



INNOVATIVE TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Q&A: How Seniors Helping Seniors Chose a New Training Partner



Training is built into the onboarding and compliance process for most home-based care organizations, but not all training programs are alike. Particularly for franchises that have a network of partners aligning around a standard of care, a consistent training platform can be a boon to operations.

Further, as the caregiver population ages, ease-of-use and accessibility of training becomes even more important. Home Health Care News sat down with Howard Algeo, director of business development and training for Leesburg, Pennsylvania-based Seniors Helping Seniors, to learn about the company's approach to training across its 125 franchises throughout the U.S. The company's model is based on a peer-to-peer caregiver network, where active seniors — who often have background and experience in caregiving, but sometimes do not — provide care to seniors who are in need of home-based assistance.

With training as a strong focus, the organization has seen course completions across the company rise sharply, from 81 trainings completed in 2019 to more than 5,000 completions in 2021, following its implementation of CareAcademy's online training platform.





Algeo shares the company's training philosophy, as well as its recent implementation of CareAcademy, to not only train its caregivers but also to help with onboarding, retention and franchise relationships.

Home Health Care News: What made you first explore the idea of implementing a training program for Seniors Helping Seniors?

We got involved in CareAcademy as a result of an initiative that we started in late 2019, which we called Seniors Helping Seniors 360. The “360” was to [reference] a complete circle of care services that we could provide to the seniors we serve. As part of that initiative, we put together a number of franchise partner councils. We started with Assistive Technology, then Personal Care. A number of our partners who were providing companionship and homemaking services wanted to add additional services in personal care. We wanted to give them all the tools that they needed to do that.

We also had a Memory Care Council because we were, of course, discovering that in some cases, a majority of the seniors we served had memory issues. Those two particular councils — the Personal Care and the Memory Care Councils — came to the conclusion pretty quickly that we needed a comprehensive training tool primarily for our caregivers, but also for our franchise partners, our office staff and the people that we serve. We combined the two committees to execute this search.

How did the committees conduct their search?

As so often happens, we sat through a lot of demos — and I mean a lot of demos. I think it was eight that we saw all together in the beginning. Then we had some more. We drilled it down to three, and after going through that process, we chose CareAcademy. They won by four laps. Their offering was comprehensive and easy to access, and with senior caregivers, ease of access is really important.





What we particularly liked and what our franchise partners use most frequently are the disease-specific caregiver tools. If, for instance, a caregiver has his or her first encounter with someone recovering from a stroke, they can get help with that right away. Having a tool like CareAcademy enhances the relationship between our caregivers and our franchise partners. Intuitively, it's a great retention tool. Our caregivers, and in particular, senior caregivers, are really hungry for knowledge and they appreciate the opportunity to get better at what they do.

In the last 14 months or so, we've added about 35 new franchises. CareAcademy is an integral part of how we bring them on board and train them. I think all of the new partners have engaged CareAcademy as their training tool. We don't have what you would call, preferred vendors. We vet vendors, we recommend them. Our franchise partners get to choose who they use, but CareAcademy has been overwhelmingly adopted by our community.

What led you to choose CareAcademy relative to those other vendors that you've demoed?

The mobile application is easy to use and understand. I'm a senior, but I've had a smartphone for 15 years — a trend we're seeing with a lot of our seniors as well. During COVID, seniors also began using their smartphones to communicate with their grandchildren in new ways. Having [training] accessible to them and easy to use on the mobile phone was really a crucial deciding point.

When it comes right down to it, business decisions are based on value and getting the most for your money. CareAcademy does their pricing based on a number of seats that you can purchase and rotate throughout your caregiver pool, and that made a big difference, too. One of the other things that stood out is the availability of Teepa Snow and all her great training for caregivers who are dealing with people who have dementia. It is a great value for a great tool. It really is as simple as that.





Have you heard from any of your franchise owners that the training helps from a recruitment standpoint?

Most new caregivers or prospective caregivers are interested in the training aspect. Having this broad-based offering, which can take you anywhere from washing your hands to dealing with the personality changes that come with dementia, is powerful. Yes, it helps, and that's what I hear from my franchise partners. Right now, it's a little tough to bring people on, so every little bit makes a difference. If we can differentiate ourselves, it helps. We've been very fortunate to have kept up the pace. I have no doubt that our access to a training tool like CareAcademy has helped us.

How does CareAcademy support operational transitions, such as new functionality or initial onboarding of your partners?

The onboarding that CareAcademy has is pretty rigorous in that it is both personal, one-on-one onboarding, as well as a whole array of supporting videos and tutorials. The people at CareAcademy pick up the phone. Our franchisees and business owners are pressed for time like a lot of people. The ability to get a correct answer promptly is so beneficial to them and to me because then I don't hear about it.

Do you have any advice for the leadership of an organization that may be adopting CareAcademy or a training platform for the first time?

My advice is to get your caregivers engaged in CareAcademy early. Get them used to the tool and guide them to the training that will help them most at that time. Update your caregivers regularly about what's available and integrate it into the whole process of recruiting, retaining and encouraging caregivers from the very beginning.

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