

Excerpt from Changing Culture, Changing Care:

PROLOGUE

Frank

Frank is a 210-pound man with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. He lives in a long-term care facility. Today Frank is visibly upset. He is pacing through the unit, looking for something that he cannot describe in words. He paces faster and faster, tearing linens off the beds and going through dresser drawers in one room after another. A staff member grabs his arm from behind as he rips a sheet from another bed. He pulls his arm away and looks as if he might strike her. She screams for help. Frank is startled by the scream. He pushes his way out through the doorway, only to see a crowd of staff descend upon him. Six staff members wrestle him to the floor, holding him down while the nurse gives him yet another injection. He fights with all of his might, frightened and panicked.

George

George is a new resident in a nursing facility. He is a large man, with a diagnosis of dementia. George is restless today, wandering all over the unit. He looks worried, afraid, and moves from space to space with increasing anxiety. Pam, a certified nursing assistant, approaches him, speaking quietly. He stops. She stands in front of him and looks into his eyes, quietly humming a song. She smiles and waits, and when it is time, she gently takes his hands, one by one. Still looking into his eyes, she hums and smiles. As she starts to sway from side to side, George moves with her. Still humming, she leads him in a slow and gentle dance. He smiles, no longer anxious, no longer alone, and no longer afraid.

What is the difference between these two scenarios? Can you imagine how each situation ends? What happens to each of these residents? Why is one nursing assistant so different from the other? Which staff person would you want to care for you?

While the answers to these questions lie in a number of factors, the primary difference is an organization-wide philosophy of care. It is the creation of a culture that respects, prepares, educates and supports staff to work with the resident with compassion and love, as demonstrated in the second scenario. It is an environment committed to serving older adults, their families and the staff who work there. It is a facility where carefully selected and educated staff work together as a team, feel ownership, are heard, and have decision making opportunities and responsibilities. It is a respect-filled environment where staff are prepared, not just trained in the tasks of caregiving. They are knowledgeable about the aging process and are sensitive to the needs of older adults. In such an environment leadership is focused on service with a clear vision and mission where education, communication and inclusion are commonplace, and growth, innovation and compassion reside.

It is a facility that utilizes S.E.R.V.I.C.E.