

## 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.

00:37 - 00:51

Lucas McCurdy

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. Here in Fort Lauderdale, we've got a great friend and returning guest, Damon Thomas, at Providence Senior Living. Welcome to the show.

00:51 - 00:54

Damon Thomas

I'm so glad to be back, guys. Thank you for having me.

00:54 - 01:12

Lucas McCurdy

Damon is also, Bridge the Gap ambassador. Very engaged with all of the ambassadors. It's a lot of fun to have more of a continual connection with you. And you're also a board member here. Florida Senior Living Association house. How's that been going?

01:12 - 01:38

Damon Thomas

Great. The ambassador, as you know, the relationships keep on growing. You all really created something special here. And I love the, it started out small. Remember in Nashville. Now, again, we met this person, and then this person and this person. Then we got just a lot of great friends, a lot of great resources. So, thank you for allowing me to be part of that. You know, it's something special.

01:38 - 01:44

Lucas McCurdy

It's special for us, especially guys like you at your caliber. You've been in the industry for a very long time. So for you to validate that it's, it's a good group and that you want to be a part of it is really encouraging to us. So, you know, 2025, in senior living, there's a lot happening.

We are post-COVID, where we, you know, we've been hearing that for a long time. The demographics in this industry, as far as age and income, are very compelling. We have a lot of headwinds and development, and there have been headwinds in staffing. And, you know what? You are really good at organizational culture and it's going to be fun to dive into some of your tips and tricks, so to speak, of, the great habits that you have formed, over the course of your career by working with Very Large, the largest, you know, operator platforms, in the industry to now a much more smaller, regionalized footprint.

02:44 - 03:07

Lucas McCurdy

And you're able to kind of, you know, flex your muscles, so to speak, on all of this, you know, your whole career. So walk us through a typical week with Damon Thomas and your team of, are you putting out fires? You're fighting fires. Are you trying to get people in alignment? And on the same track? How do you heard the cats, so to speak?

03:07 - 06:36

Damon Thomas

My son, Hunter, is a firefighter here in Boca, and he's going to be, chief of one of these houses next December. So I gotta throw in my Hunter plug. I'm very proud of him, but I think about him often. And the reason why is, in senior living, we were always putting out a fire, it seems.

And one of the things that, one of the operational and Damon isms that I brought to Providence Senior Living is that I have a daily alignment. And, it's not a 15-minute stand-up. I have my own personal feelings about the 15-minute stand-up. I feel that, 15 minutes. What are you really going to capture in 15 minutes?

And if you don't capture it in 15 minutes, then you're going to have multiple, many meetings throughout the day, some scheduled, some unscheduled. So what we do at Providence is I have about 45 minutes, and we are adults. So we can sit down, or we can have a table. It's really nice. We sit around and we cover everything from A to Z in the organization.

Now, of course, you don't do a deep dive on everything every day. But we cover all of those hot, those hot spots. So speaking of hot, you talk about your hot leads for the week, you're move-ins your move-outs. I have a requirement. There's a little bullet point, 72 hours prior to move-in, and we'd better have all our information together.

1823 has been reviewed and clarified. We've sent out our information to the pharmacy. Everything that we need for a successful move-in. So then we look at a little bit of AR, it better say zero. And if not, what are we going to do to, you know, to collect the money necessary that needs to be collected?

Certainly. Our health and care are a big part. Right. So what's on that 24-hour log? Anything of concern? Who are those residents? One of the things I think you guys will find funny, I also have a top ten list. Now, the top ten list is not something that we go into a deep dive every daily alignment.

But we do know who's on our top ten list that as you talk to the operators around, they always have the numbers may vary, but it's usually about ten people within a community, no matter what the size is. That may provide a little bit more challenges for one reason or another. You guys may you'll appreciate the family that you can't figure out who the pole is because they come in droves.

