

Welcome to season six of Bridge The Gap, a podcast dedicated to informing, educating, and influencing the future of housing and services for seniors. Powered by sponsors Accushield, Connected Living, Hamilton CapTel, Refera, The Bridge Group Construction and Solinity. The contributors are brought to you by Peak Senior Living and produced by Solinity Marketing.

Christy 00:39

Welcome to the Bridge The Gap podcast. I am Christy Van Der Westhuizen. I'm SVP of Sales and Marketing at Legend Senior Living, and I'm so thrilled to be here with Josh and Lucas of Bridge The Gap podcast.

Lucas 00:53

This is amazing. Our Bridge The Gap Ambassador. Our Bridge The Gap Contributor Christy, she is here hosting this special edition of Bridge The Gap Contributor. And the topic's gonna be sales and marketing. You are well known in the industry on this topic. You have contributed to many, many different podcasts, you know, in the Bridge The Gap library.

Christy 1:18

Are you tired of me yet?

Lucas 1:19

We're not tired. We want more of you. And we see the feedback that we get on LinkedIn and places like that. We love your content. And I think it's just very, very valuable to the industry. The industry has changed.

Christy 1:34

Yes.

Lucas 1:35

And shifted so much. And this is a fun conversation because I've sat in the background and listened to your solo podcast. So it's a pleasure to be able to have a conversation with you. You know, there's been so many changes.

Christy 1:45

Yes.

Lucas 1:46

Sales and marketing doesn't look the same as it did five years ago.

Christy 1:48

Right.

Lucas 1:49

Do you agree?

Christy 1:49

Yes. I absolutely do. And I think one thing that is so different is that we meet the customer where they are. And when I started in the industry about 14 years ago, it was very much gated. I felt like people had to reach out to me as a Sales Director to find out more information, and we held it very close to the vest. The only kind of thing that we would do is we would mail a large brochure with all the pricing and all the floor plans, and probably way too much information for someone to digest on their own. Or we would schedule a tour without really knowing anything about that person. And so now I feel like sales and marketing has transformed into just this amazing transparency, really forum, of how much information can we get to the consumer when they want it, how they want it. And a lot of that is online. People are reading reviews a lot more. We're utilizing either live chat or chat bots to have conversations with prospects and their families where they are, how they want the information. And so I think that we've really made great strides in understanding consumer behavior and how to communicate better with our consumers. I still think we have a long way to go because I do think that we still are an "opaque industry" if I could use that word, where a lot of people don't really know what happens behind the doors of our assisted living and memory care communities. And so I think that it's really our job to invite them in to see what really life is like for not only our team members, but our residents and our family members. Just so we can really start to have a lot more transparency in this industry. And I wanna be a part of that.

Josh 3:49

So the transparency, I would totally agree with you. I think it's improved a lot.

Christy 3:54

Yes!

Josh 3:54

As you said just in the time that we've been in this space, but needs to improve a lot more. So in your crystal ball, the Crystal Magic Ball.

Lucas 4:04

Christy Crystal Ball.

Christy 4:05

Yes.

Lucas 4:06

How do I say that? But what do you see ahead? Where do we need to continue to move and to get that transparency that you're describing? What are some of the things we're gonna have to be willing to do as an industry that maybe we're not doing today?

Christy 4:22

I think that pricing on websites, at least starting at rates, gives consumers at least a glimpse of what the cost could be for themselves or their loved ones. So I think pricing is really important and explaining what the price includes, right? We all know we're in the industry. It includes so much more than just monthly rent, like how you and I would pay rent. But it includes so much more. And really talk about the lifestyle because that you can't really put a price tag on the loneliness and isolation that sometimes our

seniors feel in their own homes. You can't put a price tag on removing that barrier from them. And so really explaining what that looks like. And again, that has to be on the website somehow where people can read it and digest it at their own rather than having to pick up the phone and call us and having us explain it. So not only just price transparency, I think just especially online, but I think that transforming the tour experience, I think is really where our industry is going. I have this grand idea that we're gonna get rid of the word "tour" and we're gonna call it the "experience" because as a Sales Director I want a prospective resident to come in and experience what life is going to be like if they move into that specific community. And you don't get that when it's, "Here is the dining room, here is the pool area, here is the spa." You don't get that that if you're doing the Jungle Cruise tour. I'm totally guilty of this. I used to call people who were really great in sales and marketing. I said they were great tour guides. I wish I never said that because that's absolutely wrong. We're not tour guides. We are experience givers and solution finders and problem solvers and hand holders. But our goal, I think, in the future is to really showcase, what is life going to be like for that person if they do indeed make the change and move into the community? So I would love to see the word "tour" just, magically disappear and replace it with "experience."

