

*[Paul Mullin](#) sits with Josh and Lucas for a great interview on how to influence the culture of dementia care.*

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Lucas: Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. We are in the most incredible location talking to one of the most incredible people in the business. We want to welcome Paul Mullin. He is senior vice president of development at Silverado. Paul, welcome.

Paul: Thank you very much guys.

Josh: Yeah, man. Glad to have you here

Lucas: Paul, I cannot believe that you get to wake up to this view every single day of your life, almost.

Paul: Even better as the sunset.

Lucas: It's incredible. You know, Josh and I are on the East Coast, mostly, I guess I'm more central now. But coming out here and seeing, coming to these conferences- we're at Senior Living 100- the guys and girls are out there surfing. There's like these gigantic waves. The scenery is incredible. So for those of you that are listening, you're going to have to go to our YouTube channel. Number one, subscribe. But then number two, you're going to want to see the b-roll in the footage of actually where we're sitting right now because I would have to say this is one of the most incredible recording locations that we've been at, Josh.

Josh: Oh, it's spectacular, man. We've already caught a couple of great sunsets as you mentioned here on the West Coast and even with the rain that you've had here this morning, it's beautiful. And the sunsets behind the clouds have been incredible. I actually I've been blowing up my Instagram feed with the sunsets and had several people commenting. So yeah, definitely need to check this out.

Lucas: Yeah. So now the listeners are all just frustrated cause we're gloating about our lovely location. We're going to dive into some topics today that I think they're going to find very, very valuable. We're going to talk about workforce and affordability, maybe even dive into some middle market talk. It's a big topic. No one has a silver bullet for it, but we're going to actually unpack that a little bit with Paul because Paul has got some great ideas. And then Josh and I, yesterday, were kind of diving into this just personally in the hallways after you got off of your panel. Before we go into that, Paul, tell our listeners some of your background and why you've chosen to put your time and talent into seniors housing.

Paul: Yeah, sure. Thanks again for coming to my backyard here. Oh man, this is great. I've been working in this industry going on 13 years now and, you know, really found it out of real estate. I was working previously in multifamily doing infill development, transitory development. Prior to

that I worked in technology and didn't really quite feel entirely fulfilled and technology is always changing. It was interesting, but, you know, providing solutions was fun, but really finding what were you giving people at the end of the day? You know, really looking for that servant leader type role in my life and more of a purpose driven role in my life. And I met Loren Shook, our founder of Silverado and he took me in and he said, hey, you know, I'm not going to try and explain this role over the phone. Come visit Silverado San Juan Capistrano and you can see if you like it and you want to come work.

Moved from multifamily and senior housing. At the time I was just finishing my MBA at USC and was thinking a lot about this demographic and the opportunities and some of my parents and grandparents that had been in the senior setting in nursing homes in Brooklyn, New York, which were really clinical, and I thought to myself, 'Oh man, if this is going to be, you know, where my Ukrainian grandmother was, you know, spending (her) last final days and in a nursing home in Brooklyn, I want nothing to do with it' because it was really a hospital.

And I got to San Juan Capistrano and there were dogs and kids and popcorn and you know, the smell of popcorn in there and cookies being baked. And I walked in, I'm like, I want to hang out here. This is, this is my kind of place, you know, grabbed a cookie, sat on the couch, started talking to, you know, a resident that I thought just might've been somebody that worked there and met Loren there and immediately the light bulb went off. This guy had a revolutionary way of presenting memory care as a real residential, purposeful environment rather than really a care setting. It was home, you know.

I think of something I heard recently from Margaret Wilder, you know, with Promature is people are looking for home and community. Those are the two big things in our market. They're not looking for the Taj Mahal of amenities and everything else. They're looking for a place they can call their home and they feel like they're part of a community.

And Loren's really pulled that off with the team at Silverado. So, that's why I joined.

Josh: That's awesome. So you know, home and community, those two terms that you popped up, I think those really resonate with a lot of people. The panel you were on yesterday was talking a little bit about that, kind of beating around those topics, but that's really what it comes down to. So I fully agree with that.

And I think also when you start talking about labor, you know, we talk so much about the challenges and there are real challenges with labor, but I think a lot of that, those themes, the team members, the employees are looking for that too. They're looking for a place they can call home with a sense of community and collaboration. And I know you guys have been doing some really cool stuff from a culture standpoint. So, talk us through a little bit about what the culture's like in your communities and from the corporate office down and how you guys really drive that.

