

Finding and Growing a Talent Pipeline

Proven Solutions for the Senior Living Workforce Lifecycle

The senior living industry must find creative solutions to the workforce shortage to care for the nation’s aging population. Building a talent pipeline and strengthening employee engagement are critical to providing quality care.

Senior advocates can learn from their peers and other business thought leaders to create innovative strategies addressing the three critical stages of workforce development:

- Attraction
- Hiring & Onboarding
- Retention

Attraction

Goal: raise awareness in high-opportunity groups

Strategy #1:

Promote opportunities to work in senior living in local schools

Strategy #2:

Cultivate strong referrals, including from often-overlooked populations

Strategy #3:

Offer information and access that suits more tech-savvy generations

Hiring & Onboarding

Goal: find great fits and welcome new hires to the family

Strategy #1:

Involve others in hiring to nurture pride and camaraderie

Strategy #2:

Educate hiring managers to reduce no-shows and mismatches

Strategy #3:

Highlight uniqueness of perks and programs

Retention

Goal: strengthen the 3 C’s (core, careers, culture)

Strategy #1:

Develop the CORE (frontline and mid-level supervisors and managers)

Strategy #2:

Promote clear and compelling CAREER paths

Strategy #3:

Measure and strengthen employee engagement to improve CULTURE

Attraction

Attracting the right candidates into senior living supports recruitment goals, of course, but also is essential to industry goals for service delivery and employee retention. In the United States, it is not yet the norm for children to grow up and say, “I want to work in senior living.” This reflects general misperceptions about the contemporary senior living industry, as well as the wide range and rewarding nature of careers.

This reflects general misperceptions about the contemporary senior living industry, as well as the wide range and rewarding nature of careers.

Industry Insights

While many operators have programs and techniques focused on millennials, Great Place to Work research illustrates that very few operators have strategies targeting other “high opportunity” generations. Great Place to Work Institute data show that *older* and *younger* employees are groups that report high employee scores on their workplaces.

- Great Place to Work 2018 surveys of senior living employees show that employees who *most* enjoy working in the sector are individuals born after 1998 (Generation Z) and individuals born before 1945 (Silent/War generations).
- The most engaged employees in senior living tend to want to refer friends and family to the sector. Yet, since Generation Z and the Silent/War Generations account for fewer than 20 percent of current employees in the industry, the issue of attracting new talent to the sector is more difficult. A set of aggressive strategies for attraction is needed.

Strategies

Goal: Raise awareness of senior living careers across multiple generations

1. Promote senior living careers in local schools

Industry representatives can build ongoing relationships with local high schools and career and technical education to build a pipeline of qualified and motivated workers. School partnerships can take many forms, including reaching students at career presentations, advising on curriculum in technical training programs, and establishing job shadowing and internship programs.

2. Cultivate strong referrals, including from high-opportunity groups

In addition to establishing employee referral programs, consider cultivating more diverse referral partners. These may include technical schools and a variety of job boards, as well as networking through faith-based groups, community organizations, and other sources that cut across generations.

3. Offer information and access that suits tech-savvy individuals

More candidates are applying to jobs online, especially on mobile devices. It's important that a company's recruitment and application process matches current technology. Here is a checklist of “must have” items for a company or community to establish and keep active:

- Mobile-compatible website
- Facebook page (optional: Instagram and Snapchat)
- LinkedIn page
- Twitter account
- Weekly, biweekly, or monthly content that is “shareable” – with video and news links that are interesting and engaging to view or read

Argentum's Senior Living Works campaign includes a toolkit for operators and educators, outreach materials on senior living careers, and meeting agendas for successful public-private partnerships. A key part of the campaign is the role of Senior Living Works Ambassadors, industry representatives who coordinate connections with high schools, technical schools, community colleges, and universities.

For more information about the program and to become an Ambassador, visit: seniorliving.works.

Argentum Senior Living Career Center

Argentum maintains a career center that allows employers to target jobseekers specifically in senior living and related healthcare sectors.

For more information, please visit argentum.org/careers.



A Caution

Some senior living communities require that jobseekers fill out a paper application. The thinking is that “if they want to work here, they should see it first.” As a result, its workforce may be missing high opportunity groups (e.g., Generation Z). There are other ways to ensure prospective employees see the community in-depth as part of the hiring process.

Spotlight on Vi

Vi is a national operator of luxury continuing care retirement communities with nearly 3,000 employees. Vi continually seeks out candidates desiring meaningful careers in hospitality, caregiving, and administrative and professional roles.

