



## Communicating the Value of the Activity Program

The activity department manager is responsible for disseminating information about the program to others. The words that you use, and the style of your communication can impact the image that others have of the department. Frequently, activity professionals feel that “others” outside of the department do not place a high value on the work that they do. Phrases like “Your job is easy, you have all the fun.” or “Your job isn’t work,”

Communicating the value of the work we do as activity professionals is an ongoing process and involves several steps.

**First**, we must understand the image that others have of the activity department. To work effectively as a team, it is vital to see things from the perspective of others. It is important to step outside of our role as an activity professional, and examine what others see and hear. As you think about the following questions, remember **you** are **the only** person that sees or knows all the aspects of the program.

### Staff perspective

What do other staff members see? Do they see mostly parties, entertainment, food?

What do other staff members hear? Do they hear the word FUN as you invite?

How would staff define “activities”? Is an activity a large, visible event?

Are activities evaluated on the size, the bigger the better?

If a resident is not interested in a particular program, is that a negative evaluation of the activity?

Do others understand that “all activities are not for all people”?

Do other staff members *see* the administrative aspects of planning, preparation and documentation?

Do staff members stereotype residents, underestimating their abilities? Do they devalue the capabilities of residents and wonder what they could possibly do in an activity?

### Family perspective

What do families see when they visit? What time of day is it? Is it a weekend?

Is the calendar of activities perceived as the total program by families? Is the program evaluated strictly by the entries on the monthly calendar?

Do the names on the calendar give a clear understanding of the goals of the program?

### Resident Perspective

What does a resident want?

- Meaningful relationships with friends and staff
- Challenging activities that have a purpose
- Interaction with the community
- Opportunities to use past skills and knowledge
- Opportunities for choice and independence

As you see things from another point of view, you can then gain a better understanding of why others do not place a high value on the work of the activity program. In most cases it stems from a lack of education about the program and a lack of awareness of the positive outcomes that are fulfilled for residents. Unless you make a focused effort to communicate the true value, others will see activity professionals only dressed in costumes, wearing hats, and dancing. They will only hear us say “It will be FUN” or “That was FUN.” In other people’s eyes, FUN and work are opposites! We must learn to communicate in different ways.



Some suggestions include:

1. Make a list of words that you would use to describe the activity program. Include words that tell the true story of what you do, words that show the positive outcomes of activities for residents. Practice using these more descriptive terms such as reinforcing identity, promoting worth and self-esteem, increasing autonomy and decision making, connecting to past habits and skills.
2. Design the calendar with names that are dignified. Use names that promote the goal of the activity. Examples such as a “Good Company” program instead of 1 to 1 to show the socialization component of the visit, an “Awakenings” program for lower cognitively functioning residents to promote wakeful interactions with the environment or “Competitive Challenge” to promote physical challenge and exercise through games and sports. **Create “umbrella programs.”**
3. Describe each activity listed on the calendar, include the benefit or value. Put this either on the back of the calendar or posted by the large calendars. Don’t take it for granted that others understand what takes place at the activities.
4. Instead of listing everything as “activities” specify the type of activity. For many people the word “activity” is related to kids, camp or school. For example, list monthly activities as

Events and celebrations	Projects
Classes or study groups	Community service
Clubs	Leisure pursuits and
Organizations or councils	hobbies
Self-help or wellness groups	
5. Highlight the traditions and specialties of your activity program. Create a promotional brochure or slide presentation that shows how your program is unique.
6. Provide a framework (the program schedule/calendar of events) with a **changing focus that promotes flexibility will add meaning to the program.** When promoting the monthly calendar of events, establishing a THEME or FOCUS that is important to the residents will increase interest and motivation. A focus that encompasses the main holiday, season or national themed days or month, will provide a sense of security, purpose, and a meaningful approach. An article that gives an overview of the monthly focus can be included in the newsletter. This technique helps market the program. It encourages a creative approach to a routine framework.
7. Make sure to emphasize all the informal individual and small group activities that take place, not just the big events.
8. When displaying pictures of residents, include a caption that describes the therapeutic value or benefit to the resident. Display mostly individual pictures that capture the feeling and emotion of the activity. Small groups of residents interacting, involved in meaningful projects, or accomplishing a task promote the true value of the program.
9. Offer to begin care plan meetings with a review of the life story of the person.
10. When announcing the schedule of events at stand up or department meetings include the following: The name, goals and expected outcomes, time needed for preparation and planning and include a summary statement such as “For this event to be successful, the following support is needed.....”
11. Communicate resident outcomes with families through newsletters and email connections.