Paul: Absolutely. And you know, first I'll say, those kids that I encountered weren't just kids from a nearby elementary school. Those were kids from the caregivers that were there. And so we invite our caregivers as part of our culture to bring their kids to work, you know.

Josh: That's so cool.

Paul: Create that multigenerational environment. And, you know, there's not a ton of kids there. There's four or five, but that's really meaningful to the caregiver who is in the middle of the summer, they have nowhere to bring their kids. They can come to Silverado and go to the kid's camp and interact with, you know, residents that are there, which is cool.

But it really does start from the top. Our whole philosophy is love is greater than fear. And what does that mean? A lot of people are afraid to talk about love. You know, it's a squishy word and you know, how's that a business kind of term? But it is, I mean, if you're coming from love and compassion for everybody- your co-workers, your residents, everybody else, you're creating a culture that really shuns fear. You're not in the realm of fear and I made a mistake. I can't tell anybody, I'm going to brush it under the rug. That's the worst possible scenario, right? Coming from love: 'Hey, I made a mistake.' Oh, well, let's talk about it and we can all figure it out. You know this, there's never a problem that's too big to just get together and solve, right?

So, that's really coming from love and in a kind of business environment. But in our care environment in our communities, coming from love is all the caregivers loving the residents. I always say to anybody looking at senior housing as an option for their family or loved ones: Count the smiles. You know, when you walk in are the residents smiling? Is the front receptionist smiling? Are the caregiver's smiling? If everybody's smiling and having a good time, you can't fake that, you know, and you know it's home and you know there's some community and culture behind it.

Josh: Yeah. So talk us through. I love the fact and appreciate you being so transparent, kind of unveiling the curtain. You know, what's behind the scenes. So, on that topic. So most are most of your communities what would be classified as memory care?

Paul: Yes, indeed.

Josh: Okay. So with that population, typically a little bit more frail environment, some high acuity, but I want to dig a little deeper on this idea of the children being able to come to work. For a lot of our operators and the stakeholders in our industry, there's a lot of talk about that kind of stuff that's kind of intergenerational programming. I like that you guys are intentional with that, but what, speak candidly, what, if any of some of the challenges have you encountered with that? Because I can imagine if you just say free for all, you know, bring your kids, then you got potentially some issues that you have to mitigate and things like that.

But what kind of obstacles, if any, have you guys encountered with that? And what kind of parameters if someone is out there thinking we would love to do something like that but not sure what to do? It kind of scares us a little bit.

Paul: Yeah, without a doubt. And I'll share with you guys, I'll follow up with you via email. We have a set of policies and procedures that outline, hey, you know, what's the age of the child? And are they independent enough to take care of themselves? And, the parent, you know, is there and caregiving, but you gotta be responsible for your child at the same time. So it's not, you know, babies all the way through teenagers. It's really a set of kids, let's call it five through 11 or so that are visiting and spending time with us.

But the magic behind that too isn't just it's a caregiving service. These kids, many of them have grown up and now become caregivers and join the company. And the stigma and the fear of dementia and the elderly, let's call it ageism, is gone from these kids. They, you know, they're surrounded by seniors and it's one of the best things that comes out of that program really, you know, is that education.

Josh: That's so fascinating. So what states do you guys currently operate in?

Paul: We're in eight states. California is really where we got started. So, we're in southern California, northern California. We just moved into Washington state in the past couple of years and we're going to continue to expand around Seattle. Texas, Arizona, Utah, Wisconsin, Illinois, and just recently in Virginia.

Josh: Wow. So you guys seem to be doing some pretty cutting edge things when you guys are in the media a lot and things like that. Some great stories.

So in the regulatory environment from state to state, it seems like often times when you want to do something a little bit different and out of the box, some of your toughest obstacles are convincing those state regulators that the intentions of it and that it's safe for the residents. What are some of the things surrounding children in the workplace and dogs in the workplace, pet-friendly communities and things like that. What have been some of y'all's challenges and have the state authorities, have they been pretty welcoming of those those cultural differences?

