



Hiring for Heart

By Todd A. Shetter, COO of ActivCare Living, Inc.

Regardless if you are hiring a private duty caregiver to assist the family with a loved one at home or hiring a full staff of caregivers for a newly constructed Memory Care community, when caring for those with memory loss, there is nothing more important than 'heart.'

Caring for those with dementia and related memory loss issues is hard work and takes special skills and talents that are not taught in a classroom or learned from a book. Compassion, kindness and positive attitudes are the most important characteristic to our hiring managers when we seek new associates.

The technical attributes of quality memory care can be taught. ActivCare has developed an Alzheimer's Academy with more than twelve modules that address everything from aggressive behavior to re-directing repetitive questions. We have experienced better outcomes by teaching compassionate individuals about dementia-care techniques rather than re-training certified nursing aides who have skills but lack empathy.

Caregivers who are not prepared, trained and in the right mindset will not succeed and will certainly not enjoy their job. If we provide comprehensive training correctly and consistently, our best caregivers will also be the most confident and happiest employees. They will know their job, feel confident in their abilities and understand what to expect and how to react to the issues they face every day as a dementia caregiver.

The frustration experienced by many family caregivers at home is rooted in the ever changing nature of the disease progression and the effect on their loved one's behavior, many times within the same day. If a trained and prepared caregiver knows that behavior may begin to change as the sun goes down, known as Sundowners, then they will be prepared when agitation and wandering ramps up every day at 4 pm.

Caring for a senior who has lost judgment, memory and inhibitions takes special training, but more importantly a special individual who really cares. Unfortunately, there are no fail-safe tests to gauge or measure 'heart'.

Hiring for heart takes practice. In ActivCare's nearly 30 years of memory care, we have learned some tricks over the years and are happy to share.

Getting to Know You. During an interview, we want to know what caregivers are passionate about, how they spend their time off and what are their hobbies. Compassion and passion are difficult to fake. Ask a prospective caregiver questions about their passions and see how they light up, how they smile and what their enthusiasm looks like when talking about things they truly love.

Getting to Know About You. When asked about caregiving, taking on the tough job of caring for those with memory loss, see that compassion and measure it against the earlier discussion.

In your search, if you don't believe that potential caregivers want the job because they are genuinely caring individuals and have a 'heart' for it, they are not the right person. There are many jobs available where they can make more money and be better suited if they are not committed with their heart.

About ActivCare

For more than 30 years, ActivCare has led the industry in providing personalized memory care and enhancing life for its residents. ActivCare's purpose-built assisted living communities offer engaging activity programs, experienced staff, and compassionate care to meet the unique needs of those with Alzheimer's or related dementia. Our specialized communities serve Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties in Southern California. Our portfolio continues to grow, and new locations are slated to open throughout the region. For more information about ActivCare Living and its communities, please visit activcareliving.com or call (888) MEM-LOSS.