

Intro

Welcome to season eight of Bridge the Gap, a podcast dedicated to informing, educating, and influencing the future of housing and services for seniors. The BTG network is powered by sponsors, Aline, NIC MAP, Procare HR, Sage, Hamilton CapTel, ServiceMaster, The Bridge Group Construction, and Solinty and produced by Solinity Marketing. Bridge the Gap in three, two.

00:43 - 00:55

Lucas McCurdy

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior Living podcast with Josh and Lucas, a beautiful day here in Fort Lauderdale at FSLA. We've got a great friend, returning guest David Hopkins. Welcome back to the show.

00:54 - 00:55

David Hopkins

Thanks, guys. It's so great to be here.

00:55 - 02:42

Lucas McCurdy

You've been a good friend to me and Josh for many years. Former Bridge the Gap ambassador. You've interacted with us at our events. And you've also been one of our contributor Wednesday hosts. And so most of our listeners would probably remember and have heard David. Long career in senior housing, so far, and, really, what I see and what I know is just you were such a great leader at the community.

Obviously, you've been an executive director. That's been your primary role in senior housing. If I have that correct, and leading teams and really just understanding the complexities of the industry. And you took a little bit of time away from that, did? That's obviously very stressful. Position. Executive director is just I'm getting off on a tangent here, but the role of executive director to me, literally, there's not a dollar figure you could pitch to me that would make me do that job. It's the hardest job I've ever seen anyone do. And I get to see it. And I'm just like, how? How do people do that? I don't know, David. You could speak to that, but, placement in the industry, these placement services, there are some that are localized, there are some that are national. There are big ones, small ones, and in between.

And sometimes it can be a little confusing. Like, should the industry fully embrace this, who they partner with, which ones can they trust? And when you told me that that's what you were really focused on now, I thought if I was going to move into a senior living community, I would want David leading the way because he's the best person for it. So I digress. There's a lot to unpack there. Yeah. Tell us what's going on.

02:43 - 03:28

David Hopkins

So I'm excited to be back in the chair first time in person. This is amazing. We've had a few conversations Zoom-wise, but, you know, what drew me, I guess, to the placement services

around this is that there's so much in the family journey of trying to select a place for your mom or your dad or your loved one in so many nuances.

Even as an executive director, you'd see people coming in and couldn't afford your building. They could over afford. You're building, you know, they needed special care, they need more activities. And as an executive director, I think you always know what your building's really good at, right? Like, you look at everybody's website, everybody's got the best food. We've always got the best activities.

03:28 - 03:37

Lucas McCurdy

The same actors, the same old, old, older adult actors. They're on every single webpage. I notice that I'm like, oh, they live there, too. Yeah.

03:37 - 03:39

David Hopkins

They're making the rounds. It's like a. Winter bird snowbird kind of thing. They go to one or the other.

03:43 - 03:46

Josh Crisp

That's a whole other episode.

03:46 - 08:06

David Hopkins

What I always thought was, you know, as people came in, in, you try to find, especially from a community standpoint, the quickest way to connect with them, to engage them, so that they think your community is the best, and sometimes it's not. And, you know, as an executive director, I remember when I first got in, it was super cutthroat, and I worked in a community that had three other locations, and I remember calling the executive directors and saying, I'd love to take you out for breakfast, right.

And they were on guard. They didn't know what was going on. I mean, I remember sitting at the restaurant, and we sat at a table, and they literally were on the edge of their chairs, like ready to fight each other because they weren't sure why. They were all sitting at the same table. And I said, listen, I'm new to this game, but I'm going to tell you a couple of things.

I'm a man of my word. And when I get one of your residents touring my building, I'm going to call you because it's no good for the resident to just hop from building to building. And likewise with employees, too, because sometimes the employees are on their last straw and, you know, maybe they need to shift out of that community or that line of business to find where their happiness really is.

And we went away from the meeting, and I'm like, oh my God, this is never going to work, right? And a month later, I got one of the new residents from one of the sister buildings, and he came in. He was complaining about meatballs, and I'm like, meatballs. And he's like, yeah, I've been asking for these meatballs for like three months, and they won't get them.

So I'm like, okay, well, let's just fix a meatball problem instead of the building problem. Right. And so I picked up the phone and I called the executive director. She was on the edge of her seat, and she's like, Why are you telling me this? Why wouldn't you just take the move? Moving? I'm like, because this is no good for this guy.

If he just hops from building to building, like if the meatballs are a problem, I'll buy them on Amazon and have them shipped to you. I'm sure they're like ten bucks or something. And she's like, I told them they were coming in tomorrow. I said, well, just reiterate that and maybe make a big presentation out of it. And she kept the guy. Fast forward four months, she gets a resident who comes in, was out of state and had all the paperwork done, walks into the building, and it's out of their license purview. It was in my license purview. She picks up the phone, calls me, and says, I have a gift. I'm like, oh, what's my gift? And she's like, I got a new resident for you.

