

# How Landis Communities fosters

a consumer-centric culture



**Through thoughtful and intentional efforts, this Pennsylvania-based senior living organization has created a culture that excels at consumer-friendly service and information**

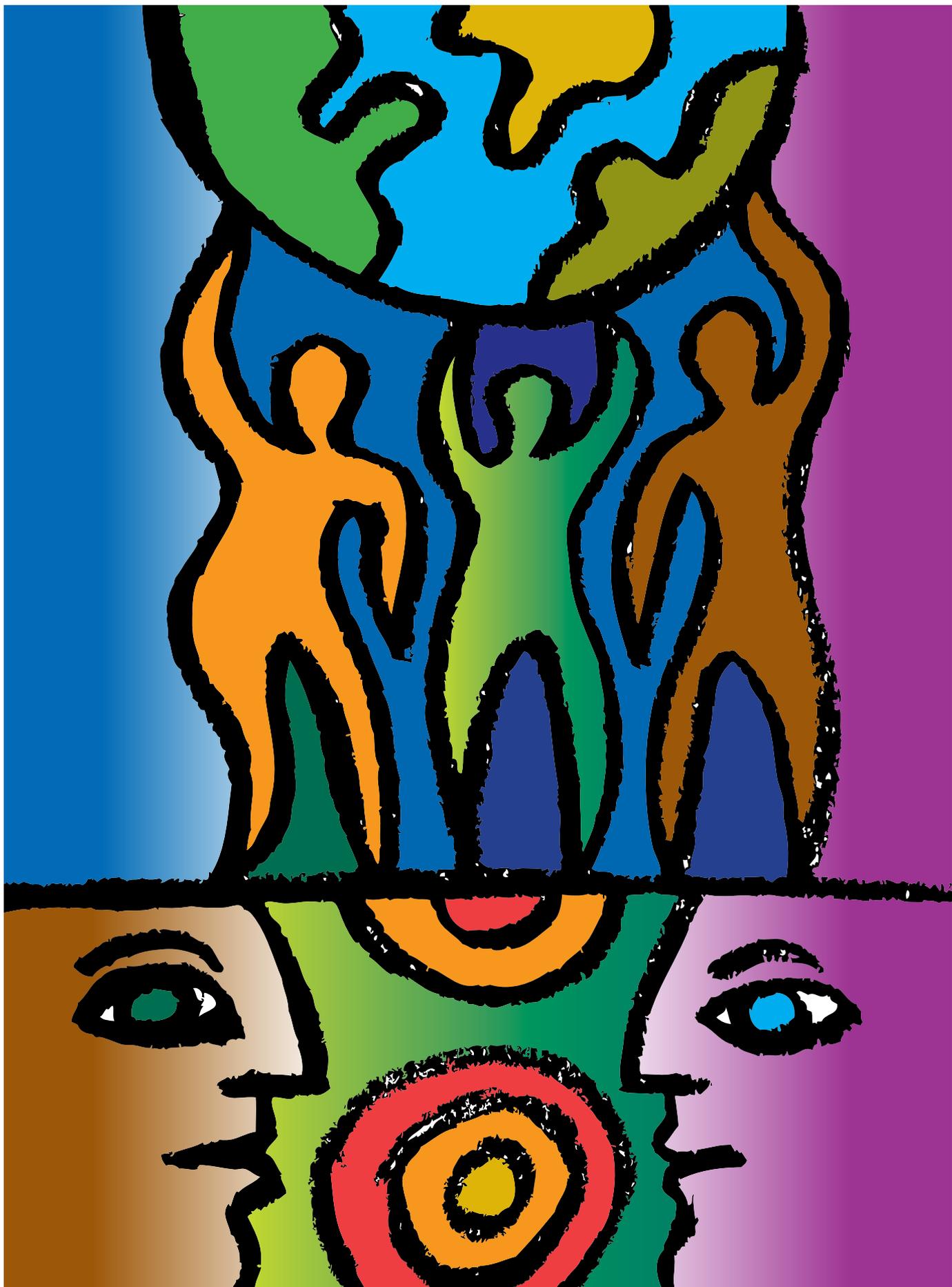
*by Beth Spohn, BBA*

In 2014, Creating Results has been privileged to speak at conferences around the United States, including, most recently, the International Council on Active Aging Conference in Orlando, Florida. As a consulting firm focused on strategic marketing to the mature market, our team has studied Boomers, Generation X and older adults for more than 15

years. We've gained a deep understanding of and insight into the mature consumer in that time. But we've also seen a number of disruptive trends in marketing and aging-related services in recent years.

