Workforce: Addressing Today's Aging Services Challenges

WHITE PAPER

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WORKFORCE: ADDRESSING TODAY'S AGING SERVICES CHALLENGES

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Synopsis

To succeed in serving our growing senior population, providers must attract, retain, and develop a quality workforce, as well as expand the available labor pool. Tools to be employed will range from developing competitive benefits programs for employees to investment in expanded educational programs and improved working conditions. What is being done today to address this future need?

This case statement will briefly summarize the current state of the workforce crisis and provide tools and examples of ways to address the ongoing challenge within each respective area.

About the LeadingAge Business Strategy Council

Increasingly, LeadingAge's members are seeking research findings, business intelligence, and sound strategies to help them navigate the highly-pressured financial, regulatory and market-driven environment. Members need guidance in the areas of growth, management, financing and operations. LeadingAge's Gold Partners are experts in these areas.

This nexus of member need and corporate partner expertise is an opportunity to tap business partners to provide information to members and LeadingAge staff to strengthen the nonprofit aging services sector. The LeadingAge Business Strategy Council is a forum where Gold Partners can work with a select group of members to share insights and intelligence on trends and solutions.

The Council's work will be published as valuable information to help LeadingAge members with business and strategic decisions and to give Gold Partners exposure as thought leaders in our field.

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I. Introduction

To succeed in serving our growing senior population, providers must attract, retain, and develop a quality workforce, as well as expand the available labor pool. Tools to be employed will range from developing competitive benefits programs for employees to investment in expanded educational programs and improved working conditions. What is being done today to address this future need?

Areas identified as critical to explore include:

- Attractiveness of Industry & Recruitment

- Process Improvement & Design

- Competitiveness of Benefits & Compensation

- Workplace Culture & Retention

- Understanding the Needs of Our Workforce

This case statement will briefly summarize the current state of the workforce crisis and provide tools and examples of ways to address the ongoing challenge within each respective area.

II. Problem

With low unemployment and an increasing number of baby boomers needing long-term services and supports, there is a greater shortage of competent and compassionate caregivers than ever before. For those of us in the in long-term or post-acute care, the situation is ever more dire.

Overall, the U.S. labor pool is at its lowest level in 38 years and the most experienced workers are retiring (Travelers, 2015). The current workforce crisis for the aging services field has been predicted for years. Despite the warning signs and the calls to action as demonstrated by the works of Robert Atchley (1996) and James Straker (1999), the crisis has not abated.

Since the publication of "The Long-Term Care Workforce: Can the Crisis Be Fixed" (Institute for Future of Aging) in 2007 and "Improving the Long-Term Care Workforce Serving Older Adults" (Stone & Harahan, 2010), the demand for long-term services and supports has only increased. Every day, 10,000 people turn 65, with 70% eventually needing long-term care and services (Mastry, 2016). While the call to action for the ongoing workforce crisis continues to sound, the reality remains the same: too few caregivers, paid or unpaid, for the growing care needs of seniors.

This problem will only get worse as 1 million nurses prepare to retire in the next 10-15 years (HealthcareSource, 2016), with a growing need of an additional 1 million home health aides to provide care and services between now and 2022. The overall outlook isn't much better. By the year 2050, only half of the number of caregivers needed will be available to care for seniors (Mastry, 2016).

III. Findings

III. A. Attractiveness of the Industry and Recruitment

Fifty-three percent (53%) of U.S. business leaders say attracting and retaining talent is a primary issue (Travelers, 2015). The aging services field is no different. However, to attract prospective employees, the field must make potential applicants aware of the aging services as a potential career choice. The more aware someone is of the field or brand, the more likely they are to consider it for a potential job or career. If prospective applicants aren't familiar with who you are as an organization or aging services in general, they are not likely to apply. In this regard, attracting and recruiting prospective applicants can be likened to brand awareness strategies and will most likely benefit from a successful strategy for the organization overall.

