

Case Study

Episcopal Senior Communities

Client

Episcopal Senior Communities (ESC) operates five premier senior living communities (and four affordable housing communities) in northern California. They currently employ about 900 senior care workers across the organization.

Before launching Silverchair, Directors of Staff Development and Human Resources Managers delivered inservices via all-staff mandatory meetings using videos, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials. Compliance tracking was done via a paper filing system, and each community had a different tracking system. ESC also had a diverse workforce speaking several different languages, so training sessions had to overcome language barriers as well.

Challenges

Traditional Training Didn't Meet Needs of 24/7 Business

Chris Caldwell-Collins, ESC's Manager of Training, Development and Policy, remembers the difficulty of getting employees to attend training while working various shifts. Traditional training sessions were a "hit or miss program," she says. "We would miss core groups of employees: those working evening shifts and those who couldn't leave the floor while training was in session."

Employees were provided catch-up training; however, "Fifty percent of our employees were still missing some of their training," Chris says. "There are

CHALLENGES

- The timing of training sessions wasn't convenient for a 24/7 business
- For many employees, English was a second language, leading to language barriers when training
- There was a major lack of computer skills and some fear of computers; trying to improve training with technology could be difficult

so many ways an employee can miss an inservice; we couldn't be 100% successful like we wanted to be."

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Chris Caldwell-Collins, ESC's Manager of Training, Development and Policy

Language Barriers Hindered Understanding/Communication

ESC's diverse workforce also led to language barriers when training. According to Chris, "We had as many as 17 different languages being spoken among our employees, and many employees used coworkers who were more comfortable with English to communicate." ESC has an on-site English as a Second Language (ESL) program, but they hadn't integrated the program with their training.

With these communication issues, there was no guarantee that employees truly understood the training they received. Employees who were less comfortable with English also became flustered or nervous during survey if they were questioned. "The lack of ability to communicate or understand set off alarms for us," says Chris. "Employees need to understand what they are responsible for—videos weren't doing [the job]; employees were just going through the motions."

Lack of Computer Skills

Chris was also concerned about a lack of computer skills (and some fear of computers) among ESC's employees. "We had people who had been CNAs for years, never used a computer, feeling intimidated," says Chris. Her department knew that if they were going to improve their training, they would need to implement a system for getting employees comfortable with using computers.

Results

Anytime Availability Improves Compliance

Bringing their training online has helped ESC adapt to its 24/7 business model; employees can train during their shift when it is convenient for them. Chris no longer has to track down employees who missed inservices. With online tracking, each employee is "acutely aware of their training requirements," Chris says. Tracking is also more consistent among the

communities now that everything is online in one system. “We’re getting better at increasing our compliance rate and there’s more ownership of inservices at the community level, which is so important.”

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Chris Caldwell-Collins, ESC’s Manager of Training, Development and Policy

Compliance Rates

2007	2008*	2009 (to date)
55%	72%	82%

**first year with Silverchair*

Overcoming Language Barriers

For online learning to be successful at ESC, Chris knew that everyone had to understand the courses. Chris expanded ESC’s buddy system—where coworkers who speak the same language partner up to better communicate with others—to include the new training system. “I held many small introductory sessions with employees who spoke the same language, to evaluate who was strong in English and who needed more help,” she elaborates. “Those who were better English speakers/readers partnered up with those who needed more help and [the pairs] train on Silverchair together.” This hybrid approach “is better than passively watching a video they wouldn’t usually understand,” adds Chris.

Chris also worked with the on-site ESL program to review courses to see if there may be difficulty understanding the lesson; issues could be addressed immediately to ensure that every employee understood the material.

Chris has seen great results using this system: “One of our most language-challenged departments, housekeeping, now out-performs everyone!” she says. Employees also feel more confident now that they better understand their training: “They’re really learning something. Employees come away with more detailed knowledge and they’re excited for the next topic.”

A Boost in Computer Skills and Confidence

Chris also knew she had to familiarize employees with computers without intimidating them.

Training kiosks were set up in each community so employees would have a designated area for training. Chris went to each community to give one-on-one and small group introductory sessions for employees: “I wanted to show everyone how the system works and what to expect.” She performed computer skills assessments, similar to the language skills assessments, to determine level of comfort with computers and addressed challenges.

At first, several employees were worried they wouldn’t have time to fit a new training system into their day; others weren’t enthused about having to learn a new way of training. However, Chris’s thoughtful approach to introducing the system paid off. “At first, some of our nurses were apprehensive; now they love it,” she says. “Many employees wanted their entire year of courses assigned all at once.”

Employees who were afraid of computers are embracing the system: “I had one employee who was convinced she couldn’t do it. I visited her a year after launching Silverchair and now she is a wizard at using the system and is a language buddy for other employees.”


Online learning was also an easy way to get employees familiar with technology so they can be ready for future advances: “Silverchair is positioning us to adapt to the tech changes that are coming in our industry.”

Conclusion

Episcopal Senior Communities needed a more streamlined way to train their workforce in a 24/7 business model. They also needed a program that could be easily understood by those with language challenges and who were unfamiliar with computers.

By carefully planning the introduction of online learning, and implementing an innovative plan to help employees for whom English was a second language, ESC was able to implement a consistent online training program across the organization. Chris knows that her employees have not only improved their learning, they’ve grown and become better equipped to perform at their highest level.

“Silverchair has added a new level of confidence and is a huge boost to their professional development, but also to how they feel about themselves. It’s an amazing thing to see.”



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