

# A QUALITY INTERVIEW

By Lisa French

One of the most effective ways for assisted-living companies to distinguish themselves in our increasingly competitive environment is to focus on quality. Staffing is a crucial element of achieving optimal customer service. This presents new challenges to hiring managers. While many organizations have traditionally relied on developing service-training initiatives, they have not placed sufficient emphasis on hiring and retaining individuals who have a natural passion for quality service and resident satisfaction. Quality driven assisted-living facilities understand the value of the interview process for selecting people with the right attitude to build their company around talent.

Assisted-living providers can look to the hotel industry for examples of remarkable success in building quality service. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company resolved more than a decade ago to consistently achieve world-class customer service. To meet that goal, the organization began focusing on a quality selection process, which involved hiring the right people to do the right things. These efforts resulted in a drop in staff turnover from 55 percent in 1991 to 28 percent world-wide. In 1991, 25 percent of its customers said they experienced a problem with service. Today, that figure stands at 1 percent. Each percentage point increase in customer satisfaction represents a 2.5 percent increase in revenue per available room.

Assisted living communities can benefit from emulating quality-driven organizations that significantly impact bottom-line results.

Communities serving sophisticated and demanding consumers can no longer rely on hiring a workforce where experience and technical competency are the major criteria for selection and development. Many hiring managers can rely solely on subjective impressions from conventional interviews to determine the candidate's potential for success. Organizations that identify talent in an objective, validated way usually enjoy significantly—and measureably—improved results.

A talent benchmark specific to a particular company can be built by analyzing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of existing top performers within an assisted-living community. **Talent<sup>+</sup>**, an international human resources consultancy, designed a structured-interview process to enable The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company to identify talent in the hiring process. This interview does not replace an assessment of technical competency and experience. But unlike conventional interviews conducted by HR managers, the structured interview identifies candidates' natural talents and abilities.

Through this questioning process, candidates recall specific past and recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that help to identify their strongest assets. Their responses are analyzed and benchmarked with those of successful staff members. The advantage of the structured interview lies within the behavioral-based data that directly correlates to the future performance of a candidate and the ultimate best fit for the community.

Asking applicants questions, which are open-ended and unaided,

creates a platform for getting objective, reliable data that accurately indicates their potential for success. Personality qualities that are highly reliable in the healthcare industry include:

**Values** - When this quality is present, an employee will accomplish more than his peers in any type of setting. These individuals are dependable and responsible—qualities which become an important element of their self-definition. Questions like, "How do you feel when you make a mistake?" and "What do you do when you make a mistake?" can help a hiring manager look for values that match responses from top performers. The best candidates respond in a way that indicates they feel bad about making a mistake and want to fix it.

**Work Intensity** - This area identifies people who can establish effective priorities. They have an ability to deal with deadlines. Individuals with high work intensity take control of their own environment and work situation in an organized and productive manner. Planning is a natural part of their lives.

**Achiever** - An individual who is an intense achiever initiates action rather than resting on yesterday's success. The candidate with this quality works effectively despite the pressures of the job. Achievers will often create ways to make their work more interesting and provide their own methods to measure their effectiveness.

**Relationship** - This category demonstrates the ability to work well with others, which leads to higher productivity and retention. Individuals who strive to make relationships create trust with

their peers, as well as their supervisors. They continuously ask for more responsibility and independence in their assignments.

**Resourcefulness** - These people are very creative at finding solutions to difficult issues at work. They are quick in mastering a difficult situation and can think both logically and emotionally. They are able to deal effectively with change and figure out new and better ways to improve their effectiveness and make their efforts more meaningful.

Understanding and accurately evaluating a candidate's talent also enables a company to determine where the person would best fit. People strong in the "relationship" category often have a need to be around others and should work in an environment where they are given an opportunity to use their people-driven strengths. Within an assisted-living community, those individuals who tend to make relationships easily would provide residents with better service and more empathy.

Excellent customer service drives revenue growth and is a foundation for a strong, positive reputation. Identifying service-oriented individuals and matching them to the right position recognizes people are truly the sustainable competitive advantage for assisted-living communities.

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