For example, marketing terms refer to "brand position" when discussing the place an organization occupies in a prospect's or customer's mind (Ryan). Similarly, as an employer and/or as an industry, what "position" does aging services occupy within a prospective employee's mind?

For an applicant, an organization's "position" within their "consideration set" would include employer reputation, compensation and benefits, career development opportunities, etc. Thus, in comparison to other industries, what is the reputation of aging services as an employer? Because the answer often includes low wages, lack of flexibility combined with hard work, and unusual work hours, a negative stereotype of the work mired by nursing home and assisted living scandals, and negative attitudes of educators, the long-term care field is facing a workforce crisis. How can we change this negative stereotype of the industry and improve our position within an applicant's mindset?

A beneficial exercise for the industry and a specific provider may be to conduct a SWOT analysis as an employer. Here are 3 questions to consider:

1. What are our industry's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?

2. As a provider, what are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within your region or market?

3. Would you be considered an employer of choice within our market?

Once you complete the SWOT analysis, promote your strengths and opportunities and seek ways to improve or mitigate your weaknesses and threats.

Increasing an employer's brand awareness involves marketing and business partnerships/relationships. Employer marketing requires multiple sources including social media (e.g., Facebook), print media, television, and radio advertising. Key business relationships for prospective applicants include technical/vocational schools and colleges and universities. According to Jack Callison, CEO of Enlivant:

"While some universities are beginning to focus on senior living career paths, the field is tasked with marketing those career paths and demonstrating what makes senior living a good industry for growth and potential. Our goal is to be a top-5 employer of choice. That may need to start at the middle school level, the high school level, community colleges, and undergraduate programs. In many cases, senior housing isn't really well understood, and it's incumbent upon us as industry leaders to tell our story about why this is such a compelling industry" (PointClickCare).

Thus, it is incumbent upon us to promote our mission louder, more frequently, and earlier in a potential employee's life to plant a seed for a future career.

A key demographic that critical to our staffing challenge are millennials, who were born between 1981 and 1997. They embody one of the greatest opportunities to improve the negative stereotypes associated with aging services. For millennials, money is certainly important. However, they want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and aging services has that to offer.

Given the mission and impact of aging services on the lives of those most vulnerable, providers should highlight this contribution when attracting and recruiting millennials. Brenda Bacon, former Argentum chair and founder of Brandywine Senior Living, puts it this way: "Let's try to be competitive and let's try to open up to them about what can happen in their lives and the lives they touch and how they can grow into a career instead of just a job filling a bag at Chick-Fil-A" (PointClickCare). Promote the mission to draw the millennials.

Tactically, one of the most effective recruitment tools is employee referrals (Sullivan, 2012). Employee referrals generate the greatest number of applicants, the highest quality of applicants, and a greater retention rate, while decreasing vacancy time. Based on these outcomes, employee referrals could be considered the "holy grail" of staffing. However, it's not that easy. The key about employee referrals is not the referral bonus employers' offer or the splash of a poster or ad. The key to employee referrals is the work environment itself. An employee is not going to refer someone to a job that they themselves do not like or are considering leaving. Consider asking these questions:

- Does the work environment facilitate the success of employee referrals?

- Does the work environment embody the mission and values of your organization?

- Do you recognize staff for the contribution they make in the lives of seniors?

- Are your employees satisfied?

- Is there a sense of family dependent on one another for the success of the community?

Thus, while employee referrals can produce great outcomes, work must be done on the part of the employer to create a work environment that someone wants to encourage others to join.

In addition to employee referrals, these additional tools/sources are already typical tools in the toolbox for any employer. However, they are worth noting:

- Increase industry and brand awareness and reputation

  º Use various sources of media, including social media, television, and radio, to increase awareness among the general population.

  º Deliberate communication of the "mission" associated with aging services to encourage the interest of millennials.

  º Strategically communicate positive stories and outcomes to mitigate any negative associations with the field's reputation.

  º Provide logo wear for employees to wear outside of work, if desired.

