

Action Pact, Inc.
www.Culturechangenow.com

Culture Change in Practice

Mindfulness

POSTED BY STEPH KILEN AT
10:01 AM

Wednesday, March 22, 2006

Today I recorded voiceovers for a video we are working on. As I listened to the playbacks all I could hear was my lazy speaking habits. "Imagine" was "'magine." "And" sounded like "an'." Ts sounded like Ds and I stumbled over three-syllable words because I so rarely have to speak them. It got me thinking about how much we do every day that we really don't think about – that we do out of habit – and how much we miss out because we are "just getting it done."

"Just getting it done" syndrome is common in institutional care. Routine tasks can rob us of meaning. Waking, breakfast, bathing, lunch, activities, dinner, bed. Each day the same as the last. These activities that make up residents' lives just become a "to do" list to check off. No fun for caregivers and certainly no fun for elders. (But on a deeper level, there is no respect or meaning given to the care provided which belittles what I think is one of the greatest joys and purposes of being human – giving. On the resident's side, their well-being can be diminished to someone

else's way to make a living.) Of course we start out with the intent of giving care to our residents – of honoring them, making their lives easier, making them feel secure. But, time wears on, routine sinks in, we cut corners a bit and we give care without thinking.

The antidote: mindfulness. I was first made aware of the difference this makes when I started dating my husband. Wherever we would go, whatever we would do, he would engage those we came in contact with. At the grocery store, for example, when the checker would say, "Hello" he would look her in the face and say, "Hello. How are you?" and engage her in conversation making some comment about the weather or the produce. This sort of thing happened (and still does) at restaurants, theaters, on the phone with customer service reps even at the DMV. Suddenly the person who we were exchanging with became a person and not just an instrument in the transaction. And, it wasn't just in our eyes, but his or hers as well. Anonymous woman scanning groceries becomes Ruth who notices we go through a lot of bread and shares her trick for



"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.

www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html

Action Pact, Inc.

Culture Change in Practice

www.Culturechangenow.com *Mindfulness, cont'd*



putting avocados. You can see her suddenly taking pride in the help she is giving us and we experience better service. Grocery shopping is not a mundane, routine task. It is sharing in something everybody does and a way to feel connected to humanity. Everyone involved is just a little more alive. Realizing this, I soon picked up the habit too.

Remember when you first started working at your facility? How you learned the ropes and paid attention to every little thing you did, making sure you did it correctly? How you were introduced or introduced yourself to the elders, establishing trust between you? Now, do you really think about the things you are doing? Do you take that trust for granted? Do you assume that because the elders are fed, bathed, dressed etc that they feel cared for? It's OK. We all do it in all areas of our lives. Who doesn't multi-task?

It's OK because it doesn't mean you are a terrible person and it can be remedied. When you say "Hello Ester. How are you?" stop

what you are doing, look her in the face and really listen to the answer. When you are helping an elder with something, be focused on that task, not what you have to do next, not having a conversation with another staff member as if the elder was not there. If you let mindfulness into your life outside the facility as well, it too will become a habit. It will be the-way-things-are-done.

Get started with this [free handout and exercise](#) on mindfulness.



