


Creating a Culture of All-Team Coaching in Memory Care



Presented by:
Erin M. Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.
Founder & Lead Coach
Gemini Consulting, Inc.
www.Gemini-Consulting.org

For:
OHCA
OHIO HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION
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1218 5th Street South • Cold Spring, MN 56320 • www.Gemini-Consulting.org
612-749-1220 • geminic@rconnect.com • Erin Bonitto, Founder & Lead Coach

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Introductions

- Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.
 - Founder & Lead Coach of Gemini Consulting, Inc.
 - Dementia Educator & Dementia Communication Coach
- Philosophy

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Memory & Dementia Care as an Organizational Priority

- We make major **financial investments** in Memory & Dementia Care,
- We put significant **time & energy** into defining our philosophy,
- We create and **advertise** our signature programs,
- We launch **specialized** dementia training,
- We teach about dementia in our **orientation & annual training**,
- We preach about **'the approach'** in our neighborhoods,
- And yet, when we **reflect** on our culture and care, sometimes we may find ourselves thinking:
 - "We're so close, but we're not **quite** where we want to be..."
 - "There's got to be something **more** we can do..."
 - "Has our **investment** paid off?"
 - "Are we seeing the **outcomes** we aimed for?"




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Challenges...

- Usually, we can envision the Memory Care culture and practices we want to create and sustain, but how do we do it now?
 - Ongoing operational effects since **COVID**,
 - **Workforce crisis** resulting in historic shortages and turnover rates,
 - Loss of **organizational knowledge** when managers and directors are lost...
- How do we **refresh** in the midst of all this?




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...and opportunities

- How do we **refocus** on sustaining a Memory Care culture that not only supports and celebrates each person with dementia...
- But, also **equips, supports** and **celebrates** every member of our team and community?
 - The **Housekeeper** who **communicates best** in Spanish?
 - The **Resident Aide** whose communication style is joyfully expressive – and **big!**?
 - The **CNA** whose verbal communication style is **quiet**?
 - The **Administrator** who cares deeply, but sometimes non-verbally communicates her **stress** in front of residents?
 - The **Sales Consultant** who believes passionately in Memory Care, but is **nervous** to fully engage with persons with dementia during tours?
 - The **Family Member** for whom **nothing** is ever good enough?

Reflect – Refresh – Refocus




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Creating a Culture of All-Team Coaching

Memory Care providers who seem to be thriving, all have something in common: **A Culture of All-Team Coaching.**

- Coaching is happening nearly **every single day**. Nearly every shift.
- Coaching is not limited to caregivers, but **includes everyone** who interacts with persons with dementia, including all leaders.
- Coaching does not come from one single educator, but instead, from a **small army of educators**.
- The coaching may be organized and directed by a key leader (such as a Program Director), but much of the actual coaching is **peer-to-peer**.
- Peers are not coaching because they are **'told'** to coach, but because they are **inspired** to coach.



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- Coaching focuses on **hands-on demonstrations** and feedback for concrete, easily-definable skills,
- It happens in the real-world, in **real-time**,
- Coaching is **celebratory** in nature – catching folks doing things well,
- Coaching is often done in a 'mini-format' – 30-second, 2-min, 5-min, 10-minute, 20-min modules,
- Coaching is not just for skills, but also addresses our **dementia care philosophy** and our **organizational mission**.

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Our Goals Today:

- Receive '**snapshots**' that illustrate a Culture of All-Team Coaching,
- Consider (and celebrate!) the types of coaching you **already** have in-place,
- Consider what **new** types of coaching you could implement as soon as you get back from the conference.

Reflect – Refresh – Refocus

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Topic 1

Coaching for Basic Skills

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Traditionally, how has dementia education been delivered?

- On-line modules /videos – completed independently at orientation and then annually.
- Videos – viewed in classroom setting, with a facilitator/educator,
- Live classroom instruction from an in-house educator,
- Special trainings from outside trainers,
- Completion of special certification trainings.

