Are You Working On The Right Problem Or The Wrong Problem?

By Susan Saldibar

Problems are complicated. They don't come out of thin air, nor are they solved that way. Often, all we see is the impact of problems. But they have "root causes" which can be tricky to identify. Nowhere is this more evident than in senior care. And the problems can be different with each prospective resident.

I spoke recently with Darren Mathis, Founder and CEO of LincWare (a Senior Housing Forum partner). We talked about a book called Gap Selling by Keenan. A key concept described in the book is "PIC" which stands for Problem, Impact, and Root Cause. Darren was so impressed with the book and the PIC concept that he thought it would be a good idea to share it with those who run senior living communities. Mainly because PIC makes a lot of sense in this complex environment. It can be a more effective way for any sales and marketing folks who really want their messaging to resonate with prospective residents and their families. "According to the book, it isn't enough to identify the problem," Darren tells me. "You need to go deeper. You need to look through the lens of your prospective resident. That's how the 'PIC' method really helps to identify the underlying cause. That's how you can really connect with a prospect."

Darren and I spoke about how the concept might work for a senior living community sales professionals looking to connect with a prospective resident and their family. Here's one example:

- Problem: Mom is unable to live on her own and take care of herself.

- Impact: She has left the stove on a few times and has fallen, unable to get up.

- Root cause: Early onset dementia, limited mobility and strength. She has no support or help when she needs it.

The key is identifying the root cause. That is where you can effectively carve out a path to your solution. By doing so you resolve the problem. "Looking through the lens of a prospective resident, you might talk about the dangers associated with leaving the stove on and how a slip and fall can happen in the middle of the night when an at-home caregiver isn't there," Darren says. "By providing a solution that addresses the root cause – mom has dementia and no support when needed – you're addressing the cause of the problem which, ultimately solves the problem," he adds. Makes a lot of sense.

And the same PIC methodology can be used to solve internal problems on the administrative and sales side of your community. This made me think about an earlier article I wrote about a senior living community operator who was able to recoup $3,000 per month which was being lost due to early move-outs where paperwork was never signed. Here's how that "problem" could be looked at using the PIC concept.

- Problem: Unsigned Early Move-out Exhibit

- Impact: Revenue hit ($3k/month) to bottom line

- Root cause: Disorganized paper documents, no accountability

In this case, if you simply look at the "problem" your solution might be to reprimand your staff or just warn your sales folks to "make sure they get the early move-out paperwork signed". But if you look at the root cause, disorganization of documents and no accountability, you might start to look at how you can better organize your process so that there are checkpoints along the way to ensure that no document goes unsigned or gets lost. So instead of blaming a team member, you are making some adjustments to a broken process.

Actually, you can take this PIC methodology and apply it to just about any problem and come up with a clearer picture of where to focus your efforts to fix it.

"Back when we developed Admit+ I hadn't read Gap Selling," Darren tells me. "But by talking with sales and administrative managers in senior living communities we were able to identify the root causes of so many admissions issues. At the end of the day, almost all of them pointed to an outdated, paper-based process. So we focused our development efforts on automating it."

Darren urges anyone in marketing or sales to read Gap Selling. And you can also check out Darren's latest videos on the Admit+ solution here.