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Culture Change in Practice

Group Decision Making



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posted by Steph Kilen

While self-led teams working together to make decisions that will shape elders' lives is sort of a revolutionary notion, as a society, we've been using a similar format to decide the fate of people's lives for hundreds of years. In our judicial system, a jury of twelve people listens to all sides of the story, weighs the evidence and testimony, discusses it between themselves and comes up with a verdict.

I spent a part of last week serving on the jury of a murder trial. It was a very interesting and emotional experience. The jury members were chosen just after lunch on Monday and we had a verdict by 4 p.m. Wednesday. Talk about swift justice! When it came time for us to deliberate, I was all ready to pull out my group meeting and decision making tools from culture change. But, besides having to get us back on track a few times and helping to maintain balance between the shy and the talkative, the process went very smoothly. The twelve of us brought a variety of background and experience and together we made a very important decision – one that would affect the rest of a man's life and a family grieving for their 13-year old little girl. That's a lot hanging in the balance. And yet, 12 strangers with no qualification other than a driver's license were trusted with that decision.

We had no "training" and no help. We didn't know the man who was on trial or any of the witnesses.

So, can someone tell me why a group of people, including elders and those that care for them (both family members and staff), can't or shouldn't decide what to have for dinner tomorrow night, alternatives to scheduled lift and dunk baths, an individual's morning routine or any of the other thousands of things in an elder's everyday life?

We assume that adults have some sort of good judgment (though of course, there are those who don't)...but generally, we drive cars, vote, hold jobs, raise families and at times even take calculated risks. It is only institution that makes us believe there are only a gifted few who can be trusted to make decisions or know "what is best."

Remember at the end of "The Wizard of Oz" when Glinda the good witch tells Dorothy that she's had the power to get herself back to Kansas all along? Administrators and DONs are not the only ones wearing ruby slippers, friends.



"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.

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