Each of these serve an important purpose, but they do not necessarily translate into significant, sustainable improvements to care and culture.

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Our Experience:

All-Team Hands-on Coaching – for very specific dementia skills – is the most effective way to help team members improve their 'dementia approach'...



- Maintenance personnel practicing how to enter and leave a room (or memory care area) without triggering anxiety or suspicion. *Eddy Memorial Geriatric Center – Troy, NY*
- Bath aides practicing how to use 'Endorphin Boosts' prior to bath in order to increase acceptance of – and pleasure – of the bathing experience. *St. James Place – Dallas, Texas, TX*
- Memory Care team practicing how to approach someone urgently (and angrily) hoping to leave the area. *MW Veterans Home – Luverne, MN*

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...and these simple improvements in **skill** can begin to change the very **culture** of an organization.

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Often, the 'pebble in the pond' is a small, passionate interdisciplinary team of Champions.



Who are equipped to share & coach skills to peers.

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Example of Basic Skill that increases understanding (and decrease frustration): **Vocal Quality** | **Skill Sample #1**

Vocal Quality

- Avoid Up-Talking!
- Down-Talking:
 - Starts at a medium pitch/frequency,
 - Steps downward with each word.
- Focusing Voice:
 - Includes down-talking, plus...
 - Each word is well enunciated & crisp,
 - Just a little bit slower than our normal rate of speech,
 - Just a little bit louder than our normal volume (but not shouting!)
 - Most importantly: There is a 'bright energy' to the words!


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Practice Vocal Quality

- "Good Morning!"
- "It's time to get up!"
- "Let's stand up!"
- "Well look at you!"
- "I love that blouse!"
- "It's time for breakfast!"
- "Here are your pills!"
- "Here's your juice!"

- "You should come check it out!"
- "I can help you find the bathroom!"
- "Let's have a seat over here..."
- "We've saved a spot just for you..."
- "Let's go get some ice cream..."
- "Let's go down for coffee..."
- "I'm so glad you're here."
- "Let's go down for coffee!"



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Examples of All-Team Coaching for **Vocal Quality**



Carrie, Administrator

- Administrator coaches skill during standup,
- CNA teaches skill to new employee she is orienting,
- Social worker teaches skill to resident's wife,
- An Amharic speaker teaches it to another Amharic speaker,
- Team member who struggles with the skill becomes the coach for the skill,
- Champions promote the skill as "Skill of the Week" by catching and celebrating peers who are using the skill,
- Champions 'use the hand' for quick reminders to one another and the team.
- Coaching is **FUN! GOOFY! CELEBRATORY!**

How could you begin coaching for Vocal Quality after this conference? ?

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Example of Basic Skill to increase understanding **Simple Statements for Meal-Time** | **Skill Sample #2**

Simple Statements

- Middle-of-the-road guideline: 7 words or less.
- Phrased as a statement, not a question.
- Pause, pause ... Allow time for person to process and respond to the statement.
- Responses may be verbal or non-verbal.

Meal-Time Simple Statements: Presenting the Meal (& Cuing for Initiation)

- "Here is your Sausage Jambalaya!" [pause] "The sausage has a little kick!"
- "We have homemade macaroni and cheese today..." [pause] "It is extra creamy."
- "Here is your crispy battered fish." [pause] "Tell me how it tastes."
- "Here are your pancakes..." [pause] "extra butter."
- "Here is your baked chicken..." [pause] "It is stuffed with cheese."
- "Here is your lemonade..." [pause] "Not too sweet..."
- "Here is your coffee..." [pause] "Black like you like it."

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Meal-Time Simple Statements: Cuing for Initiation

- "Try these green beans..." [pause] "they have bacon!"
- "Here is your meatloaf..." [pause] "tell me how it tastes."
- "Homemade vegetable soup..." [pause] "tell me how it tastes."
- "Here is your beef steak..." [pause] "try a bite..."
- "Eggs over easy..." [pause] "poke them with this toast."
- "Pasta with sauce..." [pause] "let's get some on your fork!"