Right? They need to be well taken care of. Not only the resident, but their family. So they're on that list. There's that resident that you can't keep happy no matter what you do there on the list. And it goes on and on and on. And the the folks that come off our list at Providence Senior Living are the ones who say, All right, enough, stop calling.

We love you. You're doing fantastic. And when that person comes off, we go and find another one. So we're always making sure that our folks are being taken care of. Because if you're really making sure those top ten folks are everything else just falls into place. So that's on our that's in our daily alignment, the engagement teams there. I want to know what's going on for the day. Tell me what we're doing. Tell me you're not doing ball toss. Please. What was that?

06:36 - 06:40

Josh Crisp

Speaking of putting out fires, someone had a crash.

06:40 - 07:47

Damon Thomas

Yeah. Is the dietary budget on track, or are we breaking glass, whatever that may be? So that's been very successful for us. Because, like I said, after those 45 minutes, everyone gets up. One of my questions I ask you at the very end, and there has to be a delay. Is there anything else good for the group?

And then I'm just quiet, or my executive director a quiet, as you know. That's hard for me. Yeah. So I've worked on this, but if you're really quiet and you're asking, is there anything else for laughter? There may be something in there. Oh, by the way. But if there's not, everyone gets up and there's a sense of calm that I know, know what I need to do for the day.

So that's one of the things that Providence Senior Living does. I know it's something that's also been stolen. I won't I won't name the other companies, but I'm glad that it's been stolen, been plagiarized in certain circles. Because I find that's one of the keys that works for us at Providence Senior Living.

07:47 - 08:15

Josh Crisp

Well, so, Damon, we're probably in just that practical breakdown that you just gave us an explanation of how you do alignment. Can you compare and contrast, maybe the young executive of Damon to where you are today, and some of the things that you've gravitated to, as a more seasoned leader, and why that's why. Now, you see that that change has been beneficial for you and why?

08:15 - 08:42

Damon Thomas

Am I turning red? Because when I think about Damon in year five and Damon now, I mean, I admittedly get embarrassed. I was a Boston boy who went down to. I've told you the story. This was the last podcast, so we will go down that thing. But I went down to I came down went to South Carolina. Was was my first area. And the Boston speed is different from the South Carolina speed.

08:42 - 08:43

Lucas McCurdy

Very.

08:43 - 11:31

Damon Thomas

So I had to adjust. And climbing that corporate ladder was just something that I had to do. And that's my whole way of looking at things is just changed. So to answer your question today, I have a much slower pace. And it's not because business has changed the pace. It's the pace that I choose.

I believe that I have a Damonism. Another one that I say to my team. Slow down before you speed up. In the example that I use, at times, everyone's been there, whether they want to admit it or not. When you have that elopement and everyone just gets nervous and they run around getting their cars, and they're feeling good because they're doing all the right things, only to find that Mrs. Smith was in the closet the whole time.

You know, or they're not pulling out their policy and procedure book. And I know it's painful, and I know that we're worried about that. But going really fast causes issues. The way, as we're at the conference today, we're all learning about all these AI opportunities and solutions. And I'll tell you one thing that I'm going to be really slow about is trying to choose the right solutions for Providence senior living in the seniors, because first, first, the first product out there doesn't mean it's the best product.

And then just because, you know, we get to slow down to find out about all the bells and whistles. You know, if you only concentrate on five key things, you may be missing out on others, and then you're slowing down because how many devices do we need, Josh, you know, how is it pulling on your Wi-Fi, and okay, so to answer your question, I'm a lot calmer. I'm a lot slower. And I enjoy I just smell the flowers a little bit more now, because it's been a fun ride and certainly not all, over by any means at 55. But it's a lot more fun that, we're slowing down in the business. I would say that's the number one thing about me. Today in compares to five years ago and, slow and just about everything that we're doing it, I was a lot, a lot better with my associates, too.

