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Article One: Driving Employee Engagement with Technology

Written By: Jason Gottschalk

Engaged workers are more productive, hands down. Technology could be the perfect solution to creating a more engaged workforce by offloading mundane tasks, providing real-time information, and more. The key is to free up brain space and work time so employees can perform the rewarding work they love.

Employee engagement, and the myriad tools surrounding the topic, has become a business buzzword of the 21st century. But what exactly is engagement, and is it really the panacea for everything from customer satisfaction to profitability? And if there is a direct correlation between employee engagement and overall business success, then how do organizations enable and promote engagement?

According to a recent Gallup “State of the Global Workplace” report, 85% of employees worldwide are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work. Gallup estimates the cost of this disengagement at \$7 trillion in lost productivity. The United States is slightly better, with 31% of the workforce engaged, but clearly, vast room for improvement exists.

Gallop research also highlights the results of this disengagement. Organizations that score in the top quartile for employee engagement have almost double the success

(composite financial, customer, retention, safety, quality and absenteeism metrics) than those in the bottom quartile.

So it would appear that the evidence is pretty clear. Engaged employees are essential to the success of any organization. This is most critical in the current healthcare environment, where a lack of engagement could lead to increased turnover, burnout and customer dissatisfaction.

Technology's role in supporting meaningful work

Enabling employees to do meaningful work — by offloading routine tasks, for example — creates opportunities for workers to apply themselves to aspects of their jobs that are uniquely engaging, such as connecting directly with residents and guests. Supporting meaningful work, however, requires the right systems and tools to be in place. Technology can accelerate this process by removing the obstacles that often stand in the way.

Unfortunately, many organizations still use legacy systems that are slow, antiquated and inefficient. Other organizations have adopted new technology, but it has been borrowed from other industries and forced to “work” in an environment in which it was not intended or optimal. Both of these situations encumber employees with unnecessary complexity and inefficiency.

Organizations that provide the right technology for their employees can increase their efficiency, reduce frustration and make their tasks more manageable, ultimately increasing employee engagement. So what technology will have the greatest effect on employee tasks? Organizations should focus on offloading mundane tasks, providing enhanced data or information, and supporting a more agile workflow.

Offloading mundane tasks

The right technology can increase employees' efficiency by speeding up or completely eliminating routine tasks. Employees often spend a significant amount of time working on things that they weren't hired to do, such as fact-checking spreadsheets and reports, activities that technology could perform more simply.

Automating simple tasks creates the space that allows employees to focus on what they were hired to do: think critically and engage with residents and guests. Automating aspects of a job often will increase productivity by complementing worker skills with machines and computers. This also can enable employees to focus on aspects of the job that most need their attention.

By embracing automation technologies, organizations can provide more rewarding experiences for their employees, who now can spend more time on skill-based, experience-heavy tasks that lead to greater employee engagement and, ultimately, a better customer experience.

Providing enhanced information

Employees do not just want instant access to reliable information; they expect it. Yet, according to the Workforce Institute's new report on workplace trends, unlike what employees experience at home as consumers, when they arrive at work, good, valuable information across their organization can be difficult to access and nearly impossible to process to make an informed decision in the moment. Employers increasingly are expected to provide a consumer-grade technology experience in the workplace with one-touch access to information that helps employees — both laptop-toting and frontline workers — work smarter and work their way.

Organizations that improve staff access to accurate and timely information are able to enhance staff self-determination. Information directly affecting residents or guests provided in real time to staff members empowers them to make more informed decisions in a timely manner. Real-time accurate information empowers staff to use their intelligence, creativity and empathy to the fullest.

Supporting agile workflow

Collaboration and communication may be two 21st-century buzzwords, but they are critical to an agile workflow. Technology that enhances employees' ability to interact with their coworkers continuously and intuitively creates the foundation for smooth and efficient execution. These tools must be agile enough to change as the organization's and the customers' needs change, without adding complexity to the employee experience

By consistent inclusion in communication with their peers, staff members problem-solve better, learn from one another and ultimately share their "front-line knowledge" with each other and leadership. This, in turn, affects staff engagement and the customer experience.

