

Executive White Paper Series, February 2017

# **3 Ways to Help Improve Employee Recruiting & Retention in Senior Living**

Perhaps the biggest challenge that senior living providers face today is a shortage of qualified staff. That is important because numerous studies say the leading indicator for quality of care in senior living is a stable, well-trained work force.

This will become even more difficult due to our rapidly aging population and the sheer number of seniors that will require services. Adding to these challenges, senior living jobs are typically associated with high stress and low pay resulting in high turnover. Because of these factors and in order to provide high quality care, senior living providers will need to improve employee training, compensation, and communication to create a well-prepared, high-quality work force. This white paper outlines three ways to create a staff that is prepared for the growing number of seniors expected to enter senior living communities.

### 1. Adopt a Culture of Service and Hospitality that Includes a Commitment to Ongoing Training and Development

Your employees are the frontline to the residents, and employee engagement contributes heavily to resident and family satisfaction. Thus many communities are moving towards creating a culture of service and hospitality.



How can you do this? It is important that you talk about the culture at your community and make it an everyday focus. Lifespace Communities, a major senior living provider based in Des Moines, Iowa with 12 CCRCs throughout seven states, does this by holding daily staff huddles.

Engage in conversations around how employees can commit to the community's mission and empower staff to make these decisions. This will make a great impact to the level of connectedness employees feel to the community and enhance the quality of care your community provides.

### 2. Improve Compensation through Higher Wages, Benefits, and Bonuses that Recognize Employees for the Value They Bring to the Community

Low wages and benefits are also a challenge to the senior living industry. In 2015, direct care workers in long-term care industries received an average hourly wage of \$11.21, which is in the bottom quarter of all U.S. wages,

### Industry Trends

#### 1.2 Million Senior Living Workers Needed by 2025

According to Argentum's report, "Getting to 2025: A Senior Living Roadmap" the projected increase in senior living employment is 46% from about 753,000 today to 1,100,000 in 2025. Specifically, the senior living industry will require more than 460,000 nursing assistants and home health aides and about 25,600 registered nurses. However, because of employee turnover, the senior living industry will actually need to recruit 1.2 million new employees.

#### High Turnover

Senior living staffing is such a significant topic that one of the National Center for Assisted Living's (NCAL) three year quality initiatives focus (through 2018) is staff stability with a goal to keep turnover below 40% for nursing and direct-care staff.<sup>1</sup>

according to Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics. The average hourly wage in the United States across all occupations was \$23.23, more than double direct care workers' average wage.



Holland Home has implemented a unique compensation program for their hospice and home care that has been successful in reducing employee turnover. They started this program in 2011, and it specifically targets employees that are difficult to recruit and retain: nurses and therapists. While the nationwide industry turnover rate for hospice is 20% and 19.25% for

home care, Holland Homes' turnover is 13.86% for hospice and 9.43% for home care. Each year, they rolled out this compensation program to a different target group starting with the frontline nurses and therapists.

Additionally, data from the BLS's National Compensation Survey showed that direct care workers' access to employment benefits varied depending on whether they were employed full-time or part-time. According to data from the ACS, 48.8% of personal care workers and 37.6% of nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week) in 2014. Over 90 percent of full-time direct care workers received paid vacation, paid holidays, and health insurance in 2015; but fewer workers received paid sick leave, life insurance, and retirement benefits.

### 3. Utilize Technology that Can Enhance Employee Communication, and Reinforce Branding and Culture Across an Entire Enterprise

Another challenge that large senior living providers that have multiple sites face today is how to communicate effectively with their employees. Our research from talking to providers show that companies have on average only 30% of email addresses for their employees, making communication even more challenging.



### The Effects of High Staff Turnover

In 2012, turnover for all employees in AL communities was 30.2%. Nursing staff turnover was 31.4%.<sup>2</sup> Nursing includes Director of Nursing/Wellness & Director of Resident Services, Staff Registered Nurse, Licensed Practical Nurse, Certified Nurse Assistant, Resident Caregiver (non-certified), Medication Aide and Other Nursing Staff.

According to a Holleran white paper, "Employee Engagement: A Strategic Game Changer for Senior Living Providers" the average cost of turnover per employee is calculated at 50% of the employee's salary.<sup>3</sup>

### What Are Some Reasons for High Turnover in Senior Living?

Many senior living jobs have relatively low paying wages and are very stressful. According to the 2011-2012 National Survey of Customer and Employee Satisfaction in Nursing Homes, a top driver for employee recommendations was assistance with job stress.

In SNFs, the positions often come with large patient loads and long hours that can lead to burnout. Although jobs in AL/IL may be less stressful because patients have more independence, they can be boring and used as a stepping stone.

In a recent survey to Touchtown's customers, we asked, "What is the #1 thing you want to accomplish this year?" The top response (47%) was better communication.

One major provider with over 90 communities is currently in the middle of a major employee communication initiative designed to impact employee morale and turnover. They are using Touchtown's Enterprise Content Manager to enhance staff communication to the thousands of employees that do not have email addresses by putting digital signage in the staff break rooms at all of their communities. For example, their HR department can communicate company-wide benefits changes with a video from the CEO shown on digital signage in the staff break rooms at all of their communities, and blend it with a local posting for a shift change request.

These more efficient processes will help senior living employees feel more connected, and thus improve employee retention and satisfaction. ■

### Action Steps

Touchtown is actively working with its 1,200+ communities across North America to utilize technology to reduce employee turnover and lay the foundation for the long term success of the industry.

If you have any data or insights on this topic, please email: [abartko@touchtown.us](mailto:abartko@touchtown.us).

### About Touchtown

Touchtown is the #1 provider of resident and family engagement technology in senior living. Over 1,200 senior living communities throughout North America use Touchtown to unify and simplify the way they engage with residents, family, staff, and prospects. Touchtown offers powerful web-based content management software, and technology to easily deliver that content on television channels, digital signs, tablets, kiosks, print, and websites. Touchtown brings senior living communities together, improving resident satisfaction, increasing census, and driving down operating costs.

### About Senior Living 100

The Senior Living 100 Leadership Conference is exclusively for C-level executives from leading AL/IL and CCRC organizations. To register for the 2017 Senior Living 100 Conference, taking place March 5-8 at The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples, please visit [www.seniorliving100.com](http://www.seniorliving100.com).

### References

- 1 <http://www.iadvanceseniorcare.com/news-item/ncal-extendsassisted-living-quality-goals>, n.d.
- 2 National Center of Assisted Living, 2014
- 3 Minnesota Nurse Association, 2013