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# Culture Change in Practice

## Systems



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Politicians like to promise to make our world better. They talk about a cleaner environment, better education, curbing crime and violence, more affordable health care, thriving economy and even world peace (well, at least a more peaceful world). They pretend and we believe that there is a simple solution to these problems that can be enacted with a stroke of the pen. But, of course, it is not that simple.

It is not simple because our problems are contained in a system that is more like a house of cards than a line of dominos. Take education for example; teachers, administrators, students, families, economy, the buildings, the school calendar, books, computers, societies expectations, etc. – they are each a card. Any change in any one card affects the whole. And look out if two or three or more of the elements want to go in different directions – you’ll be playing 52 Pick-Up. The house of cards is a system. To make a successful change, all elements must be involved. When you realize that

the world’s problems are manifested in such big systems, it’s no wonder we are still struggling with them.

Nursing homes are systems too. Elders, staff, families, the community, the facility itself, dietary, housekeeping, clinical care, human resources, etc. - they are all part of the system. By inspiring high involvement in all the cards in your nursing home’s system you can really start to make some deep change in your organization. When everyone can understand that it will take everyone’s involvement to make a change, they will be charged up to make a difference and also be comforted by knowing what they are up against.

I borrowed this [exercise](#) that illustrates systems from Brian Foster, a consultant from New York who attended our most recent Choreography workshop. It’s brilliant. Go ahead and download it and try it out. You may want to start a binder to keep the exercises you download from this site. This way you’ll have them to refer to when a particular topic pops up. They’re like trading cards – collect them all!

***"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](http://www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html)**



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## Learning Tool Exercise: Understanding Systems

*An understanding of systems is essential to growing a sense of team in your organization. People within the organization need to know that each person impacts the whole. If one or two people are headed in a different direction their actions will throw off the whole organization. This exercise will illustrate how systems work and get people thinking about working together for a common goal.*

Get your team together in a room where there is some open space. Ask everyone to stand around as if they were mingling at a party. Have them each silently pick out two people in their head. Now, everyone should move around so that they are equidistant from the two people they picked out. Initially, there will be a lot of moving around which will eventually slow down into a little readjusting. The group has just illustrated a system at work.

If the team you have gathered is diverse enough in the roles they play in your facility, you can take it to the next level. Have everyone gather as above. Have each person pick out two people they deal with on a daily or regular basis. (You can even have a few elders sit in the middle - a great way to also illustrate resident-centered systems). Again, ask them to move so that they are equal distance from the two people they chose. On this level they will be able to see the system even more clearly.

After everyone has pretty much stopped moving, read or paraphrase this paragraph on systems:

“You all have just illustrated a system. The nursing home is a system and as you can see, every move an individual makes affects the whole system. In order for us to make deep change in our organization, we must all change and all work together to make those changes.”

Debrief with a learning circle. Ask, “How did it feel to move in the system? What did you notice? Or what parts of daily life here did it bring to mind?”