Lucas 6:38

Well, if you had a choice, do you want to go on a tour or have an experience? It's an easy choice.

Josh 6:43

We want the experience.

Lucas 6:45

We do.

Josh 6:45

For sure.

Lucas 6:45

That's what we want.

Lucas 6:46

Yes. Well, so I want to go back because you brought up a couple of big things there, but the pricing transparency, you know, it's really interesting. I think all three of us could probably agree most of the time pick anything that we shop for as consumers. We're on our phones most of the time hitting up Amazon or eBay or wherever we're searching and we're comparing and there's pretty much any other product or service that we would buy, we can shop for. We can see not only the star ratings and all the reviews, but we can see the pricing and know exactly what we're getting. We know exactly what it's gonna cost.

Lucas 7:27

And even Airbnb similar, like to move it more towards a hospitality model. It's different than if you wanna book a room at Marriott, unless this is a family vacation that you're really diving into, you're going to book that room, but at an Airbnb, you're back to an experience a lot of times, right? And there's more details you're gonna read and look at reviews and it's a tough decision just for an Airbnb.

Josh 7:50

Yeah. Well, to get to transparency, I feel like there's so many things cuz because you immediately rattled off like two things. But even just looking at pricing, the technology we know is already out there for us to leverage in senior living to make pricing more. So you have to start asking, "What is preventing us from being more transparent?" Do you have any insight on that? Is that just behavior that we're stuck in? Or is there some fear? What do you think it is?

Christy 8:21

Oh, I think it's fear-based. I think that might be because if we put our pricing out there, then maybe we're not getting as many phone calls as we did, or not getting as many web forms as we used to. But when you look at the quality of phone calls and web forms and all of that, I feel like you will start to see an improvement because people already know when they're calling or submitting that they already understand some basic pricing rather than, I feel like people don't call places to ask rates just out of the blue. Just think of just regular consumer behavior. You don't call the Mercedes-Benz dealer and just go, "Hey, how, how much is that car?" No, you do some research and so I think that it's fear of maybe we're not going to capture all the leads that we used to. But again, when you think about it, you're probably getting a lot more quality rather than the quantity. So I think it's fear-based.

Lucas 9:23

I feel like that's a whole conversation in and of itself. I feel like many bad habits have been formed in the industry around putting leads on a pedestal. There's this big golden calf of leads.

Christy 9:38

We need more leads!

Lucas 9:39

I feel like that conversation and really more of the conversation needs to shift, but I think that the actual actions behind it need to completely be reimaged.

Josh 9:48

Well, going back to your, I think you're the one, Lucas, said "Airbnb model." I know there's certain times, certain trips that I take, that I'm looking for certain types of Airbnbs, like certain services, certain sizes, certain budget. And you have to think the consumer, not only pricing, but description of how our services are unique and different. Because if you've got, let's say in any market, five different senior living communities, I could probably guarantee you they're not all exactly the same. So supporting your pricing structure by being transparent on actually what you deliver, because then you're educating the consumer on this is where we're different. But that does require a lot of intentionality and it does require a lot of work. And transparency. But then talk about this experience. So in Christy's world, thinking of "experiences," and the magic that I've heard you talking about, explain where you see this going or where it needs to go.

Christy 10:54

So the whole word "experience," and I know my husband absolutely hates it because anytime it's my birthday or anniversary, he says, "What do you want for what do you want as a gift?" I'm like, "An experience. I want an experience."

Lucas 11:11

The dreaded word.

Josh 11:11

Yes, every husband.

