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Christy Van Der Westhuizen

Welcome to the Bridge the Gap podcast. I'm Christy Van Der Westhuizen, your contributor host. So today we are going to talk about when the tour experience goes sideways. So this is really when how to recover when real life shows up during a senior living tour experience. So every senior living salesperson has experienced this. I've experienced it, I don't know, hundreds of times.

And even during some of our most recent sales training at Jaybird Senior Living, we talked about the most odd, the most weird, the strangest tour experiences that our sales team has had. And I want to say that we were all just laughing hysterically after so many ups or accidents or oh, that didn't go as well as planned. But every single senior living salesperson has experienced a tour that goes sideways.

Not perfect. So you may think, okay, you planned the perfect tour. The model apartment look so great. The dining room is ready. Oh, and it even smells like pancakes from breakfast. You know exactly what the family's looking for. Where you're going to show you've done great discovery. You know what matters most to the family. You are prepared. You did that work in advance.

And then you turn the corner and there is a very noticeable odor or a call light is going off right as the family walks in. Or maintenance has decided that this exact moment was the perfect time to drill into a wall, or a resident stops you and says something completely unexpected. And then this is definitely happened. My personal favorite.

You're saying our community is peaceful and it's calm and something crashes loudly behind you? So welcome to senior living sales. Here's what I want you to remember. A tour does not have to be perfect to be successful. I'll say it for the people in the back. A tour does not have to be perfect to be successful. In fact, sometimes the way we respond when something goes wrong tells a family more about our community than the perfectly staged community areas ever could.

And that's because families are not actually looking for perfection. They're looking for confidence, transparency. They're looking for people they can trust with someone they dearly love. And trust is often built in those unscripted, not perfect moments. So I have a couple of tips for us to use when things don't go perfectly. So first up, don't pretend it didn't happen.

And I think this is probably the biggest mistake that we make and that I've made. So something awkward happens and suddenly we develop selective blindness. Or there is a clearly an odor in the hallway, and we just keep walking like nobody has a nose. No one has smelled it. Please don't do this. The family smells it. You smell it.

There's no prize for pretending otherwise. Address it. All right. Remember this. Address it so you can simply say. Oh, I noticed that, too. Let me find out what's going on. That's it. You don't

need a 12 minute explanation of what might have happened or. Wow. Let me be defensive and explain that this never happens. You don't need to say that.

You can just say. I noticed that, too. Let me find out what's going on. Because whenever someone tells me something never happens, like, oh, this never happens. My brain automatically thinks so. This definitely happens. How often does it happen? So what you can do is acknowledge it, stay calm and handle it. And that confidence is incredibly reassuring for families.

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So let's say you're touring in a call. Light is going off now. Many of our communities have different ways of alerts. But let's say it's a call light or there is a nurse's station with everyone's apartment numbers on a wall, and there's a light going off at apartment 201, and no one's doing anything about it. So the family notices, so don't panic.

This can actually be an incredibly positive moment if your team responds well, because what they think is what the family is really evaluating. They're asking themselves, if my mom needed help, would someone come? So they pay attention to what happens next. So if a team member responds quickly, it's a beautiful opportunity to say that right there is exactly what you should see.

Someone needed assistance, and our team responded. Now real life just demonstrated your value proposition for you. Someone needs help, and we are there. So that's so much more powerful than you standing in your model apartment saying, we provide great care, showing beats, telling every single time. Now, if the call light continues for a concerning amount of time. Don't explain it away again.

That 12-minute explanation about it does not help you go and make someone aware that the prospect and the family is watching not only what happens, but what you do about it. Okay, so let's say your community is under construction, or there are visible repairs that need to happen, or the community is clearly having a rough day. Maybe something has broken.

Maybe there's a carpet cleaner in the middle of your tour path with 12 cords going everywhere, and it is rough looking. So what happens? And so again, the trick is framing it without making excuses, acknowledging it. I hope that's what you take away from this podcast, is it's okay to acknowledge either the mistakes or things that aren't perfect.

Again, the trick is framing without making excuses. So you can say, oh, we're in the middle of refreshing this area right now. So you caught us during the work. Let me show you what it looks like when it's complete, and then move on and then show what that clean carpet looks like down the hallway, or gosh, what the wall without a bunch of holes looks like.

So again, you just acknowledge and move on. You don't spend half the tour apologizing for the inconvenience, and I hope you know that. I will tell you when I've done that. And I have absolutely done that in the past, and yet I'm still here. So an apology once is gracious, an apology 14 times. Start making the family nervous.

And can we trust you? So construction can also signal investment for the family. And so when it's appropriate you can talk about what's being improved and why. So again construction is not a hindrance. If you allow it to be acknowledged it and move on. So for example, you can say something like we heard from residents that they wanted more gathering space.

