

Developing Strong Leaders Results in World Class Culture

Benchmark Assisted Living, based in Wellesley, Massachusetts is one of the largest privately held senior living providers in the nation and the largest in the Northeast. The company was founded in 1997 by Tom Grape with the vision of creating a world-class organization through a culture of service, accountability, and values. Benchmark has grown largely from acquisitions. In 2005, for instance, the organization completed three acquisitions, adding 19 properties and 2,000 employees. Today, the company consists of 43 communities and over 3,500 employees.

It's all about People

Retention and loyalty are very important to the Benchmark organization. Within senior housing, the industry itself is incredibly competitive, and will continue to be based on the demographics for the aging baby-boomers. An important part of Benchmark's success is retaining the people who best embody the organization's culture and values. With turnover in the senior housing market exceeding 89%, this element is challenging to achieve. Benchmark is able to maintain a turnover level that is almost half of the industry's average, largely by incorporating the workplace personality survey, the Predictive Index, in its people management process. The Predictive Index (PI) is a behavioral assessment tool, published by the global consulting organization PI Worldwide that reveals the natural behaviors and motivations of people in the workplace. Benchmark is a firm believer that PI, among other types of strategic business opportunities, will continue to play a pivotal role in helping to source, screen, interview, and to develop great people that will fit their culture and who will also stay.

"The Predictive Index is absolutely part of the Benchmark culture. It's part of our language. Everybody knows what it is and it's a critical tool in how we manage our talent and how we grow people."

*Jill Haselman, Senior VP of
Organizational Development*

Special Attention to Executive Director Position

The Executive Director (ED) position is critical to the success of Benchmark Assisted Living. Each Executive Director represents the face of Benchmark. EDs are responsible for managing one of the facilities - everything from filling the beds and staff development to community relations.

A tremendous amount of effort is given towards placing the right person in this position, right from the beginning. To help identify the desired personality traits of the Executive Director, Benchmark took the Predictive Index results of the top six Executive Directors, who shared similar behaviors, and merged them into a PI profile that depicts the desired job requirements in PI behavioral terminology. Some of the key behaviors included: achievement oriented, strong sense of urgency, compassion, ability to build teams, work collaboratively, and execute goals through others.

Once Benchmark hires an ED, the firm also coaches them on their management style and how it impacts other people in the organization by integrating PI with emotional intelligence, and a 360° survey. This process enables the EDs to better understand their personal communication style and then adjust that style, person by person, for maximum effectiveness.

Benchmark further invests in its EDs through the “Leadership Institute” and “Program for Excellence,” which are part of Benchmark University. The Program for Excellence provides skills-based training taught by the “best and the brightest” of the Benchmark staff. The Leadership Institute consists of an extremely high-level, invitation only, five-day program spanning a four-month period. The Leadership Institute was designed for those employees that are “best in class.” This training utilizes the insight from the Predictive Index to help the leaders: understand their natural behaviors and styles and how they come across to other people; the importance of group dynamics and team dynamics, and how recruiting or developing/promoting certain people based on their behavioral style will impact business either positively or negatively.

These strategies, in combination, have provided amazing results. Of the 60 Executive Directors who have completed the Leadership Institute over the last five years, Benchmark Assisted Living has retained 96% of them.

Employee Culture Survey

Benchmark is an authentic values-based company that starts at the top of the organization. The founder believes in them exclusively and the metrics and measurements against those core values are very important. Benchmark conducts an annual cultural survey to all of the employees called the Candor Connection. The survey measures four domains: teamwork, respect, supervisory effectiveness and loyalty. Benchmark has seen an increase year over year in all four areas but a specific spike over the last 3 years is supervisory effectiveness with a recent score of 4.1 out of 5 points. Supervisory Effectiveness has been correlated to reduced turnover, increased loyalty along with higher retention scores.

According to Jill, “As hard as we have worked, to build a great culture, and drive loyalty and engagement, I can’t imagine having to do that without the use of the Predictive Index, and can only imagine that our loyalty scores would be significantly lower and our turnover scores would be significantly higher if we didn’t have the insight of the Predictive Index.”