The seven success killers for senior living and skilled nursing

Smart, simple advice to help you address the success killers that impede your ability to build a successful community

VoiceFriend

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If you run a senior living or skilled nursing community, you know the challenges you face daily. Every day, you feel the pressure to increase productivity and efficiency, strengthen the engagement of seniors and their families, increase staff morale and retention, and boost satisfaction and census.

Based on our years of experience working with thousands of professionals at senior living and skilled nursing communities, we have identified seven critical "success killers"—overlooked opportunities, weak implementations, or downright mistakes that are likely thwarting your ability to achieve your critical goals.

This paper not only discusses those seven success killers, but also presents a simple, affordable solution proven to help senior living or skilled nursing communities like yours overcome these success killers. (Too eager to learn about the solution? Skip to page 9.)

Staff call-outs also cause nurse burnout
Another often-overlooked impact of addressing staff call-outs with overtime is the acceleration of nurse burnout. A recent study that compared nurses working shifts of 13+ hours against those nurses that worked shifts of only 8 to 9 hours found some unsettling results. The nurses working shifts of 13 hours or more are more than twice as likely to:

• Be burned out

• Be dissatisfied in their jobs

• Intend to leave their job in the next year[5]

[1] "Providers' Labor Costs to Soar Under New Overtime Rule."
Senior Housing News, May 2016.

[2] "Medscape RN/LPN Salary Report 2016."

[3] "Management and Control of Overtime Costs." New York State Office of the State Comptroller, May 2012.

[4] "Total Financial Impact of Employee Absences in the U.S." SHRM and Kronos, August 2014.

[5] "The Longer The Shifts For Hospital Nurses, The Higher The Levels Of Burnout And Patient Dissatisfaction." Health Affairs, 2012.

❶ Success killer #1: Unplanned labor costs

Labor is typically the largest major expense, ranging from 45% to 50% of total expenses for senior living communities.[1] And with wages rising, the cost of overtime continues to increase. In fact, approximately 45% of nurses surveyed indicated they work at least 6 hours of overtime each week with 15% working 11 or more overtime hours. In skilled nursing organizations, the numbers are even higher.[2]

A New York study (see sidebar) found that unscheduled overtime was caused primarily by unanticipated employee absences or special work needs or emergencies. One of its recommendations is to encourage facilities to maximize the use of part-time and temporary staff before using full-time staff when assigning overtime. But engaging a more appropriate, less expensive staffer isn't always easy. That's why we believe there is another important factor contributing to these overtime expenses—see our next success killer for more on this.

❷ Success killer #2: Ineffective processes for addressing staff call-outs

Staff schedulers are under great pressure to fill open shifts. But this is a tedious, often frustrating task of phone calls and email and voice messages to staff members. In fact, a VoiceFriend study indicates that the typical call-out takes between two and three hours to fill—and that's if you're fortunate to have only one call-out that day!

Instead of making the effort to seek out a replacement employee who has time available, staff schedulers find it easier to simply assign the open shift to an already scheduled employee willing to work overtime. From the scheduler's viewpoint, it's a win-win situation: the scheduler spends less time making tedious calls, and the employee who agrees to the overtime makes extra income that day.

But there's a problem with that logic. While the scheduler may see it as a win-win situation, it's a loss for your community and your profitability. By not taking the time to find an employee who can perform that open shift without going into overtime, your scheduler has unnecessarily increased your labor costs. And if you think that doesn't happen that often, think again. In a study conducted for the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), respondents indicated that overtime was used to cover 47% of employee absences.[4] While this may be a win-win for the individuals involved, it's clearly not a win for the employer—increasing an already out-of-control overtime expense.

That same study found that employees with supervisory responsibility spend over four hours per week on average dealing with absences, including obtaining replacements, adjusting workflow or providing training. That's equivalent to 210 hours per year per supervisory employee for typical organizations. In fact, unplanned absence was the highest cause of average productivity loss (over 36%).

Clearly, an inefficient process for addressing staff call-outs can not only increase your already skyrocketing overtime expenses, but also significantly hurt productivity and cause nurse burnout that leads to job dissatisfaction and higher turnover.

