Skill-Based Dementia Coaching
Transforming Culture, Developing Champions & Preventing Behaviors without Psychotropic Medications

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Session AL-2
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8:00 – 10:00
Part One: About our Experience
Addressing Dementia in our Organizations

• We make major **financial investments** in dementia education…

• We put significant **time & energy** in defining our dementia philosophy…

• We **teach** about dementia in the classroom…

• We **preach** about ‘the approach’ on the floor…
But what really changes for...

- The *person* with dementia?
- The *team member*?
- The organizational *outcomes*?

**Key Question:**
Was our investment worth it?
Our Experience:

**Hands-on Coaching** – for very specific dementia communication skills – is the most effective way to help team members improve their ‘dementia approach’…
...and these simple improvements in skill can begin to change the very culture of an organization.
Part Two: About Us
As **Lead Coach**, Erin provides hands-on dementia communication coaching at partner communities across the nation – including CCRCs, nursing homes, assisted living centers and memory care providers.

Innovative **partner communities** learn how to provide persons with dementia the gifts of **pleasure, purpose and peace** – while making measurable impacts on clinical and operational goals related to psychotropic use and behavioral outcomes, fall rates, team member morale and family satisfaction.

This skill-based system has been described by many communities as their **‘missing link’** to culture transformation.
Vetter Health Services owns and operates 31 long-term care communities in the Midwest.

With a mission of “Dignity in Life”, Vetter Health Services is well known for quality care. Over 3,000 team members continuously strive for improvement in all areas of service.

Quality of Life, Quality Care, Excellent Teams, Outstanding Facilities, Quality Reputation, and Stewardship are simply expected. Serving, Integrity, Teamwork, and Excellence are our core values. It’s the Vetter Way.
• **Cameo Rogers** is a recreational therapist who consults with Life Enrichment team members in all **Vetter Health Services** communities. She also works in partnership with Miekka Milliken to champion the dementia skill coaching system, **Buddies Forever**.

• Cameo is dedicated to helping team members **better understand** the residents they serve. She seeks to empower and coach team members to personalize daily care and engagement.

• **Coaching Tip:** Practice and refine your own skills first! Look for opportunities to lead by example.
• **Miekka Milliken** is a social worker who consults with Social Services and Admissions team members in all Vetter Health Services communities. She also works in partnership with Cameo Rogers to champion the dementia skill coaching system, **Buddies Forever**.

• As a **passionate advocate** for the rights of vulnerable and marginalized populations, Miekka quickly realized that her role with VHS must include a holistic understanding of **quality dementia care**.

• **Coaching Tip** If you can help team members change the way they think about out-of-character responses by shifting from, “What do we do when…” to, “What do we do before…” you have set them up for success.
Part Three: An Overview of Skill-Based Dementia Communication Coaching
The Right Approach
for Dementia Communication is included in virtually all dementia education programs and often includes...

- Approach in an easy way, from the front...
- Use a warm, encouraging facial expression...
- Use gestures & body language to convey meaning...
- Describe what you will be doing...
- Use simple statements with familiar, concrete wording...
- Use positive wording instead of negative...
- Use a respectful & easy-to-hear tone of voice...
- Step into this person’s reality...
- Validate this person’s experience...
- The list goes on...

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We all understand that these basic skills are important

- **Important** for reducing the frequency & severity of behavioral symptoms...
- **Important** for the success of our non-pharmacologic initiatives...
- **Important** for reducing staff burn-out & turnover...

and

**Important** for the person’s quality of life.
But, how do we...

- Move beyond merely talking about ‘the right approach’, and instead, clearly define essential skills?

- Help team members un-learn common, life-long communication patterns that may not work well for persons with dementia?

- Help team members develop new communication skills – skills that may require them to use their bodies, faces and voices differently?

- Help team members become the very best dementia communicators they can be?
The foundation of the coaching is Dementia Education that STICKS

• Make it SIMPLE by re-naming the brain.

• Make it RELATABLE by connecting the dots.

• Make it MATTER by challenging folks to break an old habit or create a new ‘lens.’
Here’s an Example...

Short-Term Memory
Made it SIMPLE by re-naming the brain. The Hippocampus becomes The Memory Glue Guy.

Made it RELATABLE by connecting the dots between this damage and what they will hear the person ask.

Made it MATTER by challenging folks to break an old habit: ‘Don’t You Remember?’