Employees who are empowered to function at their greatest capacity without being bogged down in mundane tasks, who are provided with accurate and timely information so that they can be self-directed, and who are provided the tools to seamlessly collaborate and communicate with their coworkers are more likely to feel that they can be their authentic selves at work, leading to higher engagement and performance.



Article Two: Expanding a Business from Assisted Living Through the Continuum of Care

Written By: Stephen Zimmerman

A Case Study: Focusing on care, innovative services the market wants, and efficient partnerships led these family owner/operators to success.

In 2015, my sister Lauren and I took over AEC Living, which manages Elders Inn, an assisted living and memory care residence, and Waters Edge Lodge, an assisted living residence, from our parents, who had run the business for 40 years. As determined entrepreneurs, we began charting a course to expand our family's business. We both agreed that growing the company had to be done in a smart, methodical and manageable way.

In the early days of managing our two properties, we discovered critical market needs — voids in services our clients needed but were not readily available from other vendors. We determined that if we could provide these services, then we could offer greater depth of care or complementary and necessary services along the continuum of care. Simultaneously, we could increase customer service and retention.

The key to our success has revolved around strategic investments we made along the continuum of care. We believed that investing in services that span all levels of care made more sense than simply taking a model we already knew and duplicating it somewhere else. We wanted to go deeper.

Attempting to duplicate an established model, for us, was tantamount to trying to catch lightning in a bottle. Oftentimes, people getting into this space don't realize how long it takes to stabilize a community. What's more, people fail to account for the sheer amount of time, energy and startup costs that are required to launch, run and maintain a senior living property.

One advantage my sister and I have over competitors is we grew up in the industry. This was our parents' profession for 40 years. At the dinner table, work always was present. This interaction helped us with our entrepreneurial mindset.

For our parents, it was about business and caring for people who entrusted them with their lives. Today, Lauren and I now are caring for our parents, many of our friends' parents, and those friends' grandparents. In short, care is at the forefront of what we do. This foundation was the springboard for our ongoing entrepreneurial journey.

It's about the continuum of care

Focusing on the continuum of care allowed us to emphasize the "care" portion of what we do. Our attention, however, always is focused on customer service and prolonging peoples' independence, as opposed to trying to be a nursing home or, essentially, a long-term hospital. We want to keep people out of hospital-like settings. We want to be able to provide services and living environments for people aged 55 and older that support them and promote their highest level of independence.

Our father and mother relied on that philosophy when they built Waters Edge Lodge and Elder's Inn. Continuing with that philosophy, when we were looking for our next project, we decided to build Phoenix Commons, a senior co-housing condominium community for those 55+. The community was built from the ground up for middle-aged and older adults who wanted a direct say in their community and the decision-making process.

One of the best things about this co-housing community is the way people connect with each other and develop and maintain their community. It brings joy and better health to them. There's no reason empty-nesters, those soon to retire or those recently retired wouldn't like the benefits of community living that was centered on their age range and provided them with the kind of camaraderie we saw residents at our assisted living residences enjoy.

After Phoenix Commons was built, we uncovered new service opportunities that fit into our continuum of care blueprint, but we needed to be fiscally prudent. This meant partnering with service organizations rather than investing our capital in entirely new businesses and trying to grow them from the ground up. As an example, we partner with hospice care providers, who work with us and families and residents to ensure communication and coordination across the continuum of care.

There are numerous advantages to partnering with other service organizations. For one, there's someone to share the risk. If the partnership doesn't work out, then it's fairly easy to part ways, and no one loses everything as a result. A partner can help fill a gap in knowledge or expertise.

When partnerships in our area are unavailable, we'll determine whether it makes sense to make an investment in that service and go it alone. And, of course, when we strike out on our own, we make sure doing so fits within our continuum-of-care business model.

Two areas where a partnership wasn't feasible and we decided to launch new business units included the launch of AEC Home Care, a private duty, nonmedical, in-home care agency, and AES Therapy & Fitness, a wellness, rehabilitation and fitness center that was specially designed for older adults. Today, these new services provide additional revenue streams and are tightly integrated into our core living facilities.

In terms of what's next for us, we'll continue to evaluate new services opportunities that align to the continuum of care, partner with those organizations where it makes sense, and develop new business units when those partnerships aren't available.

