

Christy Van Der Westhuizen 0:00

What are the little and small things that we can do to connect with our teams, to help them be heard and seen? And therefore they're also working to make our residents and prospects and family members feel loved, heard, and seen.

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Welcome to the Contributor Wednesday series on the Bridge the Gap Network. This series is sponsored by Peak Senior Living by Functional Pathways. Each week, you'll hear from a thought leader, discussing topics that are relevant and impactful to the senior living industry.

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Hi, I'm Christy Van Der Westhuizen, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for MBK Senior Living. So today we're going to talk about how small things lead to really big results. So when you are faced with a big job to accomplish, and that's one that may put your company success or professional reputation on the line, what is your first reaction? So are you overwhelmed or intimidated or do you have a burning desire to create an extremely complex plan with lots of intricate details, maybe whiteboard displays and lots of lists and Excel spreadsheets, all in the first minute that you hear about this big job and big project, or do you get stuck on where to start? And so, you know what they say about how to eat an elephant, one bite at a time.

Now I know that's a really odd saying, but I heard it probably about 10 years ago from my Regional Director of Sales, Mickey Chan Choi, who is still in the industry, so shout out to Mickey for this story. But I had been hired as a Director of Sales at a community that really was struggling with occupancy. And I remember I transferred from one community to this, a really challenging community. And she was there on my very first day in this new community. And I think I walked in and she saw it on my face. My eyes were really wide and I thought, oh my, what did I get myself into? And she said, well, this is what we're gonna do. We're gonna teach you how to eat an elephant. And I thought, well gross. I don't want that. But she said, we're going to learn, and I'm gonna help you learn how to focus on one small thing that you can accomplish at a time. One small change that you can manage at a time. So often breaking up a really big goal into a small, and I love this word, snackable tactics is way more effective than complex or out of the box ideas.

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So in fact, it's often the small, but really significant details that add up to big results. Now I'm not saying don't be innovative. Hey, I love being innovative. But sometimes in order to get results, you just really need to step back and say, okay, what are the small things that I can accomplish first?

So Steve jobs once said, simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean, to make it simple, but it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains. So at MBK Senior Living, we set a very aggressive occupancy goal at the beginning of the year. And it came on the heels of achieving record sales and occupancy numbers the year before. So honestly, I'm being totally honest right now, for a split second I questioned. Can we do it again?

So of course the answer was a resounding yes, but the question of how really did linger. And I remember being up at two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, going, how are we going to do this? How are we going to achieve record numbers for a second year? Then it hit me, that all of the simple solutions can make a difference. And so what I did at one of my two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, sleepless nights, going, how in the world are we gonna do this? I pulled out my phone, like so many of us do when we're up in the middle of the night. And I pulled out my notes app, and I just started writing. What is a

salesperson responsible for? What small bites of the elephants can they affect? And it went from everything from their sales activity level to how many phone calls, or how many videos are they making?

It also went to how many professional referral sources are they talking to? And these are all things that are decided truly by the director of sales. They have a choice to really excel and exceed expectations and focus on the behaviors of success or not. And I found that the most successful directors of sales in this industry are consistently focused on the behaviors that drive the results.

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So all in all this two AM, three AM list, really focused on a few big items with lots of little things that we can easily accomplish. But here are some of the big items that we really focused on.

The emphasis that we make on creating a memorable first impression. The standards we hold for all of our printed materials. And what that really means is when we give a price sheet of our apartments to a prospect, is it our best foot forward, or is it a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy?

And I hope you're all saying no way. It's not a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy. It is a really great first impression through printed materials.

We also looked at how we utilize our regional sales directors and sales specialists to make sure that we're getting the most bang for our buck, using these amazing commodities, which is our people. We worked on follow up plans to convert inquiries, to tours and tours to sales. We really focused on our data management and mining processes and the ways in which we network and conduct outreach.

So we had lots of little bite size pieces that all fell into these six categories. That yes, our sales directors and regional sales were really responsible for and could impact greatly. So there were literally dozens of things in place that had already been proven to be successful for our sales teams. And you know what? I wrote those down too, because why reinvent the wheel? So I feel like instead of a go big or go home attitude, we really cultivated a, keep it simple, silly attitude. So that really means we're focused more on the small details, perfected processes and kept at it one bite at a time.

And I'm very happy to say that we are back to pre pandemic occupancy levels. And I really do believe that part of that success is really focusing on the very itty bitty small things that lead to big sales results.

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So some of you may have heard this story before, but it really is extremely important for how I look at sales and my ability to influence community sales indirectly. So one day I came into our president, Jeff Fisher's office, and this was fairly early in the pandemic. And I remember saying, wow, we're not getting very many sales right now, what in the world do we do? Because I really was focused on sales. They weren't happening like they were a year ago. So what do we focus on? And Jeff said, Christy, just focus on the behaviors of success and the results will come.

And I still think about that COVID, or not COVID, it really depends on focusing on the behaviors of success. And I think that Nick Saban also says this, and for those of you who don't know, I know, you know, I'm a big old Formula 1 fan, but I'm also a college football and an NFL fan. But Nick Saban, who is the head coach at Alabama says, "Trust the process. Don't focus on the scoreboard. Don't focus on the next play. Don't focus on the sidelines. Focus on the exact thing that you are doing right then and there, and the results will come."

