

“Winning Strategies”

Leading Age Wisconsin 2014 Spring Conference

Report on Cat Selman’s presentation

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Cat Selman is a dynamic, inspirational speaker who has been in the activity field for thirty-five years. She has worked in many capacities as an Activity Consultant and Director. Some of her subject content is very basic, but an excellent review. As one who has also been in the field a long time I found her presentation informative and very motivating. Sharing her ideas will benefit WRAP members. The following is paraphrased.

Her first focus was how to develop creative skills with an emphasis on leaving your comfort zone to always ask 1-“what if....? And 2-“why not? Creativity requires significant mental resources of energy that needs to be focused. Deliberately disengage from other situations or responsibilities that might drain energy. Single mindedness facilitates creativity. **Don’t limit yourself!** “The only limits in your life are the ones you create with your mind!” **Reward your curiosity** by asking questions, seeing how things “work”, getting more information and seeing if a “different way of doing things” will be successful. **Avoid premature evaluation** by judging an idea at too early a stage in its development. That is like closing a door on an infant who can’t reach the doorknob. New ideas need a chance to wander and grow. **Don’t be afraid to make a mistake!** We are programmed to fear making a mistake, but it is not a reflection of our worth. The more creative you are the more likely you are to make mistakes. Creativity involves stretching the limits of the “known” into “unknown” territory. **Expect the unexpected!** Expectations can shape reality. This is based on a psychological principle called the “self-fulfilling prophesy”. If you expect to confront novelty and potentiality you will more likely run into it! **Break out of established patterns.** Are you a creature of habit going through the same routine each day? If you are settling into a routine so is your mind! Disrupt your life and think in constructive ways. Verify your assumptions. If you make certain assumptions about your programming you will surely be limiting what could be attempted. Such assumptions can be hidden in our thinking. Don’t label or “group” residents, they are all different.

Try brainstorming! This is a tried and true way of creating ideas. No idea is too outlandish to suggest, evaluate and breakdown. **Expand your associations** by getting out of your comfort zone. This can be done through personal growth, social networking, mentoring, exploration of different values, appreciation of different cultures, artistic appreciation and expression. This will expand experience, which expands knowledge. **Look for order in chaos.** Sometimes what appears to be chaos is actually order just waiting to happen. Don’t let disorder scare you. Look at it as a puzzle with the pieces mixed up. **Look for chaos in order.** Sometimes things are too “ho-hum”. Boring! A little variety, a little of the “unexpected” never hurt anyone. If something works, we tend to stick with it and never try any variations. **Utilize thinking stimulants** like silence or solitude, interaction with others, or music. Observe conditions that seem to foster your most creative work--early morning or late night—and try to create then.

Don’t be limited by compartmentalization. Don’t just think outside the box, don’t be caught anywhere NEAR it. Every six months you should re-evaluate your

monthly calendar by looking at who is in your building and do a population survey using as many categories as you want. Look at who can do what. **Avoid premature conclusions and don't limit your possibilities. Get silly every now and then...maybe even more often!** "It's better to be absolutely ridiculous than absolutely boring!"

Humor is a powerful creative stimulus. A playful attitude can open up new avenues of thinking. Creativity should be more like play. **Strengthen your autonomy.** Although creativity can be stimulated by interaction with others, others can also stymie it. Successful creators stand by their ideas even when they cannot be visualized or appreciated. Be independent and don't be afraid of being misunderstood.

What do residents want? They want activities that are not childish, that use their minds like word games, that are "for men" like talking about fishing, that amount to something such as producing something useful for the nursing home, that are related to their previous work, that allow for getting out of the facility or are in the community, that allow for socializing with other residents, staff and people from outside the facility and that are active like exercise. They should engage, not occupy the resident.

Activities should promote self-esteem, pleasure, comfort, education, creativity, success and independence. You can have an activity just for fun! It is important to question the benefits of each group. Some of the needs met through activities include:

- opportunities for movement
- reality assurance
- enhanced self esteem
- independence through empowerment and choice
- stimulation of procedural memory
- improvement or maintenance of joint range of motion and concentration
- improved "alertness" level through focused stimulation
- socialization, sensory stimulation and reminiscence
- opportunities for nurturing, expressing affection, pleasure, self-expression, caring touch & physical contact, to express emotions, for family involvement, to give something to others, for nonverbal communication, relaxation & alleviation of stress, an outlet for restless energy and leadership roles

Conduct a population survey to find out how many activities will be offered specifically for resident who have cognitive impairments, how many large & small group, closed or specialized activities will be offered at the facility. How many events will be held on individual units as opposed to a central location? Do they include resident interests, both past and present? Regarding program guidelines, residents should have opportunities to make choices regarding the types of activities they will attend, the people with whom they will associate and the sizes of the group in which they will participate. Residents would have opportunities to participate in groups of various sizes because such opportunity is typically available in the wider community and because there are individual preferences and needs regarding group size. Small groups subject a person to more scrutiny and greater demands for participation and performance while offering more attention, interaction and group status. Some people may be more comfortable in large groups that offer anonymity, few demands, group spirit and a sense of belonging. A

An activity program should contribute to a desirable 24-hour pattern of sleep, rest and activity for all residents, including those who are "night people" and "day people".

Programming should help residents differentiate one day from another and one week from another. Making the programming noticeably different can set off the weekend. There should be special unique events to aid memory and orientation by providing something to anticipate, plan for and remember. Some special events can occur on a regular monthly basis, while others can occur yearly, especially in conjunction with holidays or seasons. If these special events require planning ahead, they contribute to the residents' sense of the flow of time because they are activity anticipating. The activities program should adapt to the scheduling needs of the residents. Therapies, treatments, individual activities and families sometimes compete with regularly scheduled activities program for the residents' time. Some residents also have limited energy to spend in the full range of daily activities. Groups should be held in a variety of locations in order to attract participants, accommodate needs of residents and make the best use of staff time. Residents should have opportunities to experience belonging, friendship, support, attention, and importance as a member of a small, cohesive group. The small group also facilitates communication for the visually and hearing impaired. Each resident should be infrequent contact with at least one staff member who knows him/her well and makes sure the residents has opportunity for appropriate individual and group activities that meet unique preferences and needs.

Implementing the activity program involves cooperation with other staff, involving families, volunteers and the community. You cannot succeed without the cooperation of the whole building. You must have the support of administration. It should compensate for memory losses and deal with behaviors. There are limitless ideas and categories of activities. Cat's personal most favorite resource is "Chase's Calendar of Events" that covers 12,500 entries, 196 countries and 365 days. She also suggested taking a walk through Toys 'R Us, Wal-Mart and other stores to see what fun & games are out there, then ask yourself how you can adapt it to use for your residents.