Importantly: We have given our Champions a concrete assignment.
Here's Another Example…

‘Behavior’
The foundation of the coaching is Dementia Education that STICKS

- **Make it SIMPLE** by re-naming the brain.
- **Make it RELATABLE** by connecting the dots.
- **Make it MEMORABLE** through impactful story-telling.
- **Make it MATTER** by challenging folks to break an old habit or create a new ‘lens.’
Making it Stick: ‘Behavior’
• **Made it SIMPLE** by re-naming the brain. The Frontal Lobe becomes *The Control Tower*.

• **Made it RELATABLE (& REAL)** by connecting the dots with real life experiences.

• **Made it MEMORABLE** through impactful story-telling.

• **Made it MATTER** by challenging folks to break an old habit: ‘Inappropriate Behavior’

• **Importantly:** We have given our Champions a **concrete** assignment.
That all sounds good…but how do we really **make it stick** in the long run?

- Initial in-services
- Small group debriefings
- Champions using terminology
- Champions embracing assignments
- Detective work
- Care planning

+ Promotions & Boosters

= Lasting impact
Beginnings of Behavior Change
Foundation for Skill Coaching
We build on the foundation by providing 
Hands-on Coaching for **Basic Skills**
This intensive, hands-on coaching is provided initially to just a small group of Coach-Champions.
As these Champions grow, successive waves of Champions receive coaching...
How do we actually do the Basic Skills Coaching?
Classroom Coaching Blocks for Basic Skills

Purpose: To Introduce the Basic Skill and Begin to Build a Muscle-Memory

Basic Skill Coaching often includes:

• Approaching in an easy way
• Getting down below eye level
• Making eye contact first
• Using a sparkling facial expression
• Offering a handshake
• Introducing yourself
• Using short, simple statements
• Using an easy-to-hear tone of voice…

There can be considerable variability in which Basic Skills are coached - depending on the setting and levels of dementia served.
Structured, Real World Coaching Blocks
As Champions master **Basic Skills**...

The next step is to receive coaching for the **Situations** relevant for their daily work.
The coaching structure for **Situations** is the same as the **Basic Skills** coaching...
How do we begin coaching for Situations in Classroom Coaching Blocks?

We begin by establishing this take-home message:
our everyday communication patterns do not work for the person with dementia

even if we are communicating in a pleasant & professional way
Situation: Giving Medication

guiding to shower or bathroom • inviting to activity • assisting with exercise • doing an assessment • entering for a visit
He may not know exactly who I am (or if he can trust me)

My approach was too fast to build trust

Too many words & questions for him to translate everything

I was standing over him (putting me in control)

He couldn’t fully see my facial expressions

giving medication

guiding to shower or bathroom • inviting to activity • assisting with exercise • doing an assessment • entering for a visit

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Next, we illustrate how Basic Skills can be applied to this *Situation.*
So what can we do?

Treat every interaction as if it is the first (because it may feel that way to the person)

Use thoughtful, deliberate dementia communication (not just pleasant communication)
1. Approach in an easy way, get below eye level & offer a handshake

2. ‘You must be...’

3. Our name & a concrete description of who we are in the person’s world

4. Simple Statement

* Endorphin Boost
Standard Introduction
Another Situation: Leaving a Person’s Room

It’s not just the First Impression... our Last Impression matters, too!
Coaching for **Situations** is almost limitless...
Simple Statements

Endorphin Boosts

Down Below Eye Level

To increase acceptance of shower or bath
Using Clear Gestures to communicate meaning

Easing transition into a dining or activity area
Irreverent Ice Breaker
Introductions

Vocal Quality

Endorphin Boosts

To promote friendship & minimize conflict during activities or meals
Offering Concrete Choices

Simple Statements

Familiar Words

Assisting Person with Menu Selection to minimize confusion
Situations

Offer a Genuine Apology

Endorphin Boosts

Graciously Handling:

“I Didn’t Order This!”
Part Four: Coaching Demonstrations & Tips

Welcome Volunteers!
Remember to speak low & slow – no up-talking

- Introduction
- Demonstration: Everyday way & Basic Skills way
- Group Practice
- All Practice
- Tips: Use the Hand
- Misconception: Cannot be ‘enthusiastic’
- Your Take-Home: Tune Your Ears!
For ‘Remember to Speak Low & Slow’ we did actual coaching...