And of course there's a process to how he really creates this amazing team. That's all driven for success. And so Jeff and I looked at how do we drive success and the behaviors of success, when the success isn't coming immediately, like we were used to in 2019? So what we ended up doing is we started doing a daily sales activity, scoreboard, if you will. And really what that did is we looked at what behaviors our directors of sales were doing and logging in the CRM, of course, because if it's not in the database, it

didn't happen. I feel like I should get that tattooed on my forehead, I say it so much. But it really gave everyone a glimpse at each other's data, each other's activity levels. And we also really looked at what are the behaviors of success? What is the recipe card, if you will, to success eventually.

And I think that that's why we were able to recover very quickly after the pandemic, because we were very focused on the behaviors, those small little things that we can do to add up to big results, when the results weren't just coming. But we were focused on the behaviors, the small things that we could do to impact that result, but remember the results weren't coming. So we really had to stay focused on every day consistently doing the things that we knew would get us the results in the long run.

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So I wanna talk about discipline for a little bit, and I think that keeping it simple, focusing day in and day out on the small things that make the biggest difference, really takes discipline. And I think it takes focusing on small details, and small details are specific and precise. They're measurable and attainable. They have a deadline, they can be modified for better success, but I think simple, small details, once done multiple times, they become habits. And then pretty soon all those small pesky details are second nature and success is a given. And so here are a few of the simple and very specific goals we have here at MBK, and I'm happy to share them with you.

So we believe that 90% of our prospects make a decision within 90 feet and 90 seconds of their visit to our communities. So there are some very, very specific things that we can do to ensure that 90% of our potential residents and their families have a really great first impression. That might be for you and for us to have a welcome sign with their name on it. And Hey, if you know what the cat's name is, put the cat's name on it. And if they know their favorite color is pink, maybe use a pink font instead of your normal black font.

We also have created a ton of checklists as well. And again, that's, when you're looking at an elephant, I wanna have really great first impressions. That's an elephant. But how do you take it one bite at a time? You make a checklist. And I have something better for you, you make a checklist that other people can do as well, as opposed to only the director of sales or only the executive director in charge of it.

It really should become everyone's job to look at first impressions. And again, with a checklist that anyone can complete, it trains your team to have the same critical eye that you do. And know that if all of those things on the checklist are circled, yes, your first impressions are great. But it's very tangible and it's breaking up. What does a great first impression mean? And breaking it up into bite size snackable, my favorite word, pieces that your team can assist you with.

And the result truly is our residents and families and potential residents often comment that it just feels right, when they walk in the door. So here are some other things, and those are the small itty bitty things that we can do that lead to big, giant results with our prospective residents and their families.

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I'm talking about home visits, visiting a friend at their home. A wow gift, letting someone know, Hey, you said something, you gave me a little nugget of information about you, and I remembered it. And bonus points, if it ends up in the CRM that you've utilized, that's major bonus points. How about sending them a video, and a personalized video at that? What about remembering something very small about them, but again, acting on it. A welcome sign with their name on it, and maybe even something personal on it. So again, my welcome sign would probably be in pink with glitter and sparkles and probably a picture of cotton candy on it, because that's personal to me and makes me feel seen and heard. I hope y'all liked that little bit about me. Then this is probably the most critical little thing we can do to connect with prospects, listening and not over talking. So to me, those are just some little things that we can do, but adding those little things up day in and day out on a consistent basis equates to big, giant results.

So I also wanna talk about what are the little and small things we can do to connect with our teams. So again, I'm talking about community directors of sales, or regional directors of sales, but it really doesn't matter what team you're talking about because everyone wants to be seen and heard and known. So what I would suggest to you is the easiest and the smallest way, and the itty bittiest way, that you could connect with your teams is get to know them personally.

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If you've listened to the Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday podcast that I've done in the past, you know, my favorite way to make my own day is to make someone else's day and to get to know them. How do you make someone's day if you don't know who they are, right? So I would say asking discovery questions of our own teams, and our own directors of sales, and our own executive directors we work with. Those little nuggets of information, like who's their favorite football team, and the answer is Patriots, if you didn't know that. Get to know them personally and then act on it. Because again, it helps our team members feel heard and seen and appreciated, and those, and they don't have to be expensive things. They don't even have to cost anything if you act on what you know of them.

So find out what motivates them again, I'm not talking big, monetary items. It can be, Hey, I'm pretty sure that motivates a lot of people, but what are the little and small things that we can do to connect with our teams, to help them be heard and seen, and therefore they're also working to make our residents and prospects and family members feel loved, heard, and seen?

So don't get me wrong, there are times that call for innovation, big ideas, and out of box thinking, but I just really challenge you to not lose sight of the small things. So back to that elephant in the room, your big goal, start by listing all the small things you're doing that collectively support your goal. What's working, what isn't, and start connecting the dots. What's missing, or just need to be improved? And what you'll find is all those small things will add up to big results. Thanks again for listening, and I look forward to my next podcast with Bridge the Gap. Have a wonderful day!

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