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Watercrest Senior Living's First COO Focuses on Leadership Development

April 23, 2017 by [Alana Stramowski](#)

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The buzzword “company culture” is not new to the senior living industry, but Watercrest Senior Living is renewing its investment in the concept with its first-ever chief operating officer.

Watercrest, which owns and operates three assisted living and memory care communities in Florida and also offers development and project management services, prides itself on a strong culture, but its newest addition to the c-suite is making employee development a top priority.

“Culture is not just a buzzword for us,” COO Michele Thompson told Senior Housing News. “For us, company culture depends a lot on how we treat each other.”

Thompson became COO of the Vero Beach, Florida-based company in December 2016, but is not new to the senior housing industry.

“I have been working in senior living since graduating college,” explained Thompson. “First I worked with brain injury and stroke patients then I started to have a dementia focus.”

As a national certified dementia practitioner, Thompson helped manage an Alzheimer’s community and found her niche of memory care. She spent time as an executive director at Brookdale Senior Living (NYSE: BKD) as well as at Harbor Retirement Associates.

Following her time at Brookdale, Thompson became the national dementia trainer at Watercrest and helped develop the community’s memory care neighborhoods and programming. Following that, she was moved up to vice president of operations, then to her current position.

Building on Watercrest’s Culture

Collaboration and feedback are two huge aspects that Thompson plans to boost to continue to strengthen Watercrest’s culture and ultimately continue to support its residents.

“In addition to staying current on new memory care trends, feedback and collaboration is vital,” she said. “We will be talking to residents, families and other associates about what they are seeing to align everything, so our initiatives stay true and consistent.”

One initiative in particular that Thompson is spearheading is Watercrest’s leadership platform focused around the company’s four P’s: purpose, passion, platform and potential.

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“Right now we are hosting leadership meetings to continue to invest in the talents of everyone at the company,” she explained. “We will be doing platform training quarterly for executive directors through executive chefs and resident directors.”

The training is meant to help certain staff members become “trusted advisors” to employees within the community. The trainings will include a number of clear deliverables—tools associates utilize to enrich the quality of life for residents—that leaders in the various departments can take back and implement right away.

A trusted advisor, who generally starts out as a department manager, guides Watercrest families and residents, as well as develops relationships built on trust. Trusted advisors also understand the bigger picture of Watercrest and offer feedback based on professional expertise and knowledge, Thompson explained.

The plan is to expand the quarterly trainings to include direct line associates within the next year.

“If you’re expecting associates to know certain things, you need to give them deliverables in training,” she said. “It’s about understanding the importance of ongoing training and make sure associates as well as residents are appreciated.”

Written by [Alana Stramowski](#)

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