Create cues for the following menu items:

- Herb-crusted tilapia with vegetable medley
- Chicken a la King on chow mien noodles
- Sausage gnocchi casserole and honey glazed carrots
- Panko crusted chicken breast with cranberry cashew salad



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**Real-World Snapshot of All-Team Coaching:
Simple Statements for Meal-Time**



*Dee, Dining Services Lead
Tara, Program Director
Day 1*

*Victoria, CNA
Day 1*

*Virginia, Housekeeping
Lead Meal-Time Coach
Month 2*


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**Real-World Snapshot of All-Team Coaching:
Simple Statements for Meal-Time**

**Meal-Time Simple Statements:
Cuing for Initiation**

- “Miss Georgia [pause] taste these eggs...”
- “Miss Georgia [pause] tell me if this bacon is good...”
- “Miss Georgia [pause] tell me if these potatoes are crispy...”




Rose, RN

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Example of Basic Skill to maintain a calm (trigger-free) environment: Memory Care Walk | **Skill Sample #3**



Task Walk

- _____
- _____
- _____

Memory Care Walk


- Grounding breath
- Easy energy
- Check-up from the neck-up

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How could you begin coaching for the Memory Care Walk following this conference?

?

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Topic 2

Memory Care Coaching to Campus-Wide Coaching

(A Center for Campus Learning)

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Example of a Basic Skill to Prevent the Intensity and Frequency of Challenging Behavioral Symptoms: **Endorphin Boosts**

Endorphin Boosts

- Intentional use of specific, individualized skills to improve mood, thereby preventing the intensity and frequency of challenging behavioral symptoms,
- Intended for prevention,
- Typically provided many times a day,
- Determined by detective work,
- May be: Gentle/Affectionate, Playful/Irreverent, Music/Movement

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"I haven't had a single hug today"

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"You haven't??"

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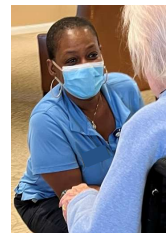
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Real-World Snapshot of Campus-Wide Coaching:
Endorphin Boosts



Sharonda, RN Case Manager for Memory Care

Dawn, Director of Housekeeping



Weekly practices on Memory Care, then sharing with her whole team.

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Topic 3

All-Team Coaching for Environmental Triggers

Key Concepts for Understanding Environmental Triggers

- 1) Often, behavioral symptoms are the result of **environmental triggers**.
- 2) Often, **we** are the triggers.
- 3) Managing **triggers** in the environment is a **critical** part of managing many of the most challenging **behavioral symptoms** of dementia.

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How many of these triggers might someone with dementia be exposed to in our setting?

How many times a day?

What is the very concrete message we are sending with these triggers?

What behavioral symptoms may we see as a result of these triggers?

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Reducing Environmental Triggers: We are all part of the team

- Marketing & tours
- Central supply
- Dining
- Plant Services
- Housekeeping
- Laundry
- Contractors / Vendors
- Families / Volunteers
- Leadership
- Nurses & Caregivers
- Recreation, Social Services
- Therapies

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Real-World Snapshot of All-Team Coaching:
 Marketing / Sale Tours

Coach Prospects on Best Practices for Entering Memory Care

- Not wearing jackets or carrying bags – why?
- Settling into seats, rather than standing and looking – why?
- Asking permission from residents to enter common areas – why?
- Limiting tour group size – why?

Can you identify areas for improvement in Environmental Triggers?
 How could you begin coaching for this after this conference?

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Topic 4

Coaching & Inspiring for Meaningful Engagement

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Coaching & Inspiring

What works:

- Unending culture of role modeling & coaching,
- Options that are best practices in our field (purposeful, person-centered vs. diversion, entertainment)
- Abundant & delightful supplies,
- Tapping into team member's interests & joys,
- Bridging language, cultural and generational differences,
- Supporting a 'lead,' not 'carrying the load,'
- A culture of all team members being involved in programming.