Christy 11:16

So it's not a "thing", it's an "experience." And so I think that if we start to frame, "What is the experience of our current residents, number one, can that be improved?" And then two, "What is the experience that a potential resident gets when they walk in a new building for the first time?" Are they feeling that intangible magic? Are they feeling warmly welcomed? Are they feeling expected? All of those things I feel like you will not get if you continue to call it a "tour." To me, a "tour" again is a scripted thing with no feelings, no desires. It's a presentation of facts. Whereas we know when we're looking at choosing an Airbnb or choosing an experience we are looking at some intangible things, right? Or unique things that maybe if you call it a "tour" you won't get. And so I think that calling it "experiences" or a "future resident experience" I think that our potential residents will really get, what does it feel like living here? What does it smell like? What does it taste like? Am I getting the good tingles or am I getting a bad feeling? And no amount of amazing salesmanship will counteract that. I really feel like that.

Lucas 12:42

Well, and the first thing, the areas of opportunity that you just mentioned in the beginning, just like expecting them, welcoming them. These are things that you can control and they're not expensive, right? So control what you can control. And then it's more than what I'm hearing, if I'm hearing you correctly. It's more than just, "Hey everybody. All right. We're not gonna call it a tour anymore, we're gonna call it an experience. You can't go back to the same way of doing it."

Christy 13:06

No.

Lucas 13:07

You know, if you're buying a house and you just recently moved, right? You don't walk in the house with your realtor, well, you hope not, and they walk you into the kitchen and they say, "This is the kitchen."

Christy 13:17

Really?

Lucas 13:18

Wow. You just earned your commission buddy. This is cutting edge stuff, right? No, you don't want that. That's not what you're looking for when you're there, right? But when you buy a home, there is some of that magic that where you feel this could be our home, right? So how do you craft that same experience in a senior living community?

Christy 13:41

It's with the people. It's doing really great discovery before they even walk into your building. It's finding like-minded people that you can introduce them to. So to me, again, talking about Airbnb or just

vacation experiences, my favorite experiences are not the fanciest places. It's the times where I got to connect with people. Maybe it was my own husband and family, or maybe it was people from another country that we got to meet, but it's the people that make the experience. And how do you do that in senior living? Unless you're getting to connect to one another and people and like-minded people and team members and residents and family members. How do you create an experience without connecting people? And I don't know.

Josh 14:34

I want to dive into that a little bit more because I feel like we're really onto something. It's like, "I really want to take actionable steps." How can our audience take actionable steps? How can we remove obstacles? Because I think when we're talking about this, I can't imagine a listener being like, "Nah, I don't like that. No, that's not good. No."

Christy 14:54

I would like a tour. Just the facts.

Lucas 14:55

I want to know that this is the kitchen when I'm standing in the kitchen.

Josh 14:58

So I feel like our entire audience right now is like saying hearty amens like, "Yes, yes!" But then we're probably going to hit pause. We're going to get off the treadmill, we're going to go take our showers, we're going to go to our communities. And then we're back to the bad habits. What you just said, for example, you said, being intentional. I think, and I'm not quoting you, but you have to do some homework to learn about the resident. But do you think in most organizations, not picking on anyone, but in most organizations, do you think we create a culture and an incentives that allow for our team members to feel like that is what we want them to do and they're encouraged to do that? Or are they set, I feel like sometimes we're put in such of a sales box. That like every minute you have to be in the sales zone, like closing or calling. And I almost feel like that's sometimes almost counterintuitive to doing some of that homework that you need to do to be able to have a meaningful relationship. Do you, do you get what I'm saying?

Christy 16:09

Yes, absolutely.

Josh 16:11

How do we overcome that? Because I think that's a big barrier in our industry right now is because all these great CRM tools that are tracking every single one of our sales efforts and everything like that, when are we going to place value on that part of the job to create the experience and create the safe space for our team members and let them know they are actually incentivized to do that. So tell me, please.

Christy 16:40

That's like the magic pill.

Josh 16:41

Yeah. But like, how do we do that?

Lucas 16:43

That's a whole other podcast.

