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Excellence in Consumer Service

To have a successful risk management program excellence in consumer skills is key. Residents, family members/friends, and other stakeholders need to feel safe and welcomed to state their disappointments, discuss questions, bring up concerns, and or worries in an environment that is welcoming and accepting without defensive posturing and aggressive response. Many facilities have programs related to this, the names of these programs vary, but the one common thing is

that it takes a strong culture of excellence in consumer services. While consumer services are important in all businesses, I feel that it is especially important in healthcare as we often interact with those dealing with some of the most difficult times in their lives and frequently in the face of prolong sorrow, loss, and often death.

The Five C's

This special group of Team Member that provides this level of services does so by demonstrating something I have coined as ***The Five C's of Excellence in Consumer Service*** (herein referred to as **The Five C's**). These Five C's include:

1. **compassion,**
2. **care,**
3. **concern,**
4. **commitment, and**
5. **competence.**

Compassion-response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help.

Care-the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something.

Concern-a matter of interest or importance to someone.

Commitment-a promise to do or give something for someone, a loyalty. Making a commitment involves dedicating yourself to something, such as to a person or a cause.

Competence-the quality of being capable of performing an allotted function, having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc.

The Five C's are the skills which make partnerships between parties, improve satisfaction (not only for the consumer but also for the individual providing the services), and ultimately it reduces risk which in our environment translates into success! This success includes decreased grievances, complaints, unscheduled surveys, and reduced litigation which supports improved business success and outcomes. The Team Member that demonstrates The Five C's often have not had professional education, but they do reflect superior communication skills reflected in their actions. One thing we do know is that that Team Member that reflect three or more of The Five C's are critical to the

success of your facility and ultimately business. Thus the question is, how does one create an environment to foster The Five C's?

Creating an Environment to Foster requires us to build a Foundation

To create an environment to foster The Five C's diligence in Human Resources is pivotal. Proper attention to company hiring policies and processes no matter how 'short' we are is imperative. These policies were written to support the time necessary to truly interview and evaluate our potential new employees. While interviewing I like to consider my top five consumer service skills and then look for evidence of them while meeting candidates. These skills are:

1. awareness,
2. empathy,
3. patience,
4. negotiation, and
5. tact.

Awareness – requires an ability to access one's surroundings to ask questions and gather information through observation to gauge the needs and potential of a consumer within the scope and practice of the position held by the Team Member.

Empathy – This is the ability to understand the consumer's needs and mood to better manage their response, tone of voice, etc.

Patience – To be patient one must listen attentively, often in an interview we waive off lack of patience on nerves, but remember to look for indicators of patience or lack thereof. .

Negotiation – All of these skills come together in effective negotiation. We all negotiate and to do it well one needs to listen twice and speak once.

Tact – This is the skill of putting ourselves in another's shoes. Consumers who are unhappy or disappointed often are not upset at our Team Member but simply upset. Therefore it is important that Team Member are receptive and thankful when a consumer advises that they are displeased as without that information, how could we work to please them?

In Summary

Excellence in customer service is a known factor in risk mitigation and ultimately litigation reduction. It does not matter what job or position a Team Member holds, what does matter is the desire to provide something special, unique, and of value to the consumer who many Team Members consider their treasured valued friend and even loved ones. Consideration is not something that can be taught thus the Human Resource and Customer Service program is critical. A secondary gain is that the Team Members committed to excellence in customer service are usually happier, healthier, and have longer tenure than their colleagues that are not committed.

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