Here's all the paperwork. It's all done. Move them in. Because they fit under your license, not under mine. I'm like, awesome. That's what we should be about. Because even when one senior living community fails in a, you know, local area, everybody fails because it doesn't taint that one name. It taints everybody's name in senior living. Oh, they can't do this.

They can't do that. And it's not the name of the building. It's senior living can't do that. And so when I got into the placement service, there's a long story to that conversation. I really wanted to focus on each individual journey. Having done the family journey five times, having to remove life support. Talk about dementia. You know, it's interesting.

I'd have a conversation with a family member, and I can pretty much pinpoint where they are in that journey emotionally, physically, financially, stuff like that, and it really helps me to connect with them. The benefit for the communities is that when I'm bringing them somebody, it's only to 1 or 2 communities. They're not shopping in seven communities. They've got their checklists that they're trying to figure out if this is going to be the best place, because I'm helping them narrow it down, and they're walking in and, you know, I make my family, they come in with a folder.

They've got their legal documentation for power of attorney, health care surrogate, all that stuff in there. In Florida, we have an 1823. They've got that completed. It's up to date, and they have a blank check. So they're walking in ready to deal. Like I've narrowed it down. They've seen all the pictures. We've had the conversations about the pros and cons for mom and dad, and now they trust me to bring them to communities that are going to fit what they need.

So now the salesperson isn't having to redo a full discovery, trying to really nurture that relationship over two, three, four months sometimes to really gain that trust, to get them to move

in. And I'm a third party, so it doesn't I don't have a stake in that game. Yes, we get paid by the communities, but we work with all the communities, and so it's free to them, and they build that trust with us as an advisor to really help them walk through that journey and be intentional about where they want to place their mom or dad for a long time.

08:06 - 08:43

Josh Crisp

Well, I have so many questions for you because you've got a really great perspective. I believe in this because you've been in the communities leading communities, but now you're out there helping direct the consumer, so to speak, navigate to the community. So on that side, what are you seeing as trends that families struggle the most with?

Is it more of what senior living is? What types of senior living should I be looking for? What do they do? Or is it more of a trust issue, or are they dealing with more of the emotional? What really is the biggest issue for families?

08:43 - 10:09

David Hopkins

Yeah, it's I wish I could pinpoint down to one, but it's everything, right? I mean, most of the time, do the kids in this generation understand senior living at all? They still got a little bit around, you know, the 1970s nursing home. We're going to lock you down if you have dementia because we don't understand how to treat that.

But we've got great people like James Lee forging forward on stuff like that that are changing that environment. And so they're starting to see a little bit about that. But there's a huge emotional baggage that comes along with that. And I think the kids are really struggling because mom said she doesn't want to go into a home.

And then they walk into the home, and then you see the conflicting pieces around that, where mom has been a lifetime watcher of The Price Is Right, right? And you walk through the community with mom, and the daughter goes, look, mom, a gym you can walk out every day, and the mom you can see on her face is like, I haven't worked out a day in 74 years. I don't know what you're thinking I'm going to do now, but no, that's not for me. But she walks into the movie theater and sees this giant 80-inch screen TV and goes, I can watch The Price Is Right on that. Now that's my community, right? And it's finding those little pieces that's going to make mom happy. Sometimes we've got to try and make the kid a little happier in that journey, to feel like they're not as caring so much about emotional baggage around, you know, placing mom into that journey.

10:09 - 11:19

Josh Crisp

Well, and you bring up a really, I think, important point. And for friends in the senior housing industry that are watching this, it's so often it's a it's a misalignment of expectations between the person that's making the decision or helping mom or dad make the decision, and the actual

resident themselves. I, I can recall many times, even around nutrition, you know, you've got the adult son or daughter that's like, hey, we want heart healthy.

We want this expectation. We went to see what this tastes like. And the old guy that's there's like, hey, I've been eating biscuits and gravy for the last, you know, 50 years. I'm not changing my biscuits and gravy now. So, where do you find that perfect mix is an operator's challenge. So we know, and we won't drop names, but placement services or referral services, which you may tell us is not even the same thing.

And that's a different term, but they've kind of gotten a bad reputation with operators. Where do you believe what you're doing is changing that and how it's different than what we've come to know is like, get placement and referral services out of there. So, how is it used as the most effective tool?

11:19 - 13:16

David Hopkins

It's so true. And just like when you guys started the Bridge the Gap podcast, right. Like you had a few listeners and you've grown, and it just takes one person to say, you know, we can do something differently. And I know we can do placement services, referral services. You know, we always get around nomenclature on everything.

And especially, you know, we want to call it a community. Yeah, we're called assisted living facilities. I mean, that's what we are. That's what the state licensed us as. So we can call it whatever you want. But it's about the connection in the relationship that's built between the people. And for me, it's about building relationships with the building so that they have quality individuals that are coming in.