- Increase awareness of aging services earlier in one's education

  º Partner with post-secondary educators and faculty.

  º Develop curriculum, perhaps for high schools.

- ⚬ Make deliberate efforts associated with "Bring Your Child To Work Day."
    - ▪ Employees who are committed to the mission bring their children to work to see what they do, so the children can experience the mission early in their lives.
- Recruiting
  - ⚬ Become an employer of choice as it provides recognition among other employers within the area and region.
  - ⚬ Ensure your recruiting and interviewing process is efficient and fast. In this market, great applicants are not going to wait for prolonged periods of time for your job offer. Make the process easy, quick, engaging, and responsive to the applicant.
  - ⚬ Offer competitive wages and benefits to be market competitive among other employers.
  - ⚬ Provide a positive work experience that fosters engaged employees.
  - ⚬ Implement employee referral program, including referral bonus.
  - ⚬ Monitor and manage online reputation, especially those associated with recruiting sources (e.g., indeed.com and glassdoor.com).
  - ⚬ Implement a diversity recruiting strategy to increase the diversity of leadership roles and the percentage of male direct care workers.
  - ⚬ Create and distribute "Impress Me Cards" to prospective employees when interacting in the community.

To attract prospective applicants to the aging services industry, we must market who we are and our mission commitment. Prior to doing so, however, we must ensure that the work experience we offer as an employer provides competitive wages and benefits, promotes career growth, values and appreciates the individual employee contribution, and demonstrates shared leadership. If you build it, and they know about it, then they will come. Build a great work environment, promote the mission and work environment internally and externally, and you will attract and recruit quality employees.

III. B. Competitiveness of Benefits and Compensation

Health care work can be as stressful as it can be rewarding, and one of the best ways to show employees you value them is to compensate them fairly. If people don't feel that they're being paid fairly, they will be dissatisfied and their quality of work will suffer (HealthcareSource, 2016).

Many direct care positions in aging services are low-wage, high-turnover in nature. Often, these types of positions contribute to financial stress and vulnerability of the employee. It is estimated that 38 million American households live from paycheck to paycheck (PayActiv, 2016). For example, three out of five home care aides live in households that rely on public assistance programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, and housing and heating assistance (PHI, 2015).

Paying a living wage is another piece to solving the workforce crisis. According to President Lynne Katzmann, Juniper Communities is getting ahead of minimum wage pressures. Juniper is being proactive with a goal of achieving $15 per hour wages by the year 2020. Their program is appropriately named "15x20" program and they've already started increasing wages. She acknowledges that they will have to be "creative" in finding the money to pay for such an effort (PointClickCare).

While pay and medical benefits are most frequently presented as a means of attracting and retaining quality staff, another benefit that has shown a positive impact on patient care is financial wellness. Employees who bring their money worries to work tend to be less productive and less engaged (PayActiv, 2016). How can financial wellness help retain employees in aging services? Acknowledging that financial stress can impact attendance and work performance, empowering employees to improve their financial wellness can lead to improved performance and greater dependability, resulting in improved patient care (PayActiv, 2016).

LeadingAge has a partnership with Chris Bernardine and Advanced Voluntary Concepts to provide webinars on financial wellness.

In addition to financial wellness, some tools or tactics that can be employed to impact the recruitment and retention of your workforce include:

- Adopt an aspiration goal of a living wage.

- Implement an employee wellness program, including financial wellness.

- Offer a family caregiver benefit for employees.

- Offer long-term care insurance to employees.

- Create a paid volunteer program.

- Offer scholarships as many employees cannot afford to pay the tuition and wait for the reimbursement.

- Provide onsite childcare and/or offsite subsidized childcare.

- Implement an incentive compensation program inclusive of direct care workers.

- Offer phased retirement.

- Provide subsidized transportation.

Given the challenge of increasing wages and benefits, offering a benefit to employees that reduces financial stress can contribute to employee retention and ultimately positive patient outcomes.

