



A Former ED Spills on Why He Joined This Company

By Susan Saldibar

I had an opportunity to talk recently with Jerry Billman, an engineer and technologist who, one day found himself in an Executive Director position at a new assisted living/memory care community. That gives Jerry a pretty interesting “insider” take on technology. And it’s one that Jacquie Brennan, Vice President of [Vigil Health Solutions](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) thought I might find interesting as well. But wait, there’s more. Jerry is now Business Development Officer for Vigil. I’m intrigued and ready to learn more.

Would you like to become our executive director?

First of all, how does someone go from being an engineer to an ED? Turns out it’s not quite as crazy as it sounds. Jerry had already worked with developers of senior living communities, so he was no stranger to them in terms of the physical aspects. On one particular project, however, his hands-on involvement impressed the owners. So much so, in fact, that they invited him to join their team as ED for the newly built community.

Jerry was just as surprised as anyone. “I knew nothing about healthcare at the time,” Jerry tells me. “But I knew how to manage and had good people skills. And it was an opportunity to take a leadership role in an industry that was just beginning to experience dramatic changes and growth,” he adds. So, why not?

As someone who worked with senior housing developers, Jerry had some experience with call systems. Most of them were pretty basic, with a single master station located at a central location. “So, you’d see staff hanging out at central area, waiting around for orders,” he said. “I always wondered why they weren’t able to communicate with them as they walked the floors, caring for residents,” he added.

Jerry was a tough customer. And Vigil never said “no”.

That’s why Jerry was pleasantly surprised at what he found in the Vigil systems installed at his new community. “First of all, it was totally turnkey. They were with us during the entire process, from design and installation, all the way to staff training and customer support,” he said. “And, we were always dealing with Vigil on a one to one basis. No distributors in between,” he added. As an ED with an engineering background, Jerry wasn’t always the easiest client. He liked to challenge Vigil. “It was never “no”, it was always, ‘let’s see what we can do’.” That impressed the former engineer.

Jerry was also impressed at how Vigil strives to keep the community’s best interest in mind. “So they’ll hardwire certain stationary devices to save the community from having to buy batteries,” he tells me. “And yet they are equally quick to deploy wireless devices that allow residents to move them around. They go beyond just checking boxes to offering solutions that really fit the resident,” he says.

As a technologist and former ED, Jerry likes the fact that Vigil “never sits still.”

I asked Jerry how he uses his past experiences as an ED to market Vigil Health Solutions? He tells me that he often falls back on the knowledge accumulated as an ED. “Many adult children aren’t familiar with mom’s movement patterns and habits, when they admit her into an assisted living community,” Jerry tells me. “That’s where the Vigil system helps, by monitoring things like bed restlessness, etc. We often discover issues that the family wasn’t aware of. For instance, that restlessness could be the result of frequent bathroom visits meaning a possible urinary tract infection. If it happens in the evening, maybe it could be a sign of cognitive issues. Either way, it can be checked out and treated.”

Jerry continues to be impressed with the Vigil development model and hands-on approach with their clients. “When I was an operator, I always liked the fact that they never sit still,” he recalls. “The result is a lot of great new products, such as Vigil Mobile, Vigil Connect, GPS SmartSole™, and so on. If it makes sense, they don’t hesitate. They do it.”



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