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Success killer #3: Lack of senior participation in activities and events

The evidence is clear. Seniors who actively participate in your activities and events are generally healthier, happier and more satisfied with their life quality. A 2013 report by the Centre for Aging at the University of Manitoba indicates that activities with a social focus are crucial to overall wellness for the elderly, especially for the maintenance of a meaningful and satisfying life. The report concluded:

Boost your community's reputation, too
By encouraging senior participation in activities and events, you serve to boost your community's reputation and recommendation, which are critical to occupancy. A survey of senior living residents conducted in 2012 by National Research found that nearly **60%** of surveyed residents visited two or more residential communities prior to selecting the one they decided to call home. Reputation and recommendation **(at 44%)** were the #1-cited reason for choosing the senior living community.[9]

"Without consistent social interaction, seniors can experience a variety of distressing conditions including debilitating loneliness, depression, and an increased risk of dementia. On the other hand, when seniors consistently engage in social activities, they experience significant improvements in their physical, mental, and emotional health outcomes. Much of this improvement results from the ability to maintain healthy relationships and a continued sense of being part of society."

Some statistics on the benefits of senior engagement:

- The rate of cognitive decline was reduced by an average of 70% in older adults who were frequently socially active compared to those who were infrequently socially active over an average of five years.[6]

- Older adults who participated daily or weekly in social activity had a 40% reduced risk of developing dementia compared to those who were not socially engaged.[7]

While the physical and mental health benefits your seniors gain through their participation in social activities and events are of highest priority, there are additional benefits that can impact the success of your community as well. Socially active, happy seniors are more likely to act as impactful and effective referrals for your community. And referrals are extremely important to your success, whether they come from the seniors themselves or their families. New prospects are easier to convert when they've been referred by someone they know and trust who can attest to the quality of care and life in your community. Studies have shown that referrals are much more likely to be converted to tours than are web-based inquiries or contacts made at events.[8]

When a senior fails to participate in one of your activities or events, it's not always due to lack of interest or motivation. It may be due simply to lack of awareness. Notification processes for seniors are often not well designed—relying on word of mouth, a monthly newsletter or a poster in a hallway. A more structured, thorough notification process is necessary to strengthen awareness of upcoming events and activities.

6, 7 "Social Participation and its Benefits." Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba, August 2013.

8 "Senior Living Sales Benchmarking: How Does Your Community Measure Up?" Enquire Solutions, March 2015.

9 "10 New Powerful Senior Living Statistics." Glynn Devins, May 2014.

Success killer #4: Inefficient compliance with CMS regulations

In 2016, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) increased the number and types of situations where civil money penalties must be imposed against nursing homes that do not comply with CMS regulations—without giving the facilities an opportunity to correct their noncompliance.[10] CMS regulations were tightened further in the fall of 2017 with new requirements regarding how families, residents and patients are to be contacted during community emergencies.

Many nursing homes plan to comply with these new requirements with manual processes—by simply having their staff make phone calls to families and residents/patients. But how confident are you that, during an emergency, your staff will make every necessary notification on time, as required by the CMS regulations? With all the other tasks and demands involved with responding to an emergency, your staff is likely to be distracted, which reduces the chance that every notification will occur on time, or at all. The fact is: Relying on a manual process for your notifications can be risky. Also, a manual process may or may not offer the ability to accurately track and account for those notifications.

Relying on a manual notification process doesn't just pose a risk of noncompliance; it also ties up valuable staff resources—potentially hours of time spent contacting each family, resident and patient—at a time when you need them to focus on critical tasks.

Success killer #5: Weak family engagement

The evidence is clear that active participation in social activities and events can promote both physical and mental health, and overall life-quality satisfaction of residents or patients. But it can be just as important to foster strong family engagement in your activities and events.

It's long been known that higher life satisfaction can result when residential care/assisted living (RC/AL) residents receive visits from family at least monthly.[11]

The negative impact of weak or even mediocre family engagement extends beyond the quality of life of seniors and the satisfaction of families and staff. Families can have a major impact on a community's reputation, are also extremely important referral sources, and are often critical to the selection of senior living communities and nursing homes. According to Solutions Advisors, a senior housing consulting firm, 30% of inquiries into continuing care residential communities (CCRC) originate with family members.[13]

[10] "CMS Increases Mandatory Enforcement to Protect Nursing Home Residents." Center for Medicare Advocacy, August 2016.

[11] "Families Filling the Gap: Comparing Family Involvement for Assisted Living and Nursing Home Residents With Dementia." The Gerontological Society of America, 2005.