Paul: Yeah. You know, the kids and pets aren't such a big, big problem. It really comes down to the level of care and the skilled nursing, kind of, lobby, let's call it. In the state of California, for instance, it took Loren and folks like Major Chance, who were kind of the visionaries and starters of true assisted living in California 20 years ago to break down the walls and with the regulatory folks say, 'Hey, this isn't a nursing home. You know, we're providing a level of care that's similar but we're not, we don't have people on ventilators and oxygen, you know.' So they really spent a lot of time breaking down that wall.

With the pets, you know, some funny things have happened. We have miniature ponies in Encinitas, Hocus and Pocus.

We had our state review going on and, you know, the woman's walking through with her clipboard and all of a sudden Hocus walks by in the hallway, 'cause they come in the community.

Josh: I'm getting a good vision here.

Paul: She walks by and the horse goes by and, you know, a minute later she goes, was that a pony?

Josh: Not something you see every senior care community.

Paul: Our administrator Julian was like, well, yeah, that's one of our community pets. It's Hocus. And he's like, 'That's fantastic.'

Josh: Oh, that's awesome.

Paul: It can really go both ways, but I think most people see particularly pets, certainly nowadays is pet therapy. You know, so one, one thing that gives complete unconditional love and that's usually a dog or a cat, you know, an animal and it really helps the environment.

Lucas: Paul, we talked before this show. Talk or actually tell our listeners what we talked about before this show about different ways that you are slicing and dicing up the workforce labor issue, even with the buddy systems and things like that.

Paul: Yeah. More recently, we've really focused on talent management. We've hired a guru, Laurie Jerome who came over from Disney and Equifax and a few other very large companies where she really became this incredible guru of talent management. She joined our company about a year ago. She's creating an incredible policy (and) procedure guideline and program around how we can really improve retention and attract the best leaders.

I think a core tenant of what I've learned through working with her and working in our environment is look at character and culture first. You know, in any person that you're talking to about coming on board, you know, and the competency, lowercase c, you know, so character and culture would be capital c, competency really isn't as important as culture and character. If they have the culture, they understand our culture in particular, and they have the character, they have the true grit to do this, they'll learn what dementia care is, they'll learn what the Silverado way is.

And I think so many times, us included, we all are trading some of the same senior, tenured people that have incredible competency in this business. But look, we're coming into an era where in the next 10 years we need to add a million more people to the million people that are in this business. And right now we're just trading that million back and forth. I'm not exactly sure where we'll find another million people. But I think if we look outside of senior living and find those people, you know, the one correlation I think everybody's found in all the studies that have been done is people that want purpose and want to be a servant leader are natural fits in this environment.

So people that have been in the Peace Corps, I've been in the military have had some challenge in their life growing up. They might've taken care of their Nana or their loved one, you know, or they might have bootstrapped their way through college. Those are the people that usually are the most successful leaders in our business that we found, you know.

Josh: I think that's so awesome that you guys have intentionally gone and recruited someone to spearhead that effort. It says a lot about what you guys do. So what are you guys finding (that) is important to your team members as you're looking, as our listeners are looking to attract? What are the important variables? Because all the time you hear about labor wages, you hear about benefits, you hear about career pathways. But is that all there is to it? Is it those things or are there other things that are critically important that people need to be focusing?

Paul: Yeah. You know, I think part of it is creating, once again that home and community environment, it all comes back to that and more than we all talk, keep talking about patient-centered care, right? And person-centered care. How about staff-centered, you know, care and what are we doing to make them feel like they're happy? They're part of the family. Everybody's part of the Silverado family. The families that bring their residents with us and the associates and caregivers that are with us are all part of our family and treat them that way. And if they feel that way, the margin error on how much you're paying them a dollar more, a dollar less, isn't quite as strong as, 'Hey, I have, you know, free or next to free lunch every day and I can bring my kids to work. There's pets there. It's a great environment. I have a flexible schedule.'

We are starting to look at some interesting opportunities around productivity, you know, with both Kronos and some of the other time management software platforms. Now, they're looking at ways to find how do you take that same worker that might be a housekeeper, but also has trained to be a caregiver or a CNA and really multiply their productivity, they. They may want to work a whole heck of a lot more than just the shifts you have them on and through some of the new platforms like Kronos Dimensions, for instance, you can see, hey, this person's trained that way. They want to be on multiple shifts, let's plug them in because this other person couldn't be there.

So I think particularly for millennials, it's important to see how can you create a flex schedule for folks to come in when they really want to work and increased productivity with the labor force you have. So that's one, I think vital way to kind of be a, you know, really multiplier effect on the workforce you have.