How it Works

Schools Program

- Vi HR leaders have begun establishing relationships with high school counselors to set-up career fairs. Vi's corporate human resources team has created custom recruitment marketing materials and a high school career page highlighting Vi's career tracks and development opportunities.
- During these presentations, Vi "Ambassadors" provide high school students an overview on job opportunities and potential career progression through targeted development programs. Vi also shares success stories of employees who joined the company in entry-level positions who have progressed into careers with the company.

Second Careers

- Vi recently began targeting retirees for second careers at Vi.
 - Vi partners with AARP with a link directly to Vi's "Second Career" site.

What it Takes

- Vi supports its HR directors on the resources available in these programs and educates them on how to speak about Vi as an employer of choice (with a reputation as a "best workplace").
- Vi expanded its website to include sections for high school students and second or "encore" career applicants.
- Vi offers videos and voice messages from employees who talk about their experiences as high school students working in senior living and how their career progressed into their current stable, well-paid roles.

How to Adapt and Implement These Best Practices

- Operators of all sizes can present at local schools.
- Argentum's [seniorliving.works](#) website has materials for community outreach, which can be customized by a provider for more specific messaging and outreach.

Vi's materials for high school presentations highlight stories of former high schoolers who have made careers at Vi. Ahkira, for example, started as a high school server and is now a staff development coordinator at Vi's Lantana, Fla., community.



WONDERING ABOUT THE FUTURE?
BUILD YOURS NOW, AT VI.

**JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Hospitality, Nursing, and Administrative/
Professional/Management Career Tracks

Vi
Get Real
Experience + Rewards.



Barry, a Vi Dining Manager, started his career at Vi as a server while in high school.



AHKIRA'S STORY

"When I came to Vi, I was a teen. Once I looked into the continuous development and support they offer, I jumped on board to take advantage of it."

Ahkira McPherson, RN and Staff Development Coordinator, Vi at Lakeside Village

Ahkira began her career with Vi right out of high school as a server. Once she found her love of nursing, she used our tuition reimbursement program to earn an associate's degree. She was then accepted into our yearlong Management Development Program, followed by our Emerging Leaders Program. Now, her role includes conducting new-hire onboarding, and ensuring quality compliance.

Get Real Experience + Rewards.

Certified as a Great Place to Work®

Great Place To Work.

Spotlight on Marriott

Marriott is a national operator of hotels and Great Place to Work Certified/Fortune100 Best Companies to Work For, with 177,000 employees worldwide. Each Marriott property has a general manager who is empowered to make local decisions.

How it Works

Recruiting Content

The careers team at Marriott has received accolades from the Society for Human Resource Management, *Workforce* magazine, and others for its approach to recruiting, particularly of younger generations. Marriott involves team members to create engaging and informative content attractive to job seekers, such as:

- “#CaptionThis,” a contest challenging employees to create the best caption to funny on-the-job photos
- Twitter and Facebook feeds that encourage Marriott employees to share their on-the-job photos, tagged with #PictureYourselfHere
- Facebook postings with “What would you do?” situations to help educate potential candidates about what working at Marriott might be like

These examples elevate the engagement and online reputation and ranking of Marriott as a great place to work.

How to Adapt and Implement These Best Practices

- Senior living shares much in common with the hospitality sector. Building on its social model, senior living operators can attract similar job candidates as the hotel industry, including housekeeping, maintenance, dining, and drivers.
- Operators of all sizes can become more mobile and Gen Z/millennial friendly in their attraction and application processes.
- A single site or smaller operator can optimize its website and create (or improve) a Facebook page. Then, select one to two themes for Facebook posts and make the relevant policy and communication changes for employees to participate.
- Larger operators may consider centralizing their awareness/engagement campaigns and operationalizing this strategy on multiple social media platforms.



Examples of Marriott’s technology engagement approach

Hiring & Onboarding

The hiring and onboarding stage is often the most well-planned phase of workforce development, but there are many opportunities for improvement. Too often, hiring managers find themselves hiring someone just to fill a spot. Explore strategies for how to merge hiring and onboarding procedures with your overall workforce development strategy.

Industry Insights

In 2018, Great Place to Work data from across senior living suggest:

- Senior living employees generally perceive very poorly that “Management hires those who fit in well here.” Relative to other industries, this factor scored lower than other areas for senior living employees.

Strategies

Goal: Find great fits efficiently and welcome new hires to the family effectively

1. Involve others in hiring to nurture pride and camaraderie

Organizations should involve more than just HR in the recruitment process. Some senior living organizations involve two or more people as interviewers, sometimes from other departments within the organization. Other industries are experimenting successfully with fun, informative, and engaging recruitment and team-building.