[12] "How important is family involvement in the care of nursing home residents?" Mariposa Training, January 2017. More info, National Institute of Health:

[13] "Engaging Family in the Senior Living Transition." Argentum, July 2017.

Communications can be time consuming
Have you truly considered all the daily communications needs that require you or your staff to notify and inform your seniors, residents, families and staff—communications that are conducted mostly by phone calls or in-person visits? Here are just a few examples:

• Meal alerts

• Activity reminders

• Doctor appointment confirmations

• Health alerts

• Changes in event times and locations

• Family meetings

Think about how many hours are spent every day on these manual efforts—and the number of opportunities for error that cause them not to occur on time or accurately.

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Success killer #6: Outdated, time-consuming processes for alerts and wellness checks

Many senior living communities still rely on outdated manual processes for their alerts, reminders and wellness checks. The amount of staff time devoted to these efforts each day can be staggering.

Besides the huge amount of time spent on performing alerts and reminders, there's the time-consuming process of performing wellness check-ins via phone calls, door tags, mailbox cards, in-person visits and meal attendance checks. And this doesn't include the time spent contacting the staff about open shifts, upcoming training or license due dates.

Relying on old-fashioned manual processes for all these critical communications not only increases your labor expenses, but can also cause more overtime expenses, increase staff burnout, increase the risk of human error and hurt your compliance with CMS notification regulations.

Furthermore, requiring trained nurses and healthcare professionals to spend hours performing these tasks is an inefficient use of resources—one that takes these professionals from the critical resident/patient care tasks for which they are trained.

7 Success killer #7: Ineffective support for seniors with visual or mild cognitive impairment

As baby boomers age, the occurrence of visual or mild cognitive impairment increases. According to the Alzheimer's Association, long-term studies suggest that 15–20% of those aged 65 and older may have mild cognitive impairment today.[14]

As more and more seniors and patients are afflicted with these impairments, operators of senior living and skilled nursing communities must leverage the latest technologies to better accommodate both visual and cognitive impairments. Managers and operators of these organizations must be proactive in their efforts to deploy these technologies, as it cannot be assumed that aging seniors will notify them or even be aware of their growing impairments. Traditional forms of communication—especially printed material—will become increasingly ineffective in providing seniors with the information they need when they need it.

In summary: The status quo isn't an option

Today's senior living and skilled nursing communities are under pressure to improve the quality of their care, build a more active and engaged community, boost senior/patient and family satisfaction, and strengthen the overall experience for seniors. Meanwhile, they are under equally intense pressure to reduce costs, boost efficiency, and build and retain a strong, better trained, and more satisfied staff.

It's quite a dilemma to balance these two sets of goals, and it's only going to get worse as our population continues to age. There are an estimated 5.9 million people aged 85 or older in the U.S. today. By the year 2050, that number will increase to almost 20 million.[18] The demands on care communities will only continue to rise.

On the positive side, this demographic trend can also mean tremendous growth opportunity. Well-managed senior living and skilled nursing communities will have a strong future if they address the critical success killers we've discussed here.

Fortunately, there's a simple, easy-to-implement, and affordable solution that can help address all seven of these success killers: the VoiceFriend Automated Notification Solution.

[14] "Mild Cognitive Impairment." Alzheimer's Association.

[15, 16] "Cognitive Impairment: A Call for Action, Now!" U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2011.

[17] "Special Report on Aging and Vision Loss." American Foundation for the Blind, January 2013.

[18] "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2004-2005, Section 1." U.S. Census Bureau.

Build a better, more productive community with VoiceFriend

VoiceFriend is a simple yet powerful notification solution that enables you to easily keep seniors, staff and families informed of events and important information—with guaranteed results. By getting the right information to the right people at the right time—more quickly and accurately—VoiceFriend helps:

- Reduce staff costs and time to fill open shifts.
- Increase senior and family engagement.
- Boost satisfaction and positively impact census.

VoiceFriend is a powerful yet affordable solution requiring no special hardware and no software to install. Training is easy—you'll be ready to use VoiceFriend in just minutes. And VoiceFriend addresses all seven success killers. Here's how:

1. VoiceFriend helps address growing overtime expenses.
While reducing overtime expenses with today's staff shortages may seem a daunting task, communities that use the VoiceFriend Notification Solution have reduced overtime by as much as 25%. And, by making it easier and faster to keep staff informed of open shifts, trainings and license due dates, VoiceFriend frees up valuable staff time that you can apply to other critical services and organizational projects.