Telling

What generally does not work:

- *'Be creative!'*
- *'Just find some things to do with them!'*
- *'Just talk with them, or do a ball toss, or a manicure or something.'*
- *'Get something from the closet / cart / cupboard'*

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Real-World Snapshot of Coaching & Inspiring for Meaningful Engagement:

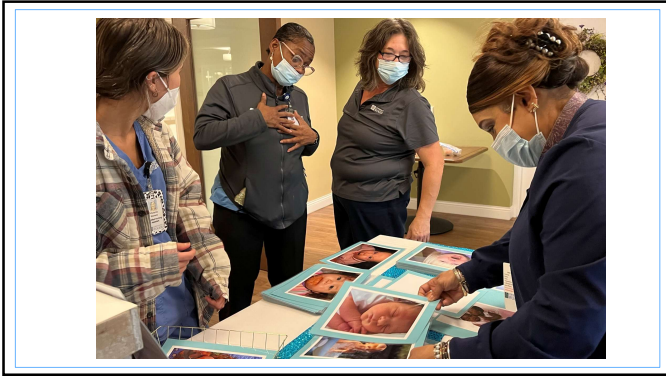
Inspiration Example #1

Inspiration

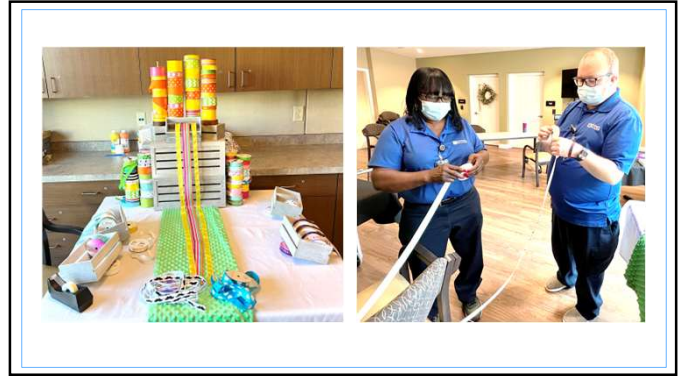
- Please make time to stop by during your shift today or tomorrow.
- Come look at this...
- Tell me what you think of this...
- Which would be your favorite?
- Can you think of any specific residents who might benefit from this?
- Could you explain this to _____?

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Inspiration: Intentional Observation Periods


- "They were *all* conversing with each other and they stayed!"
- "Their conversations were so genuine."
- "It was amazing! She had non-stop "*oohs and ahs*" and she usually sits alone in her room reading a newspaper."
- "Trust me, if she's sitting in here and staying here – she likes it!"
- "Seeing Mr. M so engaged, so contented. It was wonderful."
- "Maybe she always *wanted* someone to talk to, but we never gave her the right scenario. This just feels so natural."
- "I'm so engaged, myself!"
- "It was nice to see them all happy. They all looked fulfilled."

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Real-World Snapshot of Coaching & Inspiring for Meaningful Engagement:

Inspiration Example #2

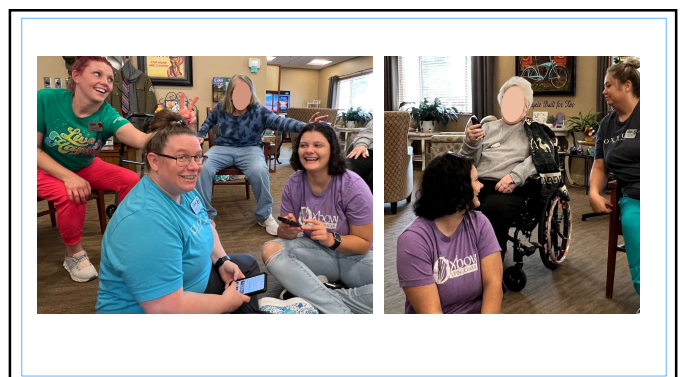


Inspiration

- Let's just try something different...
- What if we had everyone in a little circle, instead of a line?
- What if we didn't use the exercise sheet and focused more on having fun?
- What if we moved around instead of staying in one spot?
- What if we let the residents be in charge and see where it goes?

