



Leadership doesn't require perfection. The perfect plan for a novel virus doesn't exist.

RiverWoods Staff Member

Every now and then the world tries to teach you a lesson. Smart people, and smart organizations, learn the lesson. For a few years now the RiverWoods Group family of communities has been in the process of *really* becoming a system... a true "family" of communities. Sometimes that is hard to do in the beginning. We have different ideas and backgrounds. We have different history and different areas of expertise. And we often have different perspectives. And so the evolution, from "individual communities" to a real family is hard, and the progress can be jagged, but we have learned that we are more alike than we are different.

For the past several months, as we have worked through the COVID-19 impacts, we have learned many things. I asked our team members what they were learning and here are some things they said:

1. That this time period has provided them with the most meaningful work in their lives.
2. That relationships matter, more than anything else in the world. We *need* one another.
3. That perspective and resilience are the things you fall back on when things are really hard.
4. That patience and trust are necessary factors when things feel less in your control.
5. That when we let "common goals and common good" supersede individual desires we are better in the end.
6. That Leadership doesn't require perfection. The perfect plan for a novel virus doesn't exist; and honestly the perfect plan probably doesn't exist for any issue. Leading is about knowing where we are headed and then being "directionally correct", so every day we are working to get there.

While the COVID-19 time period has been tough on all of us - our residents, their families, our staff, our leadership team, our Board – it has also taught us important lessons that will make us a better system in the future.

It reminds us of the important work we do, together, staff, residents, and Board included. The meaning in our work pulls us forward when times are tough. It has taught us that change is not generally fun, but it isn't always bad and when things are most scary we need patience and trust to get us through. It has taught us that the concept of unity, of having a common goal, is in fact, "uniting" ... and we make real progress on hard challenges when we are united together.

Finally, it has taught us a lot about leadership. One of my favorite sayings to come out this time has been “who you are in COVID is who you are”. I have seen people rise to a level that was previously unimagined. Residents who made thousands of masks and gowns and literally saved lives with their efforts (and had fun while doing it). Board members who adjusted on the fly to how we would govern so that we could commit our precious time to the most important decisions. Heroes on our nursing and facilities teams who volunteered to work in the toughest situations because, well, because that was where they were needed. And I have seen leaders do the very hard work every day, leading their teams, communicating constantly, evaluating options – even on days when there were no good options to choose. And I am so very proud of the people we work with and the people we work for.

So in 2020 life taught us a few lessons. It taught us that we need one another, that we are definitely better together, that working as one will bring us forward, in a new and changing world, and that “family” matters. These are lessons that we are still learning, but we are making progress. Sometimes clean, sometimes jagged, but progress every day. We look forward to 2021, and reflecting on the full array of lessons, but so far so good. What I can tell is that we are learning, and we are better and that is a good thing to be.

Stay healthy my friends!


Justine Vogel
TRWG CEO