

Developing and Maintaining a Positive Family Member Culture in Your Community Setting

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Why it matters....

- Family perception affects resident satisfaction
- Impacts staff morale and retention
- Regulatory expectations (CMS, state requirements)

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What word comes to mind when
you think of
“family involvement”
in your facility?

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Understanding Family Dynamics

- Families are under stress
- Common emotional states: guilt, grief, anxiety, denial
- Multiple family members = multiple personalities, roles, opinions

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Roadblocks to Positive Culture

- Poor communication
- Lack of trust
- Inconsistent staff messaging
- Unclear boundaries
- Feeling ignored or excluded

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What is Positive Family Culture?

- Families feel informed, involved, respected
- Staff feel supported, not undermined
- There's a system of communication and feedback
- Conflicts are addressed early

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Know who is the “Boss”

- You are in business to provide care and services to meet resident and family needs, and you can only do that if you know what it is they want.
- When you truly listen to your them, they let you know what they want and how you can provide those services.
- Never forget that the residents/families pay our salary and makes your job possible.

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Be a good listener

- Take the time to identify resident/family needs by asking questions and concentrating on what they are really saying.
- Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel.

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Be a good listener

- Beware of making assumptions - thinking you intuitively know what the a resident/family wants.
- Do you know what three things are most important to your individual residents/families?

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Identify and anticipate needs

- Most families don't see your community as an actual business.
- They don't actually feel like they are buying a product.
- They are buying good feelings and solutions to problems.
- Most family needs are emotional rather than logical.

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Identify and anticipate needs

- The more you know your families, the better you become at anticipating their needs.
- Communicate regularly so that you are aware of problems or upcoming needs.

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Make them feel important and appreciated

- Treat them as individuals.
- Always use their name and find ways to compliment them, but be sincere. People value sincerity. It creates good feeling and trust.

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Make them feel important and appreciated

- Families are very sensitive and know whether or not you really care about them. Thank them every time you get a chance.
- Be sure that your body language conveys sincerity. Be sure your actions match what you are saying.

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Help families understand your systems/process

- Your community/organization may have the world's best systems for getting things done, but if families don't understand them, they can get confused, impatient and angry.

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Help families understand your systems/process

- Take time to explain how your systems work.
- Be careful that your systems don't reduce the human element of your organization.

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Appreciate the power of "YES"

- Always look for ways to help your families.
- When they have a request (as long as it is reasonable) tell them that you can do it.

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Appreciate the power of "YES"

- Figure out how afterwards.
- Look for ways to make doing business with you easy.
- Always do what you say you are going to do.

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Know how to apologize

- When something goes wrong, apologize. It's easy and families like it.
- The family may not always be right, but they must also feel that they have won, and were treated with dignity and respect.
- Deal with problems immediately and let families know what you have done.

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Know how to apologize

- Apologize for their experience, not meeting their expectations - not an admission that you did anything wrong.
- However, if you DID do something wrong, apologize for that also!

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Know how to apologize

- Make it simple for families to complain. Value their complaints.
- As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve.

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Exceed their expectations

- Since the future of your facility/community lies somewhat in keeping residents/families happy, think of ways to elevate yourself above the competition. Consider the following:
 - What can you give families that they cannot get elsewhere?
 - What can you do to follow-up and thank people?
 - What can you do for families that is totally unexpected?

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Get regular feedback

- Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve.
- Provide a method that invites constructive criticism, comments and suggestions.

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Treat employees well

- Employees are your internal “families” and need a regular dose of appreciation.
- Thank them and find ways to let them know how important they are.

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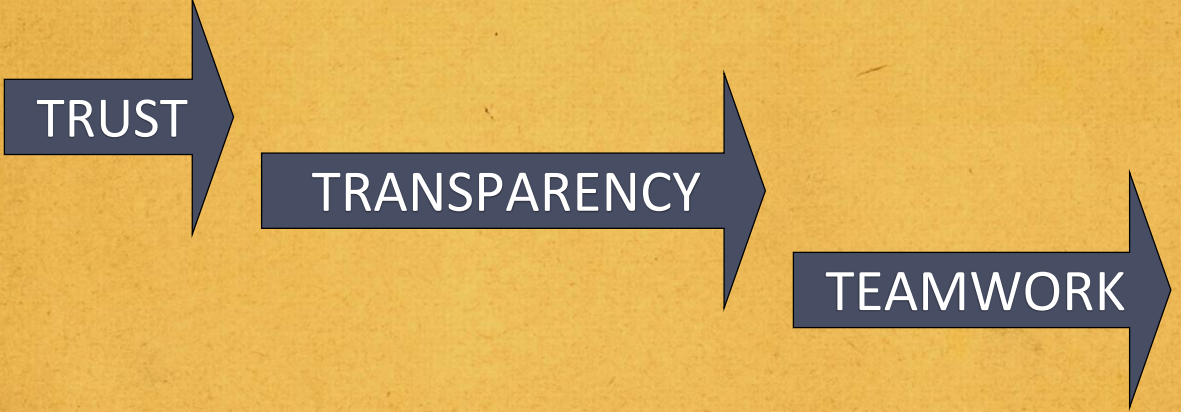
Treat employees well

- Treat your employees with respect and chances are they will have a higher regard for families.
- Appreciation stems from the top. Treating families and employees well is equally important.