You know, I'm not quick to judge. And, you know, it's almost to the other side where, hey, give him or her another chance. So what can we do to build them up to the next level? Whatever. And now I'm really I won't, I won't, I won't bore everyone. But there's a lot of success stories around, the talent that I've been blessed, to, you know, help, help, help bring up. That's the difference.

11:31 - 12:12

Josh Crisp

So that's awesome. Well, thank you for, you know, that kind of personal testament and sort of growth that you've been on as a leader. Well, so, switching gears a little bit for your company, you know, we're an exciting time. We're talking with our partners that provide us data, NIC MAP, and all the buzz here at the Florida Senior Living.

So everyone's excited again. Occupancies are up. The industry, there's so much potential. So from a strategic standpoint, what can you tell us about where your focus is as a company and how you're growing, where you're growing, what your, try to this talent that you're accumulating? How are you putting them to work? What are you guys working on?

12:12 - 15:45

Damon Thomas

That's a great question. Because I've been thinking about it a lot. Because everything is moving so fast. And, one of the benefits of being a smaller, organization, I can take deep breaths. I don't have to worry about hundreds of, Well, that's not true. I have hundreds of employees. I don't have to worry about thousands of employees.

I don't have to worry about thousands of regions. And so I can be very, I can use a scalpel in regards to the way we roll things out as, as opposed to show up and throw up. No disrespect to my my large company friends. So the approach that I think that needs to be and I think you, you you'll, you'll agree today, everyone's so focused on their phones

so focused on social media and all of these things that I want to keep the, the personal, involvement and engagement forefront. So I think that, if you everyone's moaning and groaning and I get it, there's different markets and everything about staffing. I have staffing problems, but I don't think I have the staffing problems to the degree that I'm hearing out there.

And one of the reasons why I don't think we have that those type of problems is because we're in the fields. Going back to the daily alignment, I'm slowing down. So Lucas, how's your day? And like I said earlier, I may have said, here I have seven hours for you to tell me how your day is, you know, or would that family that would that family member.

So to answer your question, first strategy is employee retention. One of the other, strategies is the, the move in process that's becoming a little automated. You know, from because I've once again, I so we see a lot of companies now are starting out with that initial email coming from a computer, you know. So and it continues to get more automated.

I mean, heck, we can't even go to McDonald's. We have to punch it in or or CVS. Everything's automated. So we want to keep it personal, engaged in regards to the onboarding, onto the moving process. And I think the third strategy is slowing down. Now to figure out what the next steps are. In regards to the, to Aeaecaa, and the, in, in fall management and the, and all the systems around.

Okay. So and the reason why that's so important, because it's like anything else, if we don't figure this out now, we're going to miss it. And the last thing anyone wants to be I think we'll all agree on this, right? Like, every, every, every, organization that's here right now is trying to figure that out, right. You're hearing data, data data.

You're hearing analysis, in-house analysis. But you've got to think about who's going to look at the data, who's going to do the analysis. Because it's not like we're dumping a bunch of employees. Right. And then are you going to be able to support that inference infrastructure. So those are the those are the top three things that I've been thinking about is the onboarding, to support the employees, to really make them feel part of our family.

And I can do that with the with my size of the company and then the, move in move and management and that whole process, making sure that our residents are feeling part of that family. And then it's all about the care. And I'm so excited. It's kind of weird. I'm not a tech guy, but I'm excited about what's coming out because there's a lot of things that we're going to be able to do to make things a lot better for our residents.

15:45 - 16:21

Josh Crisp

Well, Lucas, that kind of reminds me a lot of what he's talking about. Years ago, we had Bob Kramer on our show, and he was, I won't try to quote what he said. He said he said it very eloquently. But at that time, he said with all the technology that's emerging, we're going to have to figure out how to balance that high touch with the high tech.

And that's stuck with me. And I'm hearing that that that's something you're being very, very intentional about. In this age of AI and digital and softwares and everything that automate a lot of our processes. But what gets lost in that is that personal touch a lot of times.

