



Don't Tell This CEO It's "Just a Table" Unless You Want to Pay the Price

By Wendy D'Alessandro

If Randy Schellenberg could grant one wish this holiday season, it would be for long-term care CEOs to take a walk in the shoes of their residents' caregivers. If they could, he promises, they'd encounter some of the most common challenges facing their industry.

Why caregivers' shoes and not residents'? By walking in caregivers' shoes, Randy says, they'll experience what it's like to "make do" with whatever resources are available to provide the best possible care for residents. They'll see that functionally designed dining chairs and tables, though not shiny and fun like a new piece of exercise equipment, can create safe, dignified, and happy experiences for residents at every level of care.

Take Brenda and her group of friends in assisted living. They had been eating meals together for years until an injury had put Brenda in a wheelchair. She could no longer sit with her friends because the table height was too low and the wheelchair wouldn't fit underneath. In an instant, Brenda had lost the social, emotional, and nutritional benefits of enjoying a good meal and good conversation with her friends.

Stories like this, Randy says, are why his company, [ComforTek](#) (a Senior Housing Forum Partner) designed the Butterfly Table.

Everyone's Welcome at the Butterfly Table

Each Butterfly Table consists of either one, two or four individual table tops that, though connected to one base, can be adjusted up, down, forward and backward, depending on each person's needs. In Brenda's case, a Butterfly Table would have allowed her and her friends to each raise their table tops to their preferred heights, allowing their valued mealtime tradition to continue.

Designed for Dignity

One of ComforTek's customers is a multi-site assisted living organization that now requires each community to have at least one Butterfly Table onsite. "The table brings respect back to the person," Randy says. "It functions in a way that doesn't force people to eat in a manner that's embarrassing."

For example, Butterfly Tables:

- **Promote self-feeding & enhance independence.** Karen Jones, Executive Director at Sara Vista LTC, saw firsthand how the Butterfly Table enabled residents to feed themselves. "We had a gentleman who was about 6 feet 2 inches tall sitting at a table with a lady who is barely 5 feet tall. Both were in wheelchairs and both were struggling to eat on their own with a table that was the same height for both of them. We have had the [Butterfly] Table in use for the past 3 weeks and our residents who are using this table are able to feed themselves because all four residents at this table have it adjusted to their height and this has enhanced their independence."
- **Improve the mealtime experience, for both the caregiver and the resident.** Butterfly Tables are designed with extra space between each table top so caregivers can pull up a chair between two residents and provide assistance with feeding. This proximity allows caregivers to be more thoughtful and engaging, which results in residents eating more and getting the nutrition they need.
- **Nurture Family Meals.** Family members, even the grandkids, can sit at the same table as their parent or grandparent and everyone can raise their tops to the height he or she needs.
- **Increase Socialization.** By providing a functional table for all, no one is prevented from participating in activities with their peers. Residents seated in both standard chairs and wheelchairs can gather around a Butterfly Table to play cards, work on art projects or stuff envelopes for the fundraising event.

Somewhere in every senior service organization's brand promise or mission statement is a commitment to providing residents with opportunities to thrive and live purposeful lives at every level of care. Making good on that commitment doesn't require a grand gesture. Rather, it's the basics -- like functional chairs and tables -- that create the most value for everyone.



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