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So we're updating that area just to create just that. So now it's not just construction but it's responsiveness and it's a reason for the disruption. And this has happened to me before. It might be where you're on this amazing tour experience and you stop by a resident and the resident says something completely unexpected. Yes, that has happened many times.

So you're touring a lovely family, and a resident walks up and says, oh, don't eat the fish on Fridays. So what do you do first? Don't tackle the resident. Just kidding, of course, but don't look horrified either. And please don't say, oh, she doesn't know what she's talking about. Making something not very nice about the resident up. So residents are people.

They are the people that give us reason to come to work every day. And they have opinions and they are absolutely allowed to have opinions. So you might smile and say, oh well. Mary clearly has strong feelings about Friday Fish and then engage respectfully. So maybe you ask Mary, well, what is your favorite meal here? And sometimes that completely turns the conversation.

And honestly, families love authentic interactions with residents. Again, it doesn't have to be perfect. You don't need a resident ambassador smiling and nodding to everything you say and saying, oh, this place is wonderful with a fake smile on their face. It's okay for them to have very strong opinions one way or another. It's how we respond. I hope I hope you're getting this.

So a community where residents feel comfortable speaking freely can actually be more real and authentic and feel like home. So again, perfection can be staged and you can feel that, by the way. But personality and opinions is human. So when these things happen and you're in senior living sales.

I want you to remember to watch your body language. And I think that's something that we often forget. So when something goes wrong, the family watches your face. If your eyes get huge or if you start speed walking past the construction of past the odor, or if you suddenly whisper to another team member, the family assumes something terrible has happened or it's not normal.

And even if nothing really horrible has happened, but your energy and your body language and how you respond shows them how serious something is. So we want to make sure that any time

we encounter sees or not, the perfect tour experience. You stay calm, you stay warm, and you acknowledge and move on. So that doesn't necessarily need mean hiding legitimate concerns.

It means responding like a leader, because whether your title says it or not, during a tour experience, you're representing the leadership of the entire community. That's a big responsibility. And if you've heard me talk about my experience in the past, when I first got hired into senior living sales, I was verbally telling people that I was a glorified tour giver.

Now, that's not the leader of the community. According to the family. You're touring. No way. They see you as a leader in the community. You are the community. So ignore that or get rid of that glorified tour giver that I used to say, oh, I'm just like, cringing right now. I made every mistake. But you are representing the community, so how you respond to imperfection matters more than crafting the perfect tour, because sometimes that imperfect moment is the perfect sales moment.

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So again, years ago, I believed that a great senior living tour meant everything had to look perfect. Perfect lobby, perfect apartment, perfect dining room, perfect residence. Strategically placed, doing puzzles in our puzzle room. But families are so much smarter than that. They know this is everyone's home, and homes are sometimes messy. People need help. Things break. Dinner gets busy, people have opinions, and life happens.

So what matters most is how does the team respond? Are the residents treated with dignity and love and kindness to someone? Help and step in when help is needed. Does the sales person acknowledge concerns honestly? Does the community feel cared for? Now, I hope you don't hear this imperfection conversation and say, oh, that's the perfect reason why we don't do landscaping at our community.

Or oh, if the lobby isn't cared for, people understand it's their home. Please hear me when I say cleanliness and taking care of the community does not. You don't get a free pass on that. That is incredibly important. So please know that families are asking, does the community feel cared for and loved and all of those things, whether it's outside landscaping, the lobby, the the hallways, the door frames, I mean, you name it can all add to does the community feel cared for?

And so these moments tell families what life will actually be like after moving, so your recovery can build trust more than perfection ever could. So the next time your tour goes sideways, don't decide it in your head that the tour experience is ruined. It's not ruined. Acknowledge what happened. Respond appropriately and then reconnect to what matters most to the family.

So when there's construction, send the rendering for what it's going to look like. If there was a concern. Explain how it was resolved. If it was a funny resident interaction, maybe reference it when you call the family the next day. So that is memorable, how you acknowledge the

challenge and how you respond creates that trust. And so at the end of the day, senior living sales is not about selling perfection.

It's selling confidence. It's confidence that when something happens, someone notices, someone cares. And most importantly, someone responds and they make it right. So yes, prepare that apartment, check where you're going to be walking on the tour. Walk your community before the family arrives. That's huge. But check the smells. What does it sound like? What does it smell like?

But when real life happens, don't panic, because the tour that goes a little sideways is the tour experience that shows the family exactly who your community is. And that's the moment when they decide. I trust these people are not. Thanks so much for listening. It's been a pleasure and can't wait to share some more Senior Living sales inspiration with you next time. Have a great day!