III. C. Retention and Culture

As the competition for workers increases, time to fill positions and cost of hiring will increase dramatically. Smart organizations focus on retaining staff to ensure continuity of quality care (HealthcareSource, 2016). High turnover is not new or unusual in our industry. Industry standards quote an average turnover rate of about 55% for certified nursing assistants (CNA). Many CNAs will go on to become professionals while others will move for more money, etc. Workplace culture and retention have become cornerstones for aging services providers trying to win what seem like a losing battle for employees.

One of the primary ways to reduce position vacancies and increase employee retention is to offer the position and the work environment that employees desire. So what are the 7 reasons good employees quit their jobs?

1. They're not getting paid enough.

2. They can't get ahead.

3. They're overworked.

4. They hate their boss.

5. They're unhappy with senior management.

6. They're bored.

7. Their accomplishments are ignored.

How does your employer strategy address these seven reasons? We'll elaborate on just a few.

Aging services employers are often challenged with being market competitive with wages and benefits because more than 70% of financing for care and services comes from Medicare and Medicaid (Stone & Harrahan, 2010). The fact remains that we must still be within a reasonable range for pay and benefits. We don't need to lead our regions or markets, but we also can't afford to lag if we want to provide quality care and services, while retaining employees.

Often, aging services communities are relatively flat organizations. Does your staff know their potential career paths within your organization? Are you considering job enrichment? Are there levels within a given position to denote growth, potential for promotion, and a sense that staff is able to get ahead?

Employees who feel that they have a future within your organization are more likely to be engaged and provide patient-centered care. When a position opens up, look to internal candidates first to determine who may be best suited for the role. When employees have something to work toward, they will be more motivated to improve their performance and exceed expectations (Healthcare Source, 2016).

The most frequently cited reason for an employee to leave an organization is the relationship with their boss or supervisor. Leadership development has been known to increase leadership engagement, which in turn, increases staff engagement. When employees are engaged, they're more committed to their jobs and provide better care, resulting in increased patient satisfaction (HealthcareSource, 2016). Is there a leadership development program in place to ensure managers and supervisors embody and demonstrate the mission and values of your organization and engage with staff accordingly? Do you have a spirit and exhibit of shared leadership? How are your managers managing?

One LeadingAge member, Stoddard Baptist Nursing Home, has an industry-leading turnover rate of 5.3% for its communities. When asked how the communities create work environments where employees want to stay, Steve Nash, President and CEO, shared the following:

"Stoddard recognizes the value and importance of every employee to the overall success and implementation of their mission. Stoddard has established the following options to help show that they appreciate an employee's value, support and care for the residents and for each other."

There are many factors that have an impact on employee retention. Some that Stoddard has encountered include:

- Wages

- Benefits

- Unions

- Competition

- Occupational Ghettos

- Taxes

- Transportation

- Housing

- Access to Opportunities

- Worker Relationships (Internal and External)

- Educational Opportunity

- Career Ladder

- Safety and Security

- Child/Family Care

- Organizational Stability/Trust

- Entertainment and Local Events

- Networking

Below are some of the many options and examples within their employee retention and satisfaction effort, specifically geared for drawing and retaining the most gifted, supportive nursing team members. These options are flexible and available specifically to meet the needs of every employee.

- Empower employees to make their own schedules, based on the organization's direction and the specific needs of the customers we serve. The self-directed scheduling is delivered by an innovative program that can be used at the smart phone level. Inclusive in this is the direct use of social media to enhance our brand. Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts should be used more fully.

- Assign new hires a mentor at orientation. Onboarding employees with a mentor will help retention and familiarize them with their culture "The Stoddard Way."

- Offer alternative schedules such as weekend only, part-time, and extended schedules. Consider pool and contracted worker options per the needs of the organization. Employees will assist in providing a work environment that would maximize stability in work assignment, work location and safety. The ultimate goal of the organization is to meet or exceed staffing levels required by both state and federal directions.