Christy 16:44

Yes, it is. It's 100% a whole other podcast. But I think that one of the simplest things that we can do and again, I'm totally guilty of doing this, when I was a Sales Director, but calling it a 10 o'clock tour. "Oh, we got a 10 o'clock tour and a noon tour and a two o'clock tour." Well, that's great. And that shows that people are interested and you're making a connection on the phone and scheduling the appointment. But who are they? Who is the 10 o'clock tour, right? Who is she as a person? What is her life story? What is something that a team member when hearing it can connect the dots and then make that connection when they see the 10 o'clock person walking through the door and looking a little lost and a little nervous? It's creating tools and usually that's a couple sentences about who this person is to the entire team so that we know who's walking in our doors. There are so many other ways to do that, but I think we need to stop thinking of tours as numbers and not even have names. And think of them as people with amazing life stories that we want to get to learn from and how do you learn from them unless you ask, right?

Josh 17:57

Yeah. Absolutely. It's totally a relational driven experience. It's not transactional. And I feel like we do that a lot. It's the 10 o'clock tour. We hope there's a transaction, we need a deposit after this tour because then we got to start the admission process. All those very sterile kind of things that we do just to try to move someone through the sales move in cycle.

Lucas 18:23

Well, maybe you change that dialogue to, "Today we have the opportunity to give three experiences and for these people and what our hope is, the outcome of these experiences is that they make this their home." Changing how you even approach that on a Tuesday.

Christy 18:41

Yes.

Josh 18:41

Lucas, are you moving out of construction and now you're into sales?

Lucas 18:47

I'm a Contractor. I do construction.

Josh 18:48

No, I think you've just signed up to be part of the sales team.

Christy 18:52

We're all on the sales team, okay?

Lucas 18:54

I have learned so much from people like Christy and just being involved in Bridge The Gap. I learned these things and the things that I learned, actually, I transcribe that back to my construction team because what we are trying to do as a General Contractor, when we're going in and doing what seems simple, painting the walls, changing the flooring, changing the lights, we're trying to create an experience out of that. We're having an experience. We get to live in their community for three, six months at a time. And we're a part of that experience. And so it's great that I've had the opportunity to learn these types of conversations because I'm making that happen in my own company from a construction standpoint.

Josh 19:35

Well, and this probably ties to a conversation our listeners didn't get to hear because it was before we hit record, which is sometimes our most amazing conversations, but we were talking about how Disney has done that so well. But you think about if you walked into any Disney park and you walked into like the front area and it was amazing, but then you got back to the back area, or you got over here and it was any less amazing. So when we're thinking about this experience, I mean, everybody has to be bought in on that, right? It can't just be the salesperson. Gosh, just imagine if you've got a room turn going on and that general contractor and that paint crew know that they're there to create the exact same experience as your salesperson, as your dining person, as your housekeeper, as all of these different people are all with the same goal to paint that experience. How different would our industry look and how different would that experience look for that potential family member that's coming into your community? It's amazing.

Lucas 20:40

Fun conversation.

Christy 20:42

Absolutely.

Josh 20:44

We need a 2.0.

Lucas 20:46

We do, we do. And there will be. So these are gonna be really fun Bridge The Gap Contributor shows where we get to sit down with our rockstar contributors like Christy and others. And we have a whole library for people to go back to and listen to and learn from this great topic of sales and marketing. This is not the end, but it's the end for now. Christy, thanks for being here at ASHA with us.

Christy 21:11

Thank you.

Lucas 21:12

I know that you have a very busy schedule and you're having a lot of these types of conversations and we're rooting for you. And we know that you are a catalyst for change, positive change in our industry, and we appreciate all the work you're doing.

Christy 21:24

Thank you so much. It's been an absolute pleasure being here with you today and I look forward to many more conversations.

Lucas 21:30

Absolutely. It's coming up. And for those that want to go back and listen to other contributor shows, you can go to btgvoice.com, hit that library at the top, and you can connect with all of our content there. Connect with us on social. We want to hear from you. Go to LinkedIn, write us a message. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge The Gap Contributor here on the podcast network.

21:50

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