2. Educate hiring managers to reduce no-shows and mismatches

Given the high turnover in many communities, hiring managers may feel the urgency to hire a candidate immediately. However, there may be a mismatch in skills, interest, or personality with the rest of the team. Leading operators often use an on-call pool (even in teams such as servers, dishwashers, and housekeepers) and other creative strategies to keep interested candidates engaged and on the payroll.

Another common challenge some operators face is no-shows. In states such as New York and California, background checks can take over two weeks to process, with many new hires taking another job that gets them started immediately. In other instances, new hires “ghost” the hiring manager and do not show up at all for work. By asking candidates questions requiring a verbal confirmation, leading operators find they can double the likelihood of candidates showing up, or at least calling with a cancellation.

3. Highlight uniqueness of perks and programs

Onboarding should go beyond initial training and adherence to new-hire checklists. Some companies are using unique perks to entice and engage new hires.

One particularly engaging strategy involves new hires in their own learning planning. By asking candidates which learning opportunities they prefer from a menu of options, managers can build in the opportunities as much as possible for the employee.

Spotlight on Agemark Senior Living

Agemark Senior Living is a family-oriented memory care and assisted living company with over 800 employees in 19 communities across six states. With continued growth of the company and an increasing millennial workforce, Agemark has launched innovative practices to make “time to hire” and “time and likelihood of starting” more efficient and effective.

How it Works

Digital Audio and Video Interviewing

- All job posts are listed with a link or an “Interview Now” button which starts the process.
- Text responses are automated so that the job applicant answers some questions by text, then is invited to record a voicemail or video.
- Applicants answer questions via audio or video recordings. Questions can be customized for individual positions. They may start with something general such as, “Please tell us why you want to work with seniors” and go on to become more specific.
- These recordings go to a dashboard for review by hiring managers at Agemark. Top candidates are then called for in-person interviews.

Background Checks

- In states with long background check processes, such as California, new hires can commonly “disappear,” taking other jobs where they can start right away. Agemark has implemented a highly successful approach to combat these new hire no-shows (“ghosting”). While somewhat counterintuitive, the approach has had massive impact.
- Agemark asks candidates who receive a job offer to pay for their own background check, then reimburses them after the background check results are returned. (Organizations interested in exploring this should talk to legal counsel in each of their jurisdictions.)
- This practice increases the candidate’s commitment to a new job and immediately dissuades those who know they may have a struggle passing the background check. This has had a very positive impact on the hiring process.

How Senior Living Operators Can Use These Best Practices

- These best practice approaches work for any size operator. Audio and video interviewing does require some upfront setup and coordination. Both require training hiring managers on the system or process changes.



Spotlight on Alternative Interviews

With more operators recognizing the importance of finding a “fit” during the interviewing process, many senior living companies have started moving toward different types of interviews, including:

- **Team interviews:** A panel of 2–3 people interview each candidate. This approach introduces candidates to many perspectives and people in the role, and more interviewers can weigh in on a candidate’s strengths and weaknesses for a more robust interviewing process.
- **Peer interviews:** Frontline staff are increasingly asked to be a second or third interview for job candidates. As with team interviewing, candidates get a broader, day-to-day perspective of what the role entails, and hiring managers get more feedback on a candidate’s likely success.
- **Job shadowing interviews:** Candidates are invited for 2–4 hour interviews, which include shadowing someone who does the role today. For example, a sous chef candidate may follow a sous chef in the pre-dinner and dinner hour.

Job shadowing interviews further inform candidates and help operators gauge skills and potential.



Spotlight on a Company on the *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work for List

An “out of the box” best practice: An organization that participates with Great Place to Work Institute has an innovative culture of collaboration. In an effort to reduce turnover, this company has created a “talent show” portion of its hiring process.

How it Works

- Hiring managers interview candidates at the same time each week.
- Before receiving a job offer, candidates are asked to showcase a talent or interest for 4–7 minutes. This could be singing, juggling, etc.
- Employees at the location are invited to join.
- One memorable new hire wrote a song about the company, brought his guitar, and sang the song.

How to Adapt and Implement These Best Practices

- This approach works for any size operator – and not just for activities or enrichment job roles. This approach is a good way for people at the company and interviewees to connect on a more personal level.
- Since the goal for many in-community senior living roles is to hire people who are good at communicating and sharing with others, this approach allows operators to see immediately how candidates interact with others.
- This approach is particularly helpful in creating a unique culture and introducing employees to new hires (and vice versa). It also helps with the onboarding process, as staff and new staff members may already recognize each other and have something to talk about.
- For operators who want to try this “out of the box” approach, be sure to coordinate and communicate with hiring managers and the full community staff about the details and purpose of these “talent show” interviews. Many companies find it easier to schedule a slate of interviews at the same time slot and same weekday.