- Place a high priority on employee respect, safety, and empowerment to ensure the success of all Stoddard programs. Orientation, training, and continuing education are valued and become a significant aspect of an employee's life. Excelling in customer service and satisfaction through training, ongoing support, and evaluation is woven into the daily business of Stoddard.

- Embrace the "Stoddard Way," which recognizes that it is important for staff to be valued and respected by all within the organization. If there is any challenge with employee relations, there is an ongoing system of metrics and root cause analysis that are evaluated by the organization's management team and customer service committee to help improve individual and organizational performance.

- Adopt a professional attitude, appearance, and team player mentality. Options, such as a web-based company group uniform purchase, are made available for the ease of the employee to obtain and

manage payment for uniforms. Stoddard will even consider providing cleaning services on a regular basis to help maintain uniform integrity and professional appearance.

- Offer tuition reimbursement and discounted relationships with local universities and community colleges, so employees can improve skill sets and prepare for current and future opportunities. Salary and benefit program options have been developed to maximize the opportunity for employee satisfaction. Tuition reimbursement should include a repayment schedule for employees in the event that they resign prior to fulfilling employment obligations for receiving tuition assistance.

- Recognize employees for services to the organization and their efforts towards helping recruit and retain future employees. (Recognition plans need to be developed that are simple to understand, employee based, and valued by the employee.) Simple, but significant, areas such as discounted meal program, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and promotions are systematically recognized and incorporated into the daily employee life.

- Develop an employee life, help-stretch-the-paycheck program. Included in the program should be relationship management for vendors. Establish discount programs that benefit employees by developing "member- like" relationships at the local and national level. This program allows for a series of discounted programs in key areas of life such as listed below:

  - ° Housing

  - ° Child Care

  - ° Adult Day Care

  - ° Auto Purchase

  - ° Educational Expenses

  - ° Food Discounts

  - ° Uniform and Clothing Discounts

  - ° Phone Service and Computers

Stoddard is regularly looking for new relationships in the business community to find the best deals and maximize employee discounts to these and other employee-identified areas.

Another member of LeadingAge, Tabitha Living Communities, shared the results of its efforts to identify key elements for retaining staff. Christie Hinrichs, president and CEO, said the reasons that staff stays in the organization have been consistent in survey after survey:

- Love of Elders.........When asked why staff want to work at Tabitha versus some other organization serving seniors, the themes were:

  - ° The organization's mission and values

  - ° Feels like family

  - ° Opportunity for growth

  - ° Individualized recognition

As Christie interviewed colleagues in aging services who have also demonstrated success in retention, she heard that their secret sauce was the same. Bob Rundle, CEO of SpiriTrust Lutheran in Pennsylvania, said their mission is by far the number 1 reason people choose to work for his organization, followed by family atmosphere. Further, Bob believes that employees stay because they see the mission and core values of SpiriTrust being lived out. Like Tabitha, SpiriTrust management places high importance on individual recognition to keep employees engaged and have opportunities for growth – a place to work for your entire career.

Renee Sjulin, VP of Runza, National cites these same things for reasons her team members join the Runza team and stay.

It's clear that organizations that boast great culture, low turnover and high engagement have these 3 key ingredients in common:

1. A sense of family

2. Core values that direct decisions and that everyone embraces

3. Individual recognition

Ongoing education and training around these values is imperative. Collaboration and commitment to follow up also show up as important.

Similar to attraction and recruitment, retention tactics can be employed to help facilitate retention of quality team members:

- Career development

- Cross-training with additional compensation

- Job levels with additional compensation

- Partnerships with acute care partners to expand career ladder

- Employee recognition

- Spontaneous and structured

- AMPT (amptnow.com) is one potential recognition tool

- Supervisory training focused on shared leadership, including ongoing feedback and communication

- Structured orientation and onboarding, including new hire mentor program

- Paid volunteer program to ensure employees experience the "greater purpose" of what aging services offers

- Employee referral program

As post-acute elder care continues to face epic numbers of staff shortages, an investment on staff recognition aligned with Mission and Core Values will be critical.