People today live in a multichannel world. They have a larger range of influences and choices than ever before. So how do active-aging organizations continue to grow and stay relevant, efficient and innovative? Our "Stay, Fly, Shop to Success" presentation at the ICAA Conference shared insights to help organizations avoid missteps and take strong

*Continued on page 38*



# How Landis Communities fosters a consumer-centric culture

Continued from page 36



*Landis Communities' Steeple View Lofts project offers 'loft style rental apartments' for adults ages 55 and over in downtown Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Image courtesy of Creating Results*

steps forward, so they don't just survive but thrive in the coming years.

"Stay, Fly, Shop to Success" highlights some common strengths of global leaders such as Marriott, Southwest and Nordstrom. Why? It helps to find inspiration for success outside your industry.

You may think that there's little a provider of age-related products or services can learn from a hotelier, an airline and a department store. Yet we have found many major points of alignment with the principles that govern ICAA and other industry organizations. In fact, people ask for more information about

one of these points, "consumer-friendly service and information," every time we deliver our presentation. Here's why: "Consumer-friendly" is a critical differentiator with older adults as they look at organizations and the products and services they provide.

So, how do you foster a consumer-centric culture that delivers consumer-friendly service and information that stand out from the crowd? Everyone wants to know.

"Stay, Fly, Shop to Success" also highlights inspiring leaders within the active-aging industry, including Penn-

sylvania's Landis Communities, a senior living organization that emphasizes customer-friendly service practices and information. Landis excels at fostering a consumer-centric culture. How? According to Larry Guengerich, director of communications and church relations, the short answer is: It's not easy. Rather it's done carefully, with thoughtfulness and intention.

In this article, we'll try to figure out Landis's "secret sauce." Guengerich says it starts with their company's mission statement and defined values. Then they mix in recruitment, leadership and marketing. And it's cooked through with a strong multichannel, multiaudience communications strategy. Guengerich's insights and examples will guide us as we look at actionable tips and questions to support a culture of team creativity and customer-friendly service and information.

## **THE STARTING POINT: MISSION, VISION AND VALUES**

Mission, vision and values are fundamental to an organization's culture. In promoting a culture of consumer-friendly service, step one involves building that foundation in two ways:

- Craft a mission statement that is qualitative and actionable.
- Identify and clearly articulate your vision and values.

## **Beyond buzzwords**

From a story Guengerich shared about how the Landis mission evolved, we learn that it's critical for a mission statement to resonate with all stakeholders and to be broad enough to guide an organization for several years to come. Landis Communities' mission and vision aren't just a bunch of buzzwords. Rather, they formalize what was already in people's hearts and help focus the organization to achieve their mission:

*Continued on page 40*

# How Landis Communities fosters a consumer-centric culture

Continued from page 38

*“Following God’s call to creatively serve the diverse needs and interests of older adults by developing opportunities and collaborative relationships.”<sup>1</sup>*

Landis’s quest is “Enriching Lives.” The organization’s website expands on their vision as follows:

*“Landis Communities ... remains committed to the vision present at its beginning while preparing for growth and change during the years to come. We are committed to keeping retirement living strong and vital. To providing a number of Affordable Living options, including new models of age 55+ active adult living in the city of Lancaster and elsewhere. To provide services at home—supporting aging in place, and to develop creative partnerships in support of all of these areas.”<sup>2</sup>*

As in the mission statement, this paragraph is full of consumer-centered language, with references to creativity, service and relationships. The vision also recognizes that active adults are evolving. By committing to “keeping retirement living strong and vital,” Landis is committing to staying in tune with what future generations will want and need.

## **The value of listening**

As part of a Landis strategic plan review, they conducted a “listening tour” with key stakeholders including residents, families, employees and board members, and the larger Lancaster community. What did they hear? The same words from many stakeholders—and those words became the core values that guide Landis’s efforts: Joy, Compassion, Integrity, Stewardship and Community.