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Core Principles for a Positive Family Culture



TRUST

TRANSPARENCY

TEAMWORK

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Communication That Connects

- Use plain language
- Avoid clinical jargon
- Validate emotions
- Be proactive (not just reactive)

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Difficult Conversations

- "Mrs. Johnson, I know this transition has been tough. Our goal is to work together so your mom feels at home here. Let's talk about what you've noticed..."

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Mini Case Study

- **Scenario:** A daughter is calling daily, frustrated, micromanaging the care.
 - What might be behind this?
 - What approaches would de-escalate?

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Mapping the Family Experience

- Pick a "persona" (worried spouse, skeptical daughter, busy out-of-town son)
- Map their journey from admission to 3 months in
- What are their touchpoints? Feelings? Pain points?

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Setting Boundaries Respectfully

- Use standard communication plans (weekly updates, care conference schedules)
- Be firm and kind
- Have a clear chain of communication
- Avoid staff triangulation

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Policy Snapshot

- Written family engagement policy
- Feedback loops (satisfaction surveys, suggestion boxes)
- Escalation protocols

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Sustaining the Culture

- Ongoing staff training
- Quarterly family forums
- Celebrate success stories
- Track and share progress (family satisfaction scores)

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Tips to Keep in Mind

- Be consistent
- Stay calm under pressure
- Acknowledge AND redirect
- Celebrate small wins
- Invest in relationships before there's a problem

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Helpful Hints...

- Be a "double checker." Learn to use those words. Everyone loves it when you double check something for them. Say, "Let me double check that for you!"

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Helpful Hints...

- Pretend it's you!!
 - What would **you** want to have happen?
 - What would make **you** happy?
 - What would make **you** satisfied?
 - Remember the golden rule...

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Helpful Hints...

- Get involved.
 - Let the family member know you are on their team.
 - Empathize with their feelings, whether happy, sad, or upset.
 - Families love it when they feel you are "part of the package."

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Helpful Hints...

- Stay focused.
 - Eye contact is critical.
 - Don't type or write unless it pertains to what you are doing. Stay focused on the family member.

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Helpful Hints...

- Do something extra.
 - Little "giveaways." They love these items even if they can't use them...
 - The thought of getting something free is very special to any person.

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Helpful Hints...

- Show your teeth!!
 - Most people think they are smiling, but they aren't.
 - You can even smile on the phone, and people can "hear" it.

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Helpful Hints...

- Ask questions
 - Build on what the family member is saying.
 - Listen for one or two words that you can ask something about.
 - Once they are talking, you can help them.

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Helpful Hints...

- Use complete sentences
 - One word answers are perceived as rude.
 - "Yes," "no," and the like, tell the family member "I'm not really interested in you or what you need."

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Helpful Hints...

- Care!
 - Learn to CARE about your families' needs.
 - CARE about what they are referring to - show that it matters to you.
 - CARE about them and they will take CARE of you.

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Helpful Hints...

- Use laughter
 - Laughter lightens the load.
 - Take the time to laugh and enjoy your families.

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7 Shabby Sins...

1. Apathy Adherents

- Their attitude says, "I'm doing my job because I'm here. I showed up. What more could you possibly want??"

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7 Shabby Sins...

2. Brush-off Barkers

→ "Not my job...not my department..."

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7 Shabby Sins...

3. Shoulder Shruggers

→ "You're the only one complaining..."

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7 Shabby Sins...

4. Condescending Clods

→ "You didn't follow our policies/procedures and made lots of extra work for us..."

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7 Shabby Sins...

5. Rigid Robots

→ "Thank you - have a nice day - NEXT!" (They normally don't even look up...)

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7 Shabby Sins...

6. Rabid Rule-Bookers

- "I agree with you and it makes sense, but our rules and/or policies won't let us do it that way."

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7 Shabby Sins...

7. Rankling Runarounds

- "I'll contact you with the Unit or Charge Nurse."
- "I don't know why they connected you with this wing, administration handles that."
- "You'll have to talk with someone in the office about that."

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→ It all starts with the first hello in person, over the phone, or the first click of the mouse.

Your frontline team members are the “voice of the facility/community.”

When you find great people who can make every family member feel welcomed and important, make sure you continually thank those special folks and reward them appropriately.

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