III. D. Process Improvement and Design

While the number of employees entering the workforce falls short of the demand, organizations must find ways of continuing to operate with fewer people. This, coupled with the increased pressure of raising hourly wages, spurs many businesses to look toward technology to reduce costs and add efficiency.

The LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technology (CAST) recommends telehealth and remote patient monitoring (RPM) to address workforce shortages, especially for patients living in rural areas. These strategies have the potential to reduce health care costs and improve workforce efficiencies in a variety of ways including decreasing the number of nurse home care visits, reducing the number of patient transports to hospitals and physician offices, and increasing access to specialists such as wound care experts or pulmonologists.

One study, for example, found that a telehealth intervention utilized by a home health agency reduced the number of home visits by nurses from 8.2 to 5.8 per month.[36] Another study found that telehealth store-and-forward technology can eliminate one out of every four in-person visits. And patients can avoid one out of every two clinic visits with real-time consults.[37] Finally, a recent study published in Health Affairs found that telehealth and RPM can increase care providers' productivity by decreasing home visit travel time and utilizing automated documentation systems.[38]

Similarly, technology can be used as a key recruitment tool, especially among millennials. As mentioned previously, attracting millennials to the aging services industry is critical to our mission's success. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, millennials will make up 75% of the American workforce by 2030. Having an electronic model—as opposed to outdated, paper-based documentation—attracts millennials. This generation also has the expectation that employers will make the latest technology available to them. (PointClickCare)

III. E. Understanding the Needs of our Workforce

One of LeadingAge's business partners, Sodexo, shared its 2016 Workplace Trends report, which includes how humanizing the workplace has a positive impact on employee satisfaction and performance. According to the U.S. Workplace Survey as reflected in Sodexo's report, 90% of respondents said better workplace design and layout equals better overall employee performance. Additionally, 92% of respondents said better workplace design equals a more competitive company. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of senior management respondents believe that a good workplace environment has a positive impact on their company's bottom line.

With that information, Sodexo sought to humanize the workplace and inspire new thinking.

Specifically, they identified 7 key insights and implications that can help guide managers and leaders accordingly:

1. **Get Serious About Play:** Workplace environments that support and encourage play are critical to business outcomes.

2. **Mind the New Mindfulness:** Even very short periods of inner quiet can expand our ability to focus, improve our judgment and allow us to communicate more clearly.

3. **Lose Your Balance:** The workplace can and should sustain a more holistic version of life, where work and life are less about balance and more about respectful integration.

4. **Rethink Knowing:** We will have to rethink workplace environments to animate the unique human ability to shift perspectives, synthesize information and recognize patterns.

5. **Recognize Recognition:** People need to be recognized for taking risks and failing as must as they are for more conventional achievement.

6. **Blur the Organization:** Diverse perspectives, cross-disciplined and even cross-organizational thinking are increasingly fundamental to companies imagining "next."

7. **Create Place, Not Space:** Places, not spaces, can promote collaboration and new perspectives. It is the infusion of culture and people that transforms space to place.

Humanizing the workplace has the potential to create a more engaging work environment thereby reducing turnover, increasing retention and fostering efficiency through communication, innovative thought and collaboration. Each of these outcomes can be a tool to combat the ever-growing need to recruit and/or increase staffing levels when workforce continues to be scarce.

IV. Conclusion

With low unemployment and the arrival of the baby boomers into the healthcare system, there is a greater shortage of competent and compassionate caregivers than ever before. For those of us in long-term or post-acute care, the situation is ever more dire. While the different tools or resources recommended seek to attract, recruit and retain direct care staff, ultimately the basics remain the same. To engage a high-quality workforce during a time of great demand and competition, the aging services industry must be able to pay the 'cost of entry' by offering competitive pay and benefits, create a sense of family within the work environment, recognize employees for the impact they are having on the lives of those most vulnerable in our community, and promote the mission and core values that drive who we are and what we do.

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