The values were already there. Now, with those values clearly articulated, the Landis team could set about intentionally to live them. And live them they

## *Foster a consumer-centric culture among team members to deliver customer-friendly service and information that stands out to mature consumers*

have. The organization has encouraged team creativity in interpreting these “Guiding Values,” and team members have responded by delivering well-beyond-standard service. (One team member creatively gave the values a true life, planting a values tree.)

### *Your turn*

- If you or your board of directors went on a “listening tour,” what would stakeholders say your organization’s values were? Would you consistently hear the same words?
- If you have done a “listening tour,” were you surprised by what you heard?

### **WHAT IT MEANS TO BE VALUES-DRIVEN**

Landis Communities uncovered their values as they set out strategically to build an organization that excels in customer-friendly service and information. Larry Guengerich says those values drive everything the organization does.

### **Putting values into practice**

In fostering their organizational culture, Landis puts their guiding values into practice with care. Areas that are key to this culture include leadership, marketing and recruitment.

### *Values-based leadership*

It is easy to attribute an organization’s success to a single charismatic leader. But Guengerich says that what makes Landis successful is that it takes a *team*. “The entire leadership team (director level and up) uses the principles of ‘Values Based Leadership,’” he reveals.

Landis Communities is one of the 17 members of the Lancaster-based Anabaptist Providers Group (APG), which trains employees and helps instill their values within all aspects of leadership development. Landis also makes attending and participating at conferences a priority. Being active in APG, LeadingAge and other organizations brings value to the Landis organization as well.

### *Marketing*

Facebook and other social media sites are strategic marketing channels for senior living organizations when they communicate their values successfully. Landis Homes, an affiliate of Landis Communities, offers a master-class in values-driven communications on its official Facebook page. The feed features posts that tell stories of Compassion and Community. Humor makes even routine news fun, and reflects the core value of Joy.

There is also a great share about a Landis stream restoration project on YouTube. Posted by LandStudies, which provides environmental planning and restoration services for the project, this video features Guengerich talking about the project and Landis’s guiding value of Stewardship. (Check out “Resources” on page 43 for the Facebook and YouTube links.)

### *Recruitment*

Before hiring for a new position, the Landis leadership thinks carefully about the type of people they are seeking, and

*Continued on page 42*

# How Landis Communities fosters a consumer-centric culture

Continued from page 40

this is true with *any* person they hire—a high school intern to the chief financial officer. The organization wants to find people that exhibit joy in their work as well as Landis’s other values. As Guengerich notes, “You can train someone to have skills to perform a job, but it is much more difficult to teach someone values.”

Landis’s human resources team—the “value finders”—are responsible for identifying new employees that fit this bill. All candidates receive a copy of the organization’s mission and vision statements at their interview. They are asked to pick one of the values that they feel their closest family and friends would say they emulate, and describe a time they exhibited that value.

After team members are hired, Landis celebrates the small victories with ice cream, free meals, coupons, public recognition of time in service, and more.

## Values-driven partnerships

One of Landis’s latest projects, Steeple View Lofts, shows how forming unique partnerships creates innovative and customer-friendly offerings. As many senior living organizations know, not everyone can (or wants) to move to a traditional continuing care retirement community in the suburbs. The Landis solution was to develop an apartment community with amenities within downtown Lancaster. Steeple View Lofts has retail space, an art gallery, and ample common space to help create a greater sense of community among residents.

Landis created this urban housing thanks to a partnership. A land planning developer working with the organization on another project happened to meet a developer interested in purchasing an old tobacco warehouse. Because Landis’s vision was so clear, the developer felt compelled to make an introduction to Larry Zook, CEO of Landis Communities—and Steeple View was born.

## Tips for values-driven partnerships

Guengerich shares three tips for creating values-driven partnerships:

- Be intentional. Look for partners that can help your organization answer the “Where are we headed?” question.
- Make creating partnerships a strategic goal. That gives your team the “right and the duty” to explore and form them.
- Meet with *lots* of groups/people, but set some parameters. You never know how or when the planting of a partnership seed will grow into a value tree.

