

The Wright Approach



More People Would Rather Be Boiled Alive In Acid than to be Called a Salesperson

Having worked with struggling retirement community for about three months, it was becoming painfully clear that one of the major problems was in the area of sales. You know, the dreaded "S" word, the part of senior housing that gets little attention but lots of blame.

The retirement counselor was on a second tour with a gentlemen, when an old acquaintance met them in the hallway. "So when are you going to be moving in here with us?" asked the resident. "As soon as Steve (the retirement counselor) asks me," was the reply.

In this case the buying signs were all too obvious, but what is not so obvious to many people handling the sales efforts in today's assisted and independent living communities is how to sell. This kind of scenario is being played out all over the country, and it is becoming very evident that the sales aspect of senior housing is a cloudy part of the business for experienced as well as inexperienced operators.

Sales requires fundamental skills and realistic expectations. What is reasonable to expect? Well, national averages indicate that the monthly

move-in rate is about four in independent units and five in assisted living. Are you expecting twice that number from your team? On what basis? Retirement counselors should be expected to make a certain number of calls and tours each week, leading to a goal in deposits and move-ins, week in and week out. If they can't hit those goals what is the problem? Are they unqualified? Is the traffic there? Or for that matter, is the product worth selling?

If there is a good product to sell, and counselors are given a good base salary with a nice commission structure (even if it means that the counselors will make more money than the manager for a while) then let's make sure we have people who know how to relate and how to sell.

Here are a few of the key fundamental traits that a good retirement counselor possesses:

Establish rapport. Get to know the customer and set a goal of helping them solve a problem, not just make a sale.

Know your product. How many square feet is that balcony? How far away is the nearest Baptist Church? How many meals does your kitchen

serve a month? Knowledge means confidence.

Sell the benefits, not the features. The customer doesn't want to know how it works, she just wants to know how it will help her or her mother.

Believe in yourself and your product. If you don't, your prospect won't.

Qualify the buyer. Don't waste your time with people who can't or won't ever decide.

Use testimonials. The strongest salesperson on your team is the reference from a happy resident.

When you ask a closing question, shut up. That's the first rule of sales.

And finally, follow up, follow up and follow up. A card that sits on my desk reminds me each day that 80 percent of all sales are made after the fifth call. The problem is a mere ten percent of salespeople keep on calling after the first, second, third or fourth try. To that ten percent, however, go 80 percent of all sales!

A recent American Senior Housing Association survey showed that the annual resident turnover rate in assisted living is now 55 percent. A 60-unit building will need to move in nearly three people a month just to stay even. So, don't think that selling isn't important and won't continue to be one of the most important, yet unrecognized, aspects of running a successful senior living community.

Before you dip your toe into that vat of boiling acid, remember that practicing some of the tips above on a daily and weekly basis is a whole lot less painful.

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