



SENIOR *Living*
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SHAPE THE FUTURE OF SENIOR LIVING LEADERSHIP

From Friction to Foundation:

Turning Difficult Conversations into Lasting Relationships

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The Reality Check

Across your portfolio, how many difficult conversations happen every day?

WHO

do most
challenging
conversations
involve?

HOW

often do
challenging
conversations
occur?

WHAT

is the topic
of most
challenging
conversations?

The Organizational Reality



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What We're Hearing From the Field

WHO do difficult conversations involve?

48% Residents / Family Members

30% Someone They Supervise

16% Co-Worker (s)

6% Their Supervisor

VOLUME

How often do difficult conversations occur in one week?

13% 1 or less

44% 2-3

32% 4-8

11% 9+

THE STAKES

WHAT is the topic of the difficult conversations?

53% Staff Related Concerns

33% Family / Resident Expectations

7% Delivering difficult information

6% Feeling unheard or not valued

1% Other

THE GAP

The Business Case

This isn't soft skills—it's strategic capability.

Retention

Team members who feel equipped to handle hard situations stay longer. Those who dread every family interaction burn out.

Reputation

One poorly handled conversation becomes a Google review that costs you move-ins.

Occupancy

Families who feel heard stay. Families who feel dismissed leave—and tell others.

Culture

How your teams handle conflict defines whether you have a culture of avoidance or connection.

The Culture Difference

Culture of Avoidance

- X Problems get escalated instead of resolved
- X Team members dread family interactions
- X Small issues become big crises
- X High turnover, especially in key roles
- X Complaints drive your day

Culture of Connection

- ✓ Difficult conversations are opportunities
- ✓ Teams feel confident and supported
- ✓ Issues addressed early and well
- ✓ Staff retention improves
- ✓ Critics become champions

The Foundation: People Before Problem

“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

— George Bernard Shaw

A Leadership Philosophy

The TURN Method

The Framework



TUNE IN

Read the person, not just the problem



UNDERSTAND

Seek to understand before being understood



REDIRECT

Guide toward solutions without dismissing feelings



NURTURE

Turn resolution into lasting partnership

The Listening Foundation

Most conversations go wrong because we start talking before we've truly listened.



TUNE IN

Teach Your Teams to Read:

- What's their communication style?
- What's their emotional state?
- What's really driving this?

Four Styles:

Direct, Influencer, Stability, Compliant



UNDERSTAND FIRST

The Power Questions:

- "Tell me more about that..."
- "Help me understand..."
- "What would a good outcome look like?"

*The Iceberg: Surface complaints often mask deeper concerns—
fear, grief, loss of control*



Redirect With Purpose

Where most untrained team members fail— where training makes the biggest difference.

The Three-Part Redirect:

1 Acknowledge Without Agreeing *"I can see why that would be frustrating..."*

2 Find Common Ground *"We both want what works best for your mother..."*

3 Bridge to Solutions *"Here's what I can do / Here's what we're going to do..."*

What This Replaces:

"Let me explain..." (excuse) • "Actually, our policy..." (dismissive) •
"I understand, but..." (the 'but' erases everything)



Nurture the Relationship

Most teams stop at resolution. The best teams turn critics into champions.



Follow Up:

Check in within 24-48 hours, confirming that the issue has been resolved, or if not, your next steps.



Document the Resolution:

Not just the complaint—the relationship repair and what worked



Look for Champions:

Families who felt heard become your best referral sources



The Ultimate Win: A complainer who becomes a champion—
a referral source, positive review, family council leader – the foundation of your business!

In Action

Scenario: Family member is upset that mom fell and no one called immediately

T

Read that she's scared, not just angry. She's a Director—wants facts and action.

U

"Help me understand what worries you most..."

Discovers she lives 3 hours away and feels helpless.

R

"I completely understand—if it were my mother, I'd want to know immediately too. We both want her safe. Here's what we're putting in place..."

N

Follow-up call the next day. Weekly proactive updates.

Six months later, recommending the community to friends.

Implementation

Building It Into Your Organization

The Toolkit to Take Back

HIRE
for It

TRAIN
for It

COACH
for It

MEASURE
It

Four Implementation Levers

1 HIRE for It

Interview questions that reveal how candidates handle conflict

2 TRAIN for It

Onboarding + ongoing development using the TURN framework

3 COACH for It

ED conversations that include "How are you developing your team in this?"

4 MEASURE It

Track complaint-to-resolution stories, not just satisfaction scores

Training Your Teams

Your EDs are the multipliers. Equip them to cascade this.

The ED Training Approach:

- Model It:** Handle conversations where team can observe
- Practice It:** Regular role-play in team meetings
- Debrief It:** After real situations—what worked?
- Celebrate It:** Recognize critics-to-champions wins

Simple Training Tools

- TURN Method pocket cards/posters
- Monthly scenario discussion (10 min at team meetings)
- "Champion Stories" sharing—when complaints became advocates

Creating Permission and Safety

Teams won't try new approaches if they fear consequences.



Permission to Pause

"Take the time to really listen, even when you're busy."



Permission to Try

"It's okay if it doesn't go perfectly. We're learning together."



Permission to Escalate

"I'm here when conversations go beyond your comfort zone."



Permission to Follow Up

"Checking on families is part of your job, not an extra."

Evaluating Outcomes

How Do We Know It's Working?

People

Staff Retention
Rates

Team Confidence
Scores

Escalation Rate
Reduction

ED Development

Quality

Resident
Satisfaction

Family Satisfaction

Critics-to-
Champions Stories

Complaint
Resolution

Operational Excellence

Complaint-to-
Resolution Time

Repeat Complaint
Rates

Proactive
Communication

Time Spent on
Escalated Issues

Financial

Turnover &
Recruitment Cost
Avoidance

Occupancy Stability

Reputation & Review
Scores

Litigation Risk
Reduction

Key Takeaways

What's next?

- ★ **People Before Problem** — a leadership philosophy, not just a technique
- ★ **The TURN Method** (Tune In → Understand → Redirect → Nurture)
- simple enough to train at all levels
- ★ **EDs are the Multipliers** - equip them to cascade this capability
- ★ **Systems and permission** matter more than one-time training
- ★ **Measure transformation:** Critics to Champions is the ultimate metric

Key Takeaways

30-Day Challenge:

Introduce the TURN Method to your ED team.

Start with one scenario discussion at your next leadership meeting.

Simple Start:

- 1 Share a "difficult conversation" scenario**
- 2 Walk through TURN together**
- 3 Ask: "How can we make this the norm in our communities?"**
- 4 Commit to one system change that supports it**

Peer Discussion

1

What's working in your organization to equip teams for difficult conversations? What's not?

1

How do you currently measure whether your teams are building relationships through conflict?

1

What's one barrier to implementing this at scale? What might help?

1

Think of an ED who does this naturally—what can we learn from them?

*"Every difficult conversation is your next opportunity to build a champion.
Are your teams equipped to see it that way?"*



KRIS WARD

Thank you!

Dial / Waters Senior Living

Session Resources



KrisWardLeadership.com

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