It's not a full four-month engagement of trying to figure out what the nuance is that's going to put this family over the edge and get them engaged in our community. Right. And we have just, the placement services or referral services have gotten a bad rap because some have gotten so big, it just farm out to a bunch of people.

And as an operator, I'd see those emails come in. And if you didn't deny it right away, then you're on the hook for a payment. And it's like, you know, if you talk to the local ones that walk into your building like us and like some of the other groups out there that really care and walk in, they're going to work with you.

They want a good, long-term relationship. And likewise, we're a benefit to that community because now families trust us and they know, and they're going to call us again and say, hey, my neighbor down the street needs this, and she can't afford what my mom can afford. So, do you have something in that price range? Yes, I do, because I know these communities and I know what they're going to price out.

Right. And so then we have that opportunity to engage on multiple levels with multiple trust, which builds a better community and builds a better community in the area that you're serving, because those are the people that are going to make or break those communities in assisted living.

13:16 - 13:46

Josh Crisp

Well, and I imagine for the consumer, the complexity is greater than it's ever been. No. All we have at our fingertips of us have a phone. All of us are searching, and the consumers are coming with a lot more education. But also, there are more types of senior housing and, you know, an assisted living provider in the same market. You could have a handful, and they're all very different in what they allow, what they don't allow. So I imagine a lot of your time is just spent educating on who we are, what we do, and what the differences are. Right?

13:46 - 15:44

David Hopkins

Yeah, 100%. I mean, my first couple of phone calls, I love to try and go meet them in person. Obviously, home settings give you a lot of clues about whether mom is a hoarder or she's not taking care of stuff. And those are just little tips and tricks that you can figure out when you get into the home.

But most of the time, you get a panicked phone call seven 8:00 at night, my phone rings and it's like, is this Davin with assisted living locators? I'm like, yes. And it's like my mom fell and I don't know what to do. And then it's just like, you have this whole football field and you're at the zero starting line, and you've got to go 100 yards in this prescribed amount of time and hopefully make the right decisions, stay in bounds, and score touchdowns.

So that mom can be well taken care of. And you don't even know the rules of the game. You don't even know where the boundaries are. You know, we talk about dementia as that journey. It's a marathon with no finish line. And how do you figure out where to go if you've never even understood the difference between skilled nursing and assisted living, and being able to be a resource for family members, I will tell you, is probably one of the greatest honors that I get to have.

Because when you hear somebody give you this, I call it the sigh. Right when you say, Listen, Josh, I got you. We're going to get data right location for him. I've been in this industry for ten years as an operator. I've walked this family journey five times. I got you, we're going to do it together one step at a time, and we're going to get to that finish line. And you hear that? It's just like that burden of relief of, I don't have to do this alone.

And it's every child out there feels like they have to walk this journey alone. And yes, they have all these resources on the phone, but they're reading stuff like I'd read calculus, and I still don't understand the calculus, but it's out there, and we have that information. We just got to know

how to interpret that. And that's the biggest honor that I get to have to walk along these families in that journey.

15:44 - 15:56

Josh Crisp

That's awesome. So a dumb, dumb question I'll ask. Yeah, I'm good at that. So assisted living locators, right? Does that mean you only assist with assisted living, or is it well beyond just wherever they need placement?

15:57 - 16:50

David Hopkins

For me, assisted living locators is the name of the business. Started about 22 years ago by a nurse who came out of the industry. So we kind of follow in that same career path. And we place it everywhere. You know, where we generate our revenue from is obviously from the communities. It's free to the clients.

For skilled nursing, obviously, there are rules around getting paid for Medicaid and Medicare placement, so we don't do that. But at the same time, it's not always about money. It's about getting the families to the right location. And, you know, my hope is that, hopefully, someday they may have a friend who says, hey, I do need assisted living.

And they said, well, you need to talk to my friend David. And then they refer back to me. So, you know, the majority of your local advisors and placement agents are going to help you get to that point, even if they don't get paid, because they want to make sure that people are well taken care of.

16:50 - 16:55

Josh Crisp

Yeah. Lucas, a wealth of information right here. We can pick David's brain all day long.

16:55 - 17:15

Lucas McCurdy

So good, so good. And we're so, so we're happy for you as well in this new adventure and journey. I think there could be no one better to help on this, this path, to get to that end zone as you to use your, your phrasing. So David, thanks for all you're doing for the industry. Thanks for your support of BTG over so many years.

17:15 - 17:17

David Hopkins

Absolutely. My pleasure, I love it.

17:17 - 17:30

Lucas McCurdy

And for those that want to connect to David, we'll put him in the show notes, and you can go to btgvoice.com, download this content so much more. Hit us up on LinkedIn. We'd like to hear from you. Take care and have a great day. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap

Outro

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