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Article Three: Biofourmis Partners with ImagineMIC to Pioneer Collaborative Remote Patient Monitoring Model

Technology Interoperability sounds fancy, but it's just another way of saying let's work together. Having technology systems that work together can save staff time, assist residents, increase safety and efficiency, reveal patterns that pinpoint issues, and better meet community needs as a whole.

Technology today, although essential, often is overwhelming. Consider all of the technology that is used in an average senior living community: mobile duress, wander management, access control, security cameras, bed monitors, phones, computers and more.

For many communities, these technologies function individually, meaning countless alarms, notifications and data to keep track of. Unfortunately, this isolation of systems

oftentimes results in inefficient management and decreased safety. There is a solution, however: interoperability enables computer systems or software to exchange and make use of information, allowing senior living owners and operators to leverage their systems more effectively, improving both efficiency and safety.

For instance, many senior living communities have front door access control so employees can monitor who enters the building. Often an employee is stationed near the front door to determine who is able to enter the community simply by viewing the person from the desk. Not only does this system require an employee to always be posted at the front door; it also puts the employee in eyesight of the person entering the building, which potentially can be dangerous.

With interoperability, door access can be streamlined. Then, when someone requests access, an alert can be sent to an employee's phone with live video feed of the guest and the employee quickly can decide whether to grant the person access from wherever he or she is in the building. Not only is this a safer procedure, because the employee doesn't have to be in eyesight; it also is more convenient because the employee is able to be more productive with his or her time than simply monitoring the front door.

Many other tasks can be streamlined with interoperability as well. Mobile duress systems are a heavily used solution in assisted living, but duress technology's effect can be much more substantial when it doesn't function as a siloed system.

If a mobile duress alert is missed or responded to too slowly, serious consequences can result. Interoperability allows for users to create escalations and send customized alerts, which can improve response times and ensure that residents get urgent help in an emergency situation. This scenario also applies to bed sensors, door sensors and environmental alerts for issues such as a burst pipe. Rather than an alert only going to one user or end point, interoperability allows for these systems to communicate to a wide range of users through multiple alerts and constant flow of information, getting the right information to the right individuals in time.

When these systems all are connected, you also can begin to aggregate data collected through the use of each system. Whether you want to track how many times a resident gets out of bed at night or monitor staff response times, this information can be logged for you automatically. Data aggregation capability allows for the data to be analyzed, so you are able to spot potential issues or make necessary adjustments to staffing or protocol. For example, if a consistent spike of alerts occurs every Monday, then you can schedule an extra staff member to work on those days to keep up with the workload and ensure that response times don't drop and staff members don't become overwhelmed.

Bringing all of the data from your various systems into one platform is important, because it can reveal patterns that otherwise may have gone unnoticed, such as the changing health or habits of a resident. For instance, if a resident is skipping meals, checking in later in the day than usual and getting out of bed more often each night, staff members might not notice. If all these data are aggregated in one place, however, then these trends can reveal themselves and staff members can step in to make sure the resident is alright and can begin to look for the cause of the issue.

When your technology systems are operating in silos, they are only good for one function. When they are interconnected, however, they can be leveraged to better meet your community's needs as a whole. Interoperability empowers staff members and administrators to be more situationally aware so they are able to make informed decisions and take the proper actions to improve residents' quality of life.

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Article Four: Isolating the Problem

Written By: Cheryl Slavinsky

Social isolation and loneliness have long been a problem in U.S. elder care, causing serious health issues. An innovative Scandinavian approach and a major shift in thinking may be the solution. It incorporates the larger community within the senior community, bringing people together through programs, services, food and more.

Imagine having a traditional, stand-alone assisted living community that gets over 2,000 visitors each month—not including families and friends of residents.

Imagine having over 40 local clubs using your space as a headquarters, gathering place and creating programs and events for your residents but bringing in the greater community as well.

Imagine neighbors and friends choosing your assisted living community to meet for coffee instead of the local Starbucks or bringing their kids because “it’s cool.”

A dream? For many, but very much reality at the Scandinavian Living Center in West Newton, MA. This stand-alone, traditional non-profit assisted living center has taken an inspired approach to elder care by adopting core Scandinavian principles—respecting elders' independence, incorporating light-filled design and encouraging community

connections—to create a senior living community where individuals from all cultures and backgrounds can lead connected, fulfilling lives.