For the next Basic Skill, an **experiential exercise** seems to work best...
Down below eye level
Establish eye-contact first

- Introduction
- Group Experiential Exercise
- Tip: Emphasize this is an exaggeration
- Misconception: Must always squat down
- Your Take-Home: Try It!
Key Points & Tips for Success:

- We have demonstrated **Classroom Coaching** blocks here today.

- You will recall, Classroom Coaching blocks only serve to **introduce** the skill and begin to build a muscle memory.

- **Real World Coaching** blocks are necessary to begin to master the skill and all its variations.

- In your organization, **start small**! Pick 4-6 folks to share today’s exercises with. Practice together in the Classroom, then in smaller groups in the Real World.
Key Points:

- **Initially**, aim to work with residents who are the most easy to engage, so you experience success with the skills.

- Aiming to have all staff do the skills right away likely **won’t work well**. Develop mastery & success within your small group. Then, begin to share the skills with willing partners. (Don’t worry about the naysayers just yet…)

- Always remember: The skills are **not ‘one size fits all.’** Rather, it’s about selecting the right skills, for the right person at the right time.
What do Champions Do Next?

Begin to Coach!
What do Champions Do Next?

Promote!
What do Champions Do Next?

Celebrate!
What do Champions Do Next?

Continue Growing the Team!
Part Five:
A Real World Journey
Vetter Health Services
Where we were...

• ‘Behavior’ calls from communities
• We were not speaking the same language
Our Champions

- The champion profile
- Choosing & supporting champions
Some things fell into place...

- Psychotropic Standard rewrite
- Interdisciplinary support
Resident Outcomes

18 months ago

- “Sexual” behaviors with residents and team members
- High dose of Seroquel (300 mg/day)
- Redirection, reprimands, fear and frustration

Today

- Prevention through endorphin boosts and engagement
- Role playing
- No Seroquel!
9 months ago

- Kicking, striking out, scratching (causing bleeding)
- ABHR cream to manage anxiety and out-of-character responses
- Crying for 15-30 minutes after the spa

Today

- Endorphin boosts, Dignity and safety provided
- No more ABHR cream!
- 20 minutes of enjoyable spa experience
Data since Dementia Skill Coaching
(August 2013)

**Antipsychotic Use**
- Vetter Health Services overall: -9%
- Memory Support communities: -14%

**Behaviors Affecting Others**
- Vetter Health Services overall: -27%
- Memory Support communities: -31%

**Pain**
- Vetter Health Services overall: -19%
- Memory Support communities: -31%
My InnerView Team Member Satisfaction Surveys

22% increase in excellence score for quality of resident-related training
Question: What do we do best?

- Teach us how to communicate with residents.

- We try and take good care of our residents. The new dementia coaching is good for the staff and very appropriate to help people do their jobs better.

- The World Class and Buddies Forever coaching have been the best thing that could have happened to me. It has given me a renewed sense of respect and joy for myself and my coworkers, and my residents. Thank you!

- Buddies Forever dementia coaching program is amazing and is easy-to-understand and achieve!
20% reduction in team member injuries related to “combative” resident in first seven months of 2014 as compared with last seven months of 2013.
Achieving outcomes like these means navigating all sorts of **concerns** along the way.

Here are some common ones...
Common team member concerns and misperceptions

- We don’t have time for all those steps/skills…
  
  After using the skills in the real world, team members experience that the skills actually save time because residents are less resistive.

- Jane would be insulted if we approached her that way…
  
  We don’t use every skill with every resident with dementia. Instead, we use the right skills, with the right person at the right time.

Most of these concerns lessen over time – as folks see the tremendous increase in quality of life for the residents. And, they realize the time savings for themselves.
The most common team member concern...

I tried the skills with Joe and it didn’t help at all… so this stuff is for the birds!

That’s right – this is dementia care! Nothing is going to work 100% of the time. Nevertheless, we are obligated to use the approaches that have the highest likelihood of success.

Additionally, communication is just one variable to consider. Others include: pain/discomfort, fatigue, illness, environmental triggers… the list goes on and on.

Over time, this concern lessens as staff members experience first-hand the many instances when Basic Skills do make a big difference for a resident.
Summary of Our Experience

- Collaboration with Erin, using Gemini Consulting’s **Buddies Forever** Dementia Communication Coaching system
- Top-down support
- Ripples in a pond
- Our journey continues...
Erin M. Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.
Founder & Lead Coach

The Buddies Forever Dementia Communication Coaching system and Life Enrichment Systems for Dementia are copyright protected.

Please contact us through our website to learn more about our dementia skill coaching services!

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