

chapter 4

The Essential Elements of the Household Model

"Home is not where you live, but where they understand you."

-Christian Morganstern

The fragrance of warm muffins and hot coffee drew me to the door of Ptacek House, one of six newly established healthcare households within the community of Meadowlark Hills. I rang the doorbell and Susan, a household employee, answered the door and welcomed me in. I saw a warmly furnished living room and an adjacent kitchen and dining room; all appointed like any other home in America. The residents, an average of sixteen per household, had moved in less than two weeks before.

The signs of home were already visible amid what previously had been public corridors, cramped bedrooms and large public gathering rooms. The institutional odor was gone. My stomach growled in response to the smells of breakfast floating from the household kitchen that made me want to see "what's cooking." The previous set of monotonous, unit style chairs, tables and other office-like trappings had gone to the auction block to make way for more cozy furnishings. Each household had rearranged its initial set of new furniture to reflect the emerging lifestyle patterns of the people who lived there.

People were visiting with one another and, in stark contrast to the dismal scene of slumping, slumbering elders once parked at the now-dismantled nurses' station, a more inspiring dance of life unfolded. My heart warmed with hope. The transformation was like a new marriage for all of us...the intense excitement, depth of emotion and commitment of love coupled with fears of inadequacy and the uncertainty of the "yet to be."

But all the blossoming signs of home faded into the background when my eyes found Lee Chung Hi, the lady who screams. She had abandoned her Geri-chair and was sitting comfortably at the dining table, just as my wife had sat at our kitchen table when I left home for work that morning. It was the first time I had seen Lee Chung Hi when she wasn't screaming.

She was smiling. Her eyes locked with mine, conveying a warmth of wellbeing that sent me into a suspended sense of time and place. All I could see was her warm smile and radiating eyes of peace, and I felt myself walking toward her as if in slow motion.

I stopped near her table. With her hands at her side, she bowed her head slowly forward and then back up, all the while continuing her smile. This gesture of greeting and respect, practiced in her culture yet universally understood, enveloped my whole being. I found myself returning the gesture in full communion. I was able to return eye contact and nod in mutual affirmation before emotion overtook me.

The sum of our enormous effort to overcome a broken system – the months and months of striving in a community-wide commitment born of a belief there *must* be something better – was distilled through Lee Chung Hi's graceful and simple bow. It shook me to the core.

Her years of screaming, contrasted with the moment we had just shared, represented to me everything we must leave behind and everything we must achieve. The glaring reality was she hadn't screamed for years because she was sick, but because we were.

In screaming, Lee Chung Hi had used her only tool for hanging on to herself rather than giving in to vacant slumping. She was a fighter—a screaming indictment of the traditional nursing home system and proof in the pudding that we *can* overcome; that we have a moral imperative to do so.

Like so many other milestones along Meadowlark Hills' difficult road to the Household Model, Lee Chung Hi's bow was a validation and gift of encouragement. It was as if she had said, "This is right. Keep going!"

Clouds of doubt hovered over each of us at some point along our journey. But that moment with Lee Chung Hi brought me personal resolve and commitment to keep moving forward. I will never forget it.

Home: A Sanctuary Where Grace Abounds

If life was just about the passing of time, we might not mind so much standing in line or sitting in waiting rooms, traffic jams, airports and the DMV. Do you know anyone who looks forward to these minutes (that seem like hours) surrounded by strangers and subject to someone else's timetable? Probably not. Instead, we seek to fill our lives with enriching, sensual and joyful experiences - habitual or new, planned or spontaneous. It's no different for frail elders.

Creating home as our sanctuary and the place that fosters graceful living happens naturally and subtly over time. We may not think of the work or decisions that occur everyday to sustain our home, but there is no doubt it is we who direct its development. Being in charge of our own home brings meaning and priceless quality to our life and enables our individual potential to flourish.

Because home is such a *basic* necessity, we take it for granted. Consequently we don't adequately consider all the essential elements of the homes we help create for frail elders. There is no sanctuary or graceful living in the traditional nursing home model created by "us" for "them."

The elders in households must be in the driver's seat as they create their own home. We have a responsibility to be their partners in this pursuit.