2. VoiceFriend helps remove ineffective processes for addressing staff call-outs.
VoiceFriend helps you manage open shifts and call-outs quickly and cost-effectively, removing the need to spend hours on the phone trying to find staff replacement. VoiceFriend sends reliable, automated shift notifications and alerts to staff by email, text or phone—whichever they prefer. Having a more effective way to find available staff reduces the tendency to simply offer overtime hours to whoever happens to be at hand. Staff schedules can be managed in minutes instead of hours. And your team will have more time to focus on more critical tasks.

"With VoiceFriend . . . time spent finding coverage for staff call-outs . . . has been reduced from 2–3 hours per call-out to 10–15 minutes. The impact on staff productivity has been huge."

—Chaim Wolmark, Director, Centers Health Care

3. VoiceFriend helps increase senior participation in activities and events.
Increasing seniors' participation in activities and events is key to boosting your overall satisfaction ratings and the health of your residents. When seniors don't participate in activities and events, it's often not due to a lack of interest, but rather a lack of awareness, or perhaps a cognitive impairment. The VoiceFriend Notification Solution enables you to easily keep seniors informed of activities, events and important information—with guaranteed results. Communities using VoiceFriend have seen their level of senior engagement rise by up to 40%.

4. VoiceFriend helps you comply more efficiently with CMS requirements for notifications and alerts.
New CMS regulations require families, residents and patients to be contacted during community emergencies. But too many communities are relying on a manual process for this critical requirement. With the VoiceFriend Notification Solution, you can send immediate, automated notifications during an emergency—thereby freeing your staff for other time-sensitive, critical tasks. Without VoiceFriend, your staff could potentially spend hours personally contacting each family, resident and patient. You will better comply with CMS requirements, and you'll also run more efficiently, saving time and money.

5. VoiceFriend helps you boost family engagement.
Increasing the engagement of not only your seniors but also their families helps boost your overall satisfaction ratings while also generating positive word of mouth and referrals. The VoiceFriend Notification Solution enables you to easily keep families informed of activities, events and important information—with guaranteed results. By using VoiceFriend to send automated reminders, directors of senior living communities have increased attendance at activities, events, and outings by up to 40%.

"VoiceFriend enabled us to provide proactive instructions and updates to residents and families. These messages were appreciated by all, and we received positive feedback for our handling of the situation."

—Sharon Kruskamp, Executive Director, Five Star Senior Living

6. VoiceFriend helps improve your processes for alerts and wellness checks.
You and your staff likely spend a lot of time reminding seniors about their doctor, rehab, and other appointments. VoiceFriend can virtually eliminate the time wasted on communicating appointment reminders, allowing you and your staff more time to spend on providing care. And because your seniors/patients are more effectively notified, they miss fewer appointments—which further improves their care and boosts their overall satisfaction.

VoiceFriend's automated inbound and outbound calling service with telephone push-button responses makes wellness checks accurate, convenient and affordable. The days of performing wellness checks via phone calls, door tags, mailbox cards, and meal attendance are over. Using VoiceFriend to offer a daily wellness check-in service boosts peace of mind for you, families and residents, and saves significant time for you and your staff.

7. VoiceFriend allows more effective communications for seniors with visual or mild cognitive impairment.
Keeping seniors engaged can be especially difficult if they suffer from visual or mild cognitive impairment. VoiceFriend's exclusive Companion™ message announcer helps keep visually and mildly cognitively impaired seniors more active and engaged through more effective communication. VoiceFriend Companion™ is a simple-to-use device that works in conjunction with the VoiceFriend Automated Notification Solution to allow seniors to easily listen to vital reminders and information—about activities, meals, care plans and more—at the push of a button. This serves to boost their attendance at activities, allowing richer, more independent lives. Plus, you and your staff will save time, with no more need to make reminder calls or face-to-face visits just to notify seniors.

"VoiceFriend has enabled our team to easily ensure that all of our residents are safely up in the morning and ready for the day. It has made the wellness check-in process less cumbersome—for both residents and staff."

—Leta Medina, Executive Director at The Summit at First Hill

Learn just how easily and affordably VoiceFriend can be put to work for you

Contact us today to arrange a brief 15-minute demonstration of VoiceFriend.
It may well be the best investment of 15 minutes you'll make all year.

For more information contact:
inquiry@VoiceFriend.net or 781-996-3123

Learn more
www.voicefriend.net

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