16:21 - 16:47

Damon Thomas

We're going to see that the people that really get into the data. I heard a little bit of it this morning, one of the sessions. Two, I totally get it about the data I'm searching. Certainly in operations. I'm a finance guy, too. But but I disagree. You don't leave, you don't lead with the money. You don't lead with all that. That will come if you're truly connected to not only your employees, but to your to your residents as well.

16:47 - 17:01

Josh Crisp

Well, so, we've had an awesome time talking with you. So here, Florida Senior Living Association, give us some insight to what's happening here that you're most excited about at this event. I'm assuming you've been a big part of making the board making this happen.

17:01 - 19:58

Damon Thomas

Yeah, I'm blessed to be one of the founding fathers of the Florida Senior Living Association. So we take a lot of pride in where we come today. 700 attendees. I wish I brought I didn't bring notes on that. I should have 700 attendees. That that I'm aware of. As you can see, the exhibit hall is packed.

Probably more than we've ever seen, so I would. I'm going to go on a limb here. You can fact check me, but I'm almost positive that this is the highest attendance, not only from our industry partner side, but also from our member side. So I'm really excited about that because, you know, because I've been so intimately involved with Florida Senior Living Association, I get it.

I'm supposed to love it, but I truly love this association. I've been in other associations. This one is A+. But, you know, it's hard. And I'm so glad you asked the question. About what? What makes Florida Senior Living Association like so good? One of the things is the our legislative work that they're doing, we're doing we're passing bills.

And if anyone wants to do some fact checking, they should look at some of the other associations within Florida. You can go outside of Florida if you'd like and really find out how they've done it, you know, passing bills. But we have some great, great folks, and Jason Hand and James,

With southern Group, going up. Everyone knows, our folks and pushing our legislative agenda. Last night we had 7 to 10 senators. We were having drinks with the local senators and making that connection. Next week, I have three, three senators coming to my building to walk to see what we're doing. So, what we're doing real time.

We're passing real time bills. Some stuff that's very important. We're we're fighting things that may, get us, in trouble. that there's a lot of focus around the granny camps nowadays. Good bad or indifferent. So I could go on and on. We've got some great leadership and Gail Matillo. I think she had her on the show before.

She's fantastic. The group up there is fantastic. The board is a strong board. I think you had Greg we talking to Greg Broad today earlier. He's there. Joe with distinctive is on there. We've got some strong people so I could go on and on. But as you can tell, I'm pretty proud.

19:30 - 20:32

Josh Crisp

Yeah, well, and I think you touched on a point that, oftentimes we don't think is like the most fun, exciting thing to talk about bills and legislation. Right. And it's a lot of work if people don't have never done it to even figure out how to approach legislators and, and to have concise talking points and one united voice, but how critical it is in a changing time where we're literally shifting care delivery systems and housing opportunities and serving a whole new generation of seniors.

And we oftentimes and many, I would say, argue most states, we have aging legislation and regulations that don't allow can prohibit us from being able to do really nice, innovative, delivery systems. And so I think it's a sign of a thriving, organization. And, an association to be able to successfully adapt and pass legislation like that. So congratulations on all the successes. Yeah, it's it's all Florida senior Living Association. I'm just a cog. But they're fantastic. I can't say enough about them.

20:32 - 20:48

Lucas McCurdy

A great way to round out our conversation. We've had a great time here so far. And, yeah, we do love Gail and everything that they got going on here. Damian, thanks for all of the work that you put in for your teams and also the support that you bring to BTG. Appreciate it.

20:48 - 20:49

Damon Thomas

Thank you for having me. Love you guys.

20:49 - 21:02

Lucas McCurdy

Thank you. Love you too man. And for our listeners we love you too. And we'd love to see you on LinkedIn and also on our website [btgvoice.com](http://btgvoice.com). Download this content. So much more. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.

Outro

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