The regimens of the traditional nursing home model tightly control the possibilities in daily life. The biggest difference between home and institutional living is that home allows endless ways for a day to play out - a myriad of little things to add spice to life. Some we choose, others fall at our feet. There is a unique anticipation of "what's next." The organic rituals of our days grow from the many variables that cross our paths, whether in joy or sorrow. The Household Model welcomes these variables. Our seeking opens the window to the gift of grace.

Values and Beliefs Shape Essential Elements of the Household Model

The Household Model requires self-change, transformative leadership, redesign of the organization and reconstruction of the physical environment to produce true home. Values and beliefs are the threads that weave these together to create the fabric of life within the home.

Just as we choose values and beliefs to guide our own lives, so, too, must we choose them to lead our organizations. We err deeply by organizing ourselves around business principles. We think (and many business schools teach) that enterprises are primarily driven by numbers, policies and efficient practices. These are important for any business, but they cannot be the drivers. Rather, purpose, values, principles and beliefs must drive the organization. They must collectively lay the foundation for any enterprise that desires to stand tall in its field.

For example, putting customers in the driver's seat and ensuring satisfaction in their experience is a fundamental value. Operating systems, while important, are merely tools for carrying out the purpose for the company's existence. They cannot stand on their own unless driven by beliefs.

Absence of stated beliefs and values are by default statements of beliefs and values. Many companies operate without them. Erroneously, they are associated with not-for-profit entities. A growing number of very successful for-profit companies that are viewed warmly by the marketplace are driven by clearly stated and consistently lived values and beliefs.

The culture of business teaches us, perhaps unintentionally, that the "soft" words characteristic of values are suspect. They make us uncomfortable in business settings. We like hard words like "budget," "policy," "forecast" and "schedule." Those

words make us feel efficient, responsible and effective. We may *feel* that way, but it is not necessarily true.

Values and beliefs are the soul of the organization. An organization that serves people in residence 24 hours a day must especially be filled with soul in all that it is and does.

Consequently, it should be no surprise that the Household Model is driven by values and beliefs. They are the essential elements in the household's design and purpose. The entire organization, its people and physical design must be driven by these "Essential Elements." They are the marrow within the bones of it all. While they are not religious statements, they must be religiously lived. The words may sound soft, but when lived out they give the strength of steel to the Household Model.

Household Model Framework

The framework of the traditional nursing home model could be described as follows:

Staff, systems, policy and regulation driven service to frail elders in residence, who must subjugate themselves to fit within the framework of highly regimented and scheduled services that are delivered through departmental silos of top-down management within a public institutional setting.

The framework of the Household Model could be described as:

Small groups of people sharing house and home while directing their own daily lives through a responsive, highly valued and decentralized self-led service team that is supported by values-driven, resource-bearing leadership philosophies, practices, policies and systems.

The Essential Elements

The Essential Elements are the foundation of the Household Model. They are the guide and inspiration of the journey. The goal is for elders to one day take these principles for granted just as we take for granted the comfort of walking through our own front door.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

1. The household is each resident's home and sanctuary.
2. The people who live here direct their own lives, individually and collectively.
3. The boundaries of the person and his/her home are clear and respected as a matter of course.
4. Grace, a shared sense of what is sacred about the house and its people, is deeply valued, consciously created and preserved. Ritual, spontaneity, friendship, spirituality, celebration, recreation, choice, interdependence, art and humor are all manifestations of a culture of grace.
5. The people who live here are loved and served by a responsive, highly valued, decentralized, self-led service team that has responsibility and authority.
6. Leadership is a characteristic, not a position. Leaders support and are supported by values-driven, resource bearing principles and practices as a way for each person to actualize his or her full potential.
7. All systems, including treatments, exist to support and serve the person, within the context of his or her life pursuits.
8. We build strong community with one another, our family, our neighbors and our town. Each household is part of a neighborhood of houses, dedicated to continuous learning.

9. The physical building and all its amenities are designed to be a true home. Institutional creep in design and culture is treated as a wolf at the door.

The Essential Elements must be our aspiration. Living up to them requires deep and profound change by all of us in how we think, plan and act in regard to every aspect of long-term care. The first step of the journey begins within your own heart and with your personal understanding of change.