Going out from there, I heard a really cool idea here at a Senior 100 is somebody had mentioned they have a business card with their community on it, a picture of their community and their name on the back, and they go to Starbucks and they have a really good Barista. They give that person a card, said, 'Hey, thank you for your service. If you know, you're ever interested in finding out about what we do, here's my card.' And I thought that's genius. It's a little thing. But so many times we're at the airport or at Starbucks and you meet a really cool, vibrant person. Why not? You know, the worst thing you're going to do is pat them on the back, you know? And the best thing is they might call you for a job, right? So, so I think you've got to just really be innovative and get out there, you know.

Josh: Yeah. Well, I love that. We've talked a lot about that, Lucas and I, and talked about the culture and investing first in the team members and making it a home, as you say, and community for them. Just recently, I was sharing this with Lucas and our producer Sara, we had the opportunity to start taking over management of a community that, you know, by all industry

standards, it was not flashy, didn't have the bells and whistles, no insurance benefits for the team members. And going into it, kind of going through the checklist of what all this community didn't have, my mind automatically was going to, oh my gosh, this is really going to be a challenge. And there's always challenges.

But what I was amazed on, and I think this is where the paradigm has to shift a little bit as far as the talking points, is none of them were talking about labor wage, that they were paid or not paid. They weren't talking or interested in the insurance benefits, but they're the happiest people. They've all been there, these caregivers, for years. And so there's basically no turnover, but they've got the culture, the home and community down. So, I think that's something that to hear you talk about that as a large platform that you guys understand that. I think a lot of the single owner operators get that because they're pouring their heart into it. But it's really refreshing to hear it coming from a much larger operators. So kudos to you guys for talking about that.

Lucas: Yeah, Paul. I'm also impressed. It's obvious that servant leadership is part of the DNA at Silverado and it's definitely a part of your DNA. You're, you know, vice president of development and construction and, you know, community management on a facility level, and you're, you know, those spokesperson for the company's culture and workforce. And, you know, so there's a lot of dimensions here and this is part of the reason why I love the senior living industry so much is because there's so many talented people that bring, when I think when you're passionate and you bring your heart and soul to the industry and to your work, it's not just checking a box that I'm only this, you know. You care about the whole organization, as it, you know, how it impacts, your staff.

So, thank you so much Paul. I want to mention also Paul is an alumni of the Future Leaders Council at the NIC Conference. He's one of the original ones. You've been a mentor to me over the past couple of years and helping me onboard in that process. I know the FLC highly respects you and for any of the FLC members that are listening, this year is the 10-year anniversary of the FLC program and we're planning a blowout at the end of this year.

Paul: A celebration.

Lucas: Paul's gonna be there. He's going to be a big part of it for sure. So, be looking for that from, from NIC Conference. But Paul, we know that you have a busy day. You're gonna head back over the hill here and get to work. Thank you so much for offering your time.

Paul: One last thought too that I wanted to bring about workforce and affordability. Why not combine the two, right? One of the best ideas that's really surfacing is forget about, you know, labor and hiring people, why not volunteer? Why not find volunteers? Look at the European model, right? A lot of what they have in multigenerational housing isn't senior housing. It's an environment where you have a preschool and you have volunteers visiting the check in on the seniors. The seniors are taking care of the kids. If you have an independent living, assisted living and memory care environment, why not have the independent living folks be buddied up with the memory care folks?

Once again, forced multiplying what you really have already and it gives these people purpose. They, they like, you know, sharing their time with people with dementia and caring and being part of that purpose-driven culture. So I just want to add that in as a last thought because I think there's so many different ways to really think about this beyond just the labor rate and the fact that we're so far behind and getting people in. Who are the people we have today?

Josh: So awesome. Well, thank you for taking time, sharing your insights. We look forward to connecting our audience with you through the show notes. And so thanks for being here.

Paul: Yeah, absolutely.

Lucas: Yeah, Josh. So to our audience, what do you guys think? What are your thoughts and opinion on workforce and affordability and the things that Paul was talking about? Are you doing these things in your community? Connect with us at [btgvoice.com](http://btgvoice.com). Send Josh and Lucas a message and we'll also connect with Paul on the show notes so you can reach out to him and the people at Silverado. And thank you for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.

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