Around the world, organizations and individuals are creating opportunities to eliminate social isolation and loneliness, an issue health experts have said is as dangerous as smoking two packs of cigarettes a day.

Joe Carella, executive director of the Scandinavian Living Center, commented. “Community-centered living is the answer to eliminating the loneliness, but more important, it brings back ‘the normal’ in elder housing. At the same time, it helps eliminate the segregated thinking that is part of most older adult living environments. Why do we insist that segregating seniors is a good idea?

“Loneliness is a moving target. You can be lonely in a large group, small group, by yourself. When we decide to separate our elders or any age group, we stop the human connection that needs to take place in all our personal journeys. Community-centered living gives many opportunities for the simple human connection for us not to be lonely. The Scandinavians and families and neighbors who have experienced it call it common sense living. Whatever you do, you do for the whole community,” Carella explained.

Opening as an assisted living residence in 2001, the Scandinavian Living Center (SLC) maintains it was the first organization to embrace the concept of community-centered living in the U.S. Its parent organization is the Scandinavian Charitable Society of Greater Boston.

As a community-centered model, the SLC houses elders in 40 assisted living apartments and includes the Scandinavian Cultural Center with space for art exhibits and musical performances it organizes—free to SLC residents but at a charge to others—as well as the Scandinavian Library, a public library focusing on Scandinavian culture; businesses, non-profits and a pop-up cafe—all open to and focused on serving the community at large.

More than 2,000 visitors each month come through its doors to participate in programs, visit businesses and other activities, providing consistent and organic connections for the residents to the outside community on their terms, decreasing isolation and allowing them to continue to pursue their interests and be a part of their community.

The broadest audience comes for the Scandinavian Cultural Center’s Nordic Food Festival every September when 500 people from around the country visit the front lawn to enjoy Scandinavian treats, music and other activities.

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Carella has been on a mission to change elder care since he was 17, tore his ACL and was placed accidentally in the hospital's geriatric ward instead of pediatric ward for four days—the most horrible experience of his life, he recalls.

After receiving his MBA from Babson College, he traveled to Scandinavia in the '90s to figure out what they were doing right in the way they cared for their aging population. He talked with professors, administrators, professionals, residents, toured over 60 places and stayed in a service home, the equivalent of assisted living in the U.S.

What he saw was autonomy, a residential model—not institutional—and lots of light, he told a reporter during a June 2019 WCVB channel 5 Boston TV interview that showcased the comfortable, light-filled SLC designed in Scandinavian architectural style with huge picture windows overlooking a central outdoor courtyard.

The common area includes a fully equipped fitness center, a recently renovated dining room and café—all of which encourage connections between residents and the broader community.

Carella related how people thought he was crazy for designing more than half the space as common area when the SLC was being built. That and the almost floor-to-ceiling windows meant fewer apartments, less income. But his building committee made up of Scandinavians said, “No, that’s normal. Let’s keep going.” Above all, in Scandinavia he saw a commitment to bringing the larger community in.

“Isolation, once you have it, it’s institutional living, thinking. There’s no wellness there,” he said. “When SLC first opened, it took a while for people in the city of Newton to understand. Residents were asking why the outside community was coming in. I realized that was institutional thinking.

“What we’re doing here is changing perception,” Carella explained, “this perception that exists in which elder housing is seen as a black hole into which elders disappear from their neighbors and friends.”

Carella underscored the importance of the aforementioned efforts.

“In the end if the industry embraces community-centered living, cities and towns will begin to reach out to both for-profits and non-profits to help them, to invest in them, to create a gathering place for their entire community that welcomes all ages,” he added. “I promise, it will be a win-win for everyone and at the same time, it will go a long way toward removing institutional living.”

As an organization, SLC hopes to create a 'how to' playbook for cities and towns across the country. Details and funding are being worked on this year.

“There is nothing like the Scandinavian Living Center. All you have to do is copy it,” Carella concluded. “It can happen anywhere. It’s just a shift in the way we think about housing—not isolation and a black hole. People, the industry, have the perception about building a better building, but it’s not the building. It’s the thinking. It’s bringing people together. When you embrace community living, common sense living, you increase connections and opportunities for human connections.”