

ASSISTED
LIVING
PROVIDER
RESOURCE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

LEADERSHIP



NCAL[®]
NATIONAL CENTER FOR ASSISTED LIVING



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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Health Statistics' [2020 National Survey of Residential Care Facilities](#), over 800,000 people live in assisted living communities (ALCs)¹ across the nation. Assisted living embraces a philosophy of person-centered care while supporting physical activities and health-related needs. Assisted living communities strive to meet the social, emotional, cultural, intellectual, nutritional, and spiritual needs of its residents.

The National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) developed these Guiding Principles as an informational resource to generally describe what assisted living is and highlight how the profession is striving to continually develop and improve services. The contents of *Guiding Principles for Assisted Living* may represent some preferred practices but do not represent minimum standards, "standards of care," or profession-wide norms for assisted living communities.

Leadership Defined

Leadership is the ability to effectively move a collective group of people through the necessary identified processes to successfully achieve the mission and vision of the organization. The objective of this document is to identify the core traits an individual should possess to be successful as a leader within their specific assisted living community (ALC). It is the belief that a leader models the traits and capacities listed within this document on a daily basis to all staff and customers of the organization.

Leadership Versus Management

Management and leadership are often confused but should be considered two different areas of expertise albeit an individual may possess all the traits and skills of both a manager and a leader. Management may be defined as the prioritization and oversight of multiple issues, projects, and staff by an individual. The manager is not necessarily a leader in the organization but should be considered an expert in organizational matters.

Leadership is an identified element to a satisfied workforce. The ALC cannot survive on good management skills alone. Top executives must demonstrate superior leadership skills for the ALC to be successful.

¹ Assisted Living Community (ALC) is used in this document as a way to encompass the various terms identifying assisted living. The assisted living model is built on the concept of delivering person-centered services (e.g., personal care) and supports (e.g., housing) that meet each resident's specific needs and preferences. In addition to supporting residents in completing activities of daily living (e.g., bathing, dressing, managing medications), assisted living provides a variety of specialized services, including social work, mental health or counseling, or therapies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1: Communication

How can assisted living leaders improve? One of the simplest approaches is to be a more effective listener. Employees want to know that they can approach the ear of management and that their opinions are listened to, valued, and incorporated into operational policy when appropriate. Leaders need to listen to the staff's concerns, know their expectations, and listen to the staff for possible resolutions. It is important for assisted living leaders to stop and take the time to hear from the entire workforce on a regular basis and communicate back to them what they think they have heard. This creates a culture of mutual respect, collaboration, and a culture of participation and negotiation. Leaders are tolerant of open disagreement.

Consistent and precise communication with all levels of staff is requisite for a successful work environment. All staff have a basic need for information about the organization and its ongoing functions in order to feel a part of the team. The ALC leadership must determine the best method of communication for their particular workforce but could certainly include newsletters, staff meetings, departmental meetings, memos, electronic communications, or individual meetings depending on the size of the team. Once the best mode of communication is determined, consistency is the key to success. Without the continued efforts on the part of leadership to communicate, overall staff morale can spiral downward leading to exclusion, isolation and ultimately turnover.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2: Trust and Respect

All staff within an ALC have an expectation to be treated with certain tenets of dignity during their work hours. It is as simple as the Golden Rule: treat others as you would like to be treated. Successful leaders display such behavior:

- a. **Honesty:** Always communicating accurate information about the organization's work progress.
- b. **Empathy:** Always attuned to the needs of the staff serving the organization.
- c. **Courtesy:** Toward all customers, both internal and external.
- d. **Respect:** The staff's beliefs, values, and opinions.
- e. **Consistent:** Always fair and reasonable.

Without these basic foundational elements, the workforce may lack direction and cohesiveness, which in turn may affect the ability to meet organizational goals.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #3: Mentoring

Mentoring and coaching are tools that may be used by a community's current leadership to grow future leaders. Mentoring can be accomplished through group programs or on an individual basis. Current leadership assumes the role of teacher while the employee(s) assume the role of student(s). Knowledge passed down is based on the experiences, examples, and education gained by the leader and applicable to their continued successes. Through an established mentoring program, staff has the opportunity to develop their core principles and values, to become more self aware about the goals of the community and the most effective ways for completion and knowledgeable about responsibility to the team. Successful mentoring programs grow staff members' skills, improve morale, and strengthen the organization while substantiating the character and vision of the leadership's investment in the staff. Leaders allow for mistakes and view them as opportunities. They comfort those who admit mistakes. Also, a leader admits their own mistakes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #4: Competence, Expertise, and Collaboration

Leaders must demonstrate the necessary competencies and expertise to perform their function as the community's chief officer. It is not necessary for the ALC's leadership to know everything. But it is necessary for that individual to surround themselves with the knowledge and expertise of others needed for the community to operate at optimal performance. Leaders need to believe in their staff's abilities and expertise to get the job done and to provide the necessary information when needed to make a decision. Empowering all staff at all levels provides the overall workforce with a sense of autonomy, a confidence in their abilities to get the job done which results in great employee satisfaction and commitment. Collaborative relationships and interdisciplinary teams within your community's workforce will result in greater innovation and creativity when approaching areas of improvement or process change in operational systems. Soliciting thoughts and opinions of various departments and individual staff will create a culture of inclusion and motivate all to apply their best efforts in daily work. Leaders understand that the collective sum of the organization's staff is more valuable than any one individual.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #5: Compassion and Commitment to the Workforce

All leaders at all levels in assisted living must demonstrate their commitment and passion to their daily work and to the mission of the community. This must be shown not only to the workforce but to the residents and families that entrust their loved ones to their care. This compassion for the residents and commitment to staff must be modeled in their actions, not just on paper or in conversation. There are several ways to demonstrate this principle. All staff must have the necessary resources at all times to not only complete their job responsibilities but to exceed the residents' expectations. Leaders must show that they are involved with the daily life of the residents. Whether this is shown by participating in social activities with the residents or participating at mealtimes with the residents, action speaks louder than words.

Leaders must recognize outstanding workers in their community and offer rewards for achieving goals. Rewards and recognition programs are an integral part of employee satisfaction. These programs must be designed around the needs and wants of the workforce or else will be doomed to failure. Leaders should meet with staff to determine what is important to them and implement a program around those expectations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #6: Accountability

Leaders must be accountable to all customer groups. As stated in the [NCAL Guiding Principles for Quality in Assisted Living](#), it is imperative that all providers should operate their ALCs based on a foundation of trust. Some ways to achieve that foundation include service with integrity, ethical business standards and responsible financial stewardship. Employees working in an ALC expect these standards of operation. Leaders keep promises and consistently give credit to others.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is not an option in assisted living; it is a necessity. Staff, residents, and families look to the leaders and top management of communities to model what is right; to demonstrate the values of the community to the workforce; and to mentor future leaders so that they may care for the frail and disabled of the future. Constant, unrelenting leadership at each ALC nationwide is necessary for optimal operational performance, high levels of quality care and service to the residents and families, and a satisfied workforce.

Note: The assisted living profession continues to grow and evolve as does NCAL's perspectives on our changing profession. The concepts and terms used in this document may vary from state to state and are provided as a framework to help promote a general understanding of dementia care in assisted living. The guiding principles and content in this document are not "standards of care."