



# TEAM WORK IN CARE HOMES

In a care home setting, team work is key in offering consistent, high quality care to residents. The majority of care home employees rely on one another to do their jobs effectively; the better a team works together the better results they produce. Tracy Powley explains the theory behind team work and discusses how to help a team work well together.

A frequent answer to the question 'what is a team?' is 'a group of people with a common goal'. However, with this definition it is possible to argue that a group of people at a bus stop are a team; they all have the same aim - to catch a bus. In fact, true team work goes beyond this definition and example. There is no doubt that a common goal is a necessity for a team to achieve anything, but in real team work everyone has to believe in that goal and support each other to achieve it. How people communicate and interact with each other to achieve the goal is what makes the difference.

A 'joined-up' approach to care, where everyone working in the home understands they have a part to play and everyone respects the contribution of another, will set one care home apart from another.

## REMEMBER THE PROS

One of the first steps to helping a team work together effectively is for members to think about the benefits of being in a team. People who work in an effective team often feel that there is less pressure, as things are shared. They feel the working atmosphere is better because of the camaraderie and the sense of pulling together, even when things are tough. As a result, they gain more job satisfaction.

A good team building exercise is to get employees together and brainstorm these benefits - to the individuals, the residents and the care home. The overall team will include everyone who works in the home and often the domestic staff and catering staff will have as much of an impact on the residents, as the caring staff. Including everyone in training, in team meetings, in ideas generation and looking at ways of improving things is not only good for motivation and engaging staff, but is good for business. The more people you have looking at ways to improve and sharing ideas and supporting each other, the more it will benefit the home.

## GROUP MENTALITY

The next step is to get the group of workers thinking like a team. Do you have a group of people who come to work to clock up the hours to pay the bills and then go home again, or do they think about working as part of a team to do their job effectively?

Encourage them to identify specific examples of what being a team member means. Help your employees identify how they can support each other. What are frustrations that crop up? What can be done, as a group, to eliminate problems and ensure →

→ everyone takes some responsibility? Thinking in this way will build a workplace where people feel a sense of accountability to others in the team and make an effort to support one another instead of an environment where people choose not to do something 'because it's not my job'.

A tangible outcome from this sort of discussion is drawing up a team charter. Asking people to identify what they expect of each other in a team and how they should work together to achieve their goals, this will help them come up with some positive actions and ground rules that the team will abide by. Where the team have defined these themselves, they will be far more likely to be motivated to implement them.

Even changing the language people use when describing what they do, can help. When referring to what the team is capable of get people talking about 'we'. Help them to focus on positive actions, eg 'what we can do', rather than negative, 'what we can't do'. One phrase to eliminate from people's communication (but which often crops up in care settings) is: 'I am only...', 'I am only the cleaner', these phrases completely undermine the part that that member of staff has to play and the contribution they can make. Start to get everyone to think positively about the role each person plays and the difference they can make. This will help to build respect for each other and with respect comes increased trust and co-operation.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT

There is also self-assessment tools that can be used to help raise people's awareness around team working and the different

contributions people can make to a team. Belbin Team Roles is one of the most widely used and can be a great way to open up discussions around the strengths that people offer in a team environment.

Teams which are made up of lots of people with the same strength actually do not perform well. Meredith Belbin discovered this in the initial stages of his research when a management team full of leaders with drive and energy failed to produce results. What they were lacking was any creative input; you can have all the drive you like, but if no new ideas or improvements are forthcoming the team stagnates. Once Belbin had placed his 'ideas' person in the midst of this team (The Plant), they started to achieve.

His research has identified nine roles (roles are defined as a tendency to behave in a particular way in a team environment) and he emphasises that each is valuable and brings something unique to the team (see box below/above/to the right/the left).

Using a tool such as this, can help each team member to understand their own preferred role better and play to their strengths more. It can also lead everyone to have more appreciation of different approaches and to value what others bring. **CMM**

For further advice, ideas and guidance on this area The Aged Care Channel and Focal Point Training will be broadcasting a programme on team work to member care homes on March 28 2012.

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## CASE STUDY - PELSALL HALL

Led by Steve Brookes, the Pelshall Hall Manager, the care home has taken a proactive approach to team building within the home and has seen some great results. As with many care home teams, there were some very dedicated, hard working individuals working at the home, but Steve noticed that they didn't always seem to pull together, which sometimes led to misunderstandings and situations where staff didn't necessarily have the complete picture when dealing with an issue.

By encouraging the team to get together and talk openly and honestly about their communication and how links in the chain could be strengthened, they identified a number

of actions that have made a big difference. Most notably every member of the team now feels that their contribution is valid and are proud of the part they play. For example, following the team work training, when one of the domestic staff members finished her tasks early she walked up to the lounge to check for any additional clearing up and noticed a resident who was a little distressed. Instead of ignoring them or rushing off to find the carer she now had the confidence to sit down and start chatting to the resident and was able to calm them down before the carer returned from dealing with another situation. The carer was delighted someone had been able to step in, the kitchen assistant genuinely pleased she had helped and the resident calm and happy.

## BELBIN'S TEAM ROLES

ACTION- ORIENTED ROLES	Shaper	Challenges the team to improve - goal focussed.
	Implementer	Puts ideas - into action - a doer.
	Completer Finisher	Ensures thorough, timely completion - an eye for detail.
PEOPLE- ORIENTED ROLES	Coordinator	Acts as a chairperson - works to involve others.
	Team Worker	Encourages cooperation - helps build harmony in a team.
	Resource Investigator	Explores outside opportunities.
THOUGHT- ORIENTED ROLES	Plant	Presents new ideas and approaches - creative input.
	Monitor-Evaluator	Analyses the options -brings objectivity.
	Specialist	Provides specialised skills.

For more information on Belbin's Team Roles, please visit the website [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com)