Retention

Turnover averages well over 40 percent per year in the senior living industry and can be higher depending on the type of community. The Trust Index® is one way to measure employee engagement and its impact on retention.

Industry Insights

Great Place to Work Institute's senior care initiative collected turnover data from national and regional operators. In this first year, the correlation between the Trust Index® employee engagement score and turnover is stark:

- At a community level, an increase of 10 points on the Trust Index score translates to a decrease in turnover of 4 to 10 percent.
- The effect is greater in full-time employees but the finding holds true for part-time staff.

At an employee level, the senior living employee data show that two key perceptions are the most correlated to employee engagement:

- Management actions match its words.
- Management delivers on promises.

Keeping your word is a critical trait in supervisory, manager, and director leaders at each senior living community.

Strategies

Goal: Strengthen the 3 Cs of retention: the *core* (managers in the communities), *career* paths, and *culture*

1. Develop the core (frontline and mid-level supervisors and managers)

Best-in-class senior living operators offer in-person or online training in management 101. The topics covered include:

- Management basics (such as servant leadership actions)
- Behavioral interviewing, including which questions to ask and not to ask
- Thanking staff and recognizing good work
- Delivering constructive feedback
- Writing a performance review and having a nonthreatening two-way conversation about it
- Conflict mediation between two or more employees
- Communicating decisions (such as scheduling requests, pay grades, and promotion policies)

In addition, many senior living operators offer leadership programs for emerging leaders. These are frontline or frontline supervisory staff members who show high potential and interest in advancing their careers.

2. Promote clear and compelling career paths

Having a clear career path is an incentive for many employees to stay at an organization. The key is to make it both clear and compelling: show growth in both roles and responsibilities as well as take-home compensation and rewards.

3. Measure and strengthen employee engagement to improve culture

Improvements in workplace culture are best defined by measuring them, and several good instruments for measuring culture exist on the market today. In addition, action plans must be directive yet agile for executive directors to use and make positive impact quickly.

Spotlight on Scripps Healthcare

Scripps, a regional health system with 13,000 employees in 27 locations of varying sizes, is a Great Place to Work certified company and Fortune 100 winner. Scripps's CEO created a Leaders100 program to nurture careers and empower employee engagement.

How it Works

- Site managers nominated talented frontline or mid-level managers to be on the Leader100 group.
- The Leader100 group meets quarterly with the CEO. Members relay feedback and take key messages back to their locations to promote changes with their peers.
- The CEO gets feedback from the Leader100 group on issues faced on the frontline, which enables him or her to make workplace improvements faster.
- They also get up to five days of additional training per quarter, led by a senior executive. This enables visibility and the development of strategic thinking.
- The Leader100 group occasionally works on projects together.

How to Adapt and Implement These Best Practices

- This approach is suitable for senior living operators who are growing fast and need to cultivate a strong bench of managers/directors for future communities. It is also applicable to operators who are not growing but need a way to continue developing talented individuals and preparing them for promotions when positions become available.
- Operators of all sizes can create a "CEO Council" of frontline champions or talented frontline managers with leadership potential. This leadership council ideally has a group project, which gets presented to either the entire community or senior leadership for feedback.
- At a single site, this may be a 5- to 10-person group that meets with the executive director regularly.
- At national and regional operators, this may be an annual program identifying one to two emerging leaders from each site, who attend the leadership conference and have breakout groups and trainings for them at the event.



Engaged employees help ensure the long-term success of an organization.

Spotlight on Trilogy: Fast Track Apprenticeship program

Trilogy is an innovative regional operator with more than 100 senior living, rehabilitation, and ancillary health locations in the Midwest. An apprenticeship program for employees who want to “fast track” their careers helps Trilogy fill critical and often short-staffed roles.

How it Works

- All employees with three or fewer attendance issues are eligible for the program. Employees pay no certification fees but complete courses on their own time. Once employees achieve the next level, they automatically see a pay increase of \$0.25 to \$1.00 per hour.
- Currently, there are two tracks: Culinary and Nurse Aide (CNA or medical technician, for example).

For more information, visit trilogyjobs.com/fasttrack

How to Adapt and Use This Best Practice

- Single site operators can develop the program with existing online certification courses.
- Regional and national operators can tailor their “fast track” apprenticeship programs to the dining, nursing and other programs distinctive to that operator’s brand.



Fast Track Apprenticeship Stages

Conclusion

The data and in-field experiences of senior living operators point to the impact that workforce development programs can have on company operations, culture, and profitability. By focusing strategies on proven programs, an operator is very likely to improve its culture, attract and hire talent, and reduce workforce turnover.

Through learning from senior living peers and organizations outside the industry, senior living operators can identify and implement effective, proven strategies to attract, hire, and retain highly qualified, professional, caring workers.