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Coaching: When something works – move fast!

Multi-lingual, evening CNA finds the small adaptation that makes the intervention work beautifully.

Our Leadership Role:
Frontline team members are already **solving** problems. Our job is to catch those **solutions** and help them **grow**.

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Coaching: When something works – move fast!

Evening nurses practice individualized, **non-pharmacologic interventions** for a person prior to her normal 'sundowning' period.

The nurses are now in a good position to **coach** and **problem-solve** with the team before immediately responding with a mood-altering medication.

Leadership Question:
Do we have 4-5 **specific interventions** to genuinely connect with each person – the tools that **prevent distress** and **support joy** before medication is needed?
And who **owns the system** that tests these ideas, documents what works, and coaches the team to use them, across all shifts?

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Topic 5
Coaching for Language & Dementia Philosophy

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'She's always getting into trouble'
Stealing **Bad**
Hoarding **'She's our little thief'**
Rummaging **Naughty** **'She can be so naughty.'**
'She's our little hoarder!' **Hoarding Behavior**
'You've got to keep an eye on her!'

Medical Model Lens and Labels

"This is a problem to be stopped."

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"Margaret experiences a sense of security, safety and fulfillment by collecting things, packing things, storing things and holding things close."

Person-Centered, Strength-Based Lens

"This is a strength to be celebrated and supported."

If this is our **lens / philosophy**, then it would make sense that we would provide Margaret even **more** opportunities to gather and collect items – including items that will spark delight and provide her pleasure.

[Coaching, Skilled Facilitation, Systems for Supervision & Storage – all required to ensure safety and effectiveness]

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All-Team Coaching for Language & Dementia Philosophy

- Learning circle discussions,
- Department meetings,
- Annual trainings
- Person-Centered Concept of the Month
 - 'Rummager' vs. 'Person who finds comfort gathering things'
 - 'Elopement' vs. 'Person who went out unattended'
- Key in our discussions: If we say this is the person's home, does our **language** and do our **practices** actually align with being a home?

What words or labels used in your setting might not align with your dementia care philosophy?
 How could you begin discussions to replace those labels or words?

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Topic 6

Outcomes

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Dementia Communication Coaching for 'Behavior' Prevention

Outcomes

- 31 long-term care sites in the Midwest, including 14 with Memory Support
- 2 Year Outcomes

Antipsychotic Use

- Health Services overall: **-29%**
- Memory Support communities: **-26%**

Behaviors Affecting Others

- Health Services overall: **-39%**
- Memory Support communities: **-34%**

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Dementia Communication Coaching for 'Behavior' Prevention

Outcomes

- 31 long-term care sites in the Midwest, including 14 with Memory Support
- 2 Year Outcomes

In 2 years there has been a **50% reduction** in team member injuries related to 'combative' resident(s).

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Dementia Communication Coaching for 'Behavior' Prevention

Outcomes

- 31 long-term care sites in the Midwest, including 14 with Memory Support
- 2 Year Outcomes

In 2 years there has been a **53% increase** in "Excellence Score" for Quality of Resident-Related Training

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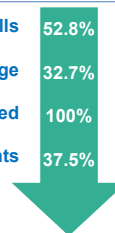
All-Team Coaching & Inspiration for Meaningful Engagement
54-person Memory Care Setting (3 Neighborhoods) in upstate New York
2 Year Outcomes



Team Members	Strongly Agree	Agree
I am more satisfied with my job	43.8%	43.8%
Caring for residents is easier now	17.6%	41.2%
My knowledge of dementia has improved	37.5%	56.3%

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All-Team Coaching & Inspiration for Meaningful Engagement
54-person Memory Care Setting (3 Neighborhoods) in upstate New York
2 Year Outcomes



Metric	Falls
Anti-psychotic Medication Usage	52.8%
Residents Leaving Unattended	32.7%
Resident-to-Resident Incidents	100%
Resident-to-Resident Incidents	37.5%

Savings
Thousands in drugs costs
Nursing paperwork reduced

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All-Team Coaching Reflection

Looking back **we** see how much frustration **we** caused to the residents, as well as to ourselves, by our old way of doing things.

