ahead; and time to look for new and interesting ideas to engage and challenge staff, residents, and families. While extra time carries benefits, in a senior care setting, it is often elusive.

No Hours to Spare

“I am sure there is not a single activities director that has hours to spare at the end of the day or week,” says Miles McCollum, account executive with [LifeShare Technologies](#), a Senior Housing Forum partner. LifeShare offers a web-based community platform designed to keep residents in senior care communities and those aging in place stay connected with their community.

McCollum explains that LifeShare client sites saw a potential in the CommunityShare platform—one that could help activity directors improve their efficiencies and save time. And so the company set out to create a better solution for them. “We realized that if we were going to build a system for healthcare staff (primarily activity directors) to use, it had to be simple, easy to use, and something they could do on the fly,” he says. “If LifeShare created more work for staff, if our calendars were more difficult than previous systems, if posting an announcement took more than a few seconds, we would not be a popular company within the senior living industry. Our goal is to equip the professionals with the tools they want and need.”

Design on the Go

The platform now includes many features that the LifeShare admin can set to occur automatically (activities on the calendar and digital signage, Announcements, Therapeutic Music, Birthdays, Videos, etc.).

For example, one time-saving feature is the ability to quickly add a variety of backgrounds to a specific slide, McCollum notes. “All they have to do is add their text. You don’t have to spend hours trying to create an appealing slide or wait for someone else to add it for you. However those who do have a design person on staff, or if corporate wants to create backgrounds, there is still the option to start from scratch and design whatever slide and background you want.”

Think Smart TV, but smarter, and friendlier. Says McCollum: “Activity directors can log into their computer and create monthly, weekly, and daily activity plans, menus, birthday announcements, even digital photo albums of residents participating in activities. These are all displayed on the center’s televisions and in the mobile app.”

More than Design

And that’s not all. McCollum notes that on-demand services are also available, including music playlists, games, and more. If getting residents to show for activities and events is a concern, the CommunityShare platform can make phone calls to a resident’s room and even send text messages. Or in some cases, a family member requests to be notified prior to an activity starting, CommunityShare notifications can do that too.

Most would agree that a more efficient use of time can be realized by better planning, and this is key for activity directors, who not only create the plans for the day but are in charge of communicating it to everyone in the building.

The end result is a sense of community and togetherness for not only residents but also to family members and visitors of the community. All visible on a device that everyone uses—a television screen. Now that’s inclusive.



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