He adds: “Take a meeting with someone even if you don’t have a clear idea of what the end result will be, but stay within a couple of hours’ drive for in-person meetings.”

## Your turn

- Do you share your organization’s mission, vision and values with your partners?
- If you do, what kind of amplification have you seen from doing that?

## COMMUNICATING THE LANDIS WAY

As the Creating Results team spoke to conferences this year, sharing the best practices of global leaders like Southwest and Nordstrom, we heard a lot of reasons why senior living communities don’t have consumer-friendly information. For example:

- “We can’t be creative—senior living is such a highly regulated industry.”
- “Our communications are so challenging. We have to speak to both adult kids *and* seniors.”

We pointed out that airlines are indeed highly regulated businesses, and yet Southwest still manages to be very creative in their operations and marketing. Then we offered the example of Landis Communities. So how does the Landis leadership “allow” team members to be

creative? How do they keep it simple and display such joy within a highly regulated environment?

## Intentional consumer-centered culture

Guengerich sums up the Landis philosophy this way: “You can’t build a culture of trust by force of will—it grows over time. But you can damage it quickly. The leadership team has to talk openly; then you can create space to be joyful and creative. Be intentional. [A consumer-centered culture] is not happenstance.”

Based on Creating Results’ experience, we couldn’t agree more with Guengerich. When repositioning a community or implementing a marketing initiative, an organization ensures the greatest success if they build a common understanding with all community stakeholders—board members to wellness practitioners to nursing assistants, as well as residents and their families.

Landis’s approach makes sure that *everyone* in the organization understands the big picture of how they can each affect the lives of older adults.

## The three Cs

To nurture and support their organizational culture, Landis uses a three Cs strategy: “communicate, communicate, communicate.” Guengerich recommends the following:

- Members of the leadership team should hold “Conversations with the President.” Here’s how:
  - Hold your “conversations” during every shift.
  - Make these meetings paid time and they will be well-received, well-attended and productive dialogues. The objective is to hear ideas for improving the lives of residents and employees by encouraging open, productive dialogues with all employees.

- Understand and respect your multiple audiences. With team members, for example, not everyone is comfortable sharing with “the boss” in an open forum. So set up an email that goes directly to the president. Then read and respond to every message.
- Keep communications clear and consistent:
  - Compile answers into a frequently asked questions (FAQs) document.
  - Distribute FAQs through multiple channels to all audiences (with tweaks as needed)—newsletter, website, community boards, and more.
- Multiple-channel communications are important during major projects as they encourage open dialogue, create a sense of community and put people at ease.

*Your turn*

- Does your organization have a great “communicate, communicate, communicate” strategy?

**POSITIONING FOR SUCCESS**

The active-aging industry is filled with caring people and organizations that serve their communities and promote quality of life for older adults. Some have long histories in the field of aging services. Yet older adults are changing in so many ways. They are empowered, demanding and connected—and they are beginning to judge our organizations by the same criteria they use when they choose where to stay, how to fly or when to shop.

Creating Results encourages you to explore new ways to serve people even better. Like Landis Communities, foster a consumer-centric culture among team members to deliver customer-friendly service and information that stands out to mature consumers. It’s not easy, as Larry Guengerich says. But when you create that culture—with care, thought and intention—it will help you avoid missteps and enjoy success with older adults today and in the years to come. 

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*service strategic marketing agency that drives demand for lifestyle-oriented products and services among older consumers. Spohn seeks out opportunities where the Creating Results team can build productive partnerships, apply their mature-marketing expertise and create results for clients. She graduated from James Madison University’s College of Business with a degree in marketing. More information about Creating Results is available at [www.creatingresults.com](http://www.creatingresults.com).*

**Acknowledgement**

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**Resources**

**Internet**

**Creating Results landing page with additional case studies, resources**

[www.creatingresults.com/ICAALeaders](http://www.creatingresults.com/ICAALeaders)

**Landis Communities**

[www.landiscommunities.org](http://www.landiscommunities.org)

**Landis Homes’ Facebook page**

[www.facebook.com/landishomes](http://www.facebook.com/landishomes)

**Multimedia**

**LandStudies’ YouTube channel: Landis Homes Restoration video**

<http://youtu.be/S44V9QtQDQg>

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