The progress we have made has been amazing!

Not only have staff seen the difference, families and visitors have made comments like *"something just seems different around here!"*

Campus Executive Director – South Dakota

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Individual Reflections
Dan, Maintenance Supervisor

Prior to Coaching

- He says he "dreaded" going into resident's room if they had dementia. Sometimes he would postpone his work.
- He would "sneak" in and out of resident rooms without interacting.

Since Coaching

- Not only is the "dread" gone, but he truly ENJOYS interacting with the folks who have dementia.
- He always does a greeting first – and uses his skills to tell the resident in a simple way who he is and what he is there to do.
- He has become a coach to the other men in his department. In Champion meetings Dan often shares, "I've been telling the guys..." or "Let me talk to ___ about that. I can show him a different way to approach that resident."

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Individual Reflections
Tori, CNA

Prior to Becoming a Champion

- She thought her 'everyday way' of doing things was good. She always got her tasks done.
- Did not realize how much of the time she was inadvertently ignoring the person she was assisting.

Since Becoming a Champion

- She slows down, uses simple statements.
- She has become much more effective, which is time-saving.
- Using the skills makes her day go better and feel better. She says she can not stop smiling.
- She is unafraid to share her experiences with co-workers, to help them have the successes she has been having. She has Pride in being a role model and leader.

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Often, the 'pebble in the pond' is a small, passionate interdisciplinary team of Champions.



Who could be the passionate Champions in your organization?

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Wrap-Up

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Everyone in this room is a leader.
Pick a new coaching action you can do the first day you return to work.

- Model **getting low** for every interaction – instead of talking from above.
- Model a **gentle, easy walk** – instead of a rushed task walk.
- Coach one team member to **establish eye contact before touch**.
- **Name and celebrate** the specific skill you see a team member using.
- Ask evening staff what **'genuine connection moments'** worked for Mr. H last night.
- Pull together a quick **behavior-detective huddle** (10-15 minutes max) to explore what a person is communicating.
- Consider how to **eliminate** the phrase "inappropriate behavior" from team language and replace it with "communication."

• _____
• _____
• _____



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What we do matters.

We are leading from the hardest spot — between the people who need us and the rules, systems, and budgets we don't always control.

But we keep showing up with heart.
We genuinely connect.
We joyfully serve.
We help our teams succeed in tough situations.
We give families moments that matter.
We help people feel like themselves again.

Leadership isn't about having all the influence.
It's about using the influence we *do* have to help someone feel connected, understood — and loved.

Thank you for doing this work.
Every shift. Every day. Every person.



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Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C., is a nationally recognized dementia communication coach, gerontologist, and the founder of Gemini Consulting. For more than 25 years, Erin has partnered with assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing teams across the country, helping them build practical and sustainable systems for dementia communication coaching and behavioral detective work that reduce frustration and prevent behavioral symptoms. Erin's hands-on coaching model has been linked to measurable reductions in off-label antipsychotic use, behavioral incidents, and staff injuries, while also improving family and team member satisfaction. Her work — often extending to individuals with psychiatric diagnoses and other cognitive differences — has been grant-funded, award-winning, and implemented across a wide range of communities, from large multi-site systems to deeply rural providers. Erin also works with organizations to build robust, interdisciplinary programming systems that provide pleasure, purpose, and peace to people living with dementia. Her real-world approaches to coaching and system-building have been described as the 'missing link' to culture transformation in aging services.

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Contact Info

Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.
Founder & Leach Coach


Gemini Consulting, Inc.

Cold Spring, MN
www.Gemini-Consulting.org
612-749-1220 • geminic@rconnect.com



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