Measuring Quality: The Critical Role of Satisfaction Research
Exceeding Resident and Employee Expectations

Do you know what your customers and staff really think? Are you exceeding—let alone *meeting*—your customers' expectations? How does your community's satisfaction ratings compare to the industry?

The ServiceTRAC Satisfaction Survey provides the best satisfaction measurement tool in the industry. Our nationally acclaimed market research firm has established benchmarks representing more than 160,000 surveys and 80,000 respondents and 440 communities. ServiceTRAC's Quality Expectation Survey allows communities to reliably compare to industry benchmarks so managers can see how their communities rate against national standards. These ratings can be used as a benchmark for self-improvement from year to year, as well as a sales tool and powerful baseline for marketing development.

One of the key values to ServiceTRAC's unique satisfaction measurement tool is the user-friendly "Value Importance Index," which provides managers with actionable guidelines on where they need to implement important changes. The Value Report points out what the problems are, and the ServiceTRAC Action Plan for Success™ provides a guideline for managers to affect positive change.

Two years ago, when AAHSA launched the Quality First initiative, Scott Wynn, COO of Beatitudes Campus, faced a difficult challenge. His board of directors asked him to find a way to implement the indelible initiative, and define what quality meant to the Arizona-based CCRC campus, its' employees, residents and family members. That was no easy task, says Wynn, who realized that the most critical aspect of Quality First was getting to the heart of resident and employee satisfaction.

In the past, Wynn and his team tried several different methods to track customer satisfaction. But, like many of his colleagues, the information received only a courtesy review before it was filed away along with stacks of previous satisfaction surveys. This time, challenged with implementing Quality First, Wynn wanted to invest in a survey that would add tangible value and provide easy-to-understand results. More importantly, he wanted to affect change in customer satisfaction levels.

With a little research, he discovered and hired ServiceTRAC, LLC. "The value added services that made the difference include the "Action Plan for Success," and the company's differentiation between satisfaction and expectation." "Those were the clinchers for me," says Wynn, who has since completed the second round of resident and employee satisfaction surveys. With the user friendly results, he was able to successfully convey important aspects of the survey to employees, residents and family members while his board members are better informed on the overall community. His residents also feel more informed and valued and his employees are happier, contributing to the lowest turnover rates in years.

There is no doubt satisfaction research, when acted upon, creates positive results all around, but what about the costs? In these times, many see satisfaction research as an expensive tool, albeit valuable, and say they cannot justify the costs with budget constraints. According to Wynn, that logic may contribute to a community going even deeper into debt. "There is no question that the survey more than paid for itself."

The cost of operating at less than full capacity affects the bottom line every single day with far greater detriment than simply making the decision to invest in quality research. "Satisfaction research impacts the bottom line in a positive manner," says Wynn.

Mort Swales, co-CEO of Front Porch agrees. His experience with satisfaction research has shown it to be a very valuable process for Front Porch's family of not-for-profit communities, located in California, Louisiana and Florida. Swales said what prompted the collaboration with ServiceTRAC was both the initiative of Quality First and Front Porch's desire to be in a better position to provide quality services. The co-CEO's wanted to lay the foundational blocks for future growth, and those blocks were firmly rooted in quality.

Swales said that with the world of human services constantly changing, Front Porch needed a new approach to better understand resident values and provide continuing customer service. "As a company we embraced the Quality First initiative, but our challenge was to say it, live it and achieve it," says Swales. "Ultimately, we know we are being judged by the consumer, not by what we think we are. It became our priority to find out what our consumer really thought."

Swales said Front Porch chose ServiceTRAC because they found it to be a reliable product and one that truly measures actual services provided. He thinks the survey asks the right questions and provides the right length and *breadth* of information for managers. "We have been challenged with reports in the past because managers often have a hard time interpreting the results. With ServiceTRAC, there appeared to be a better chance for readability and implementation."

Laura Kislowski, Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Summerville Senior Living said that prior to using a third party survey company, they only had an internal, anecdotal assessment. The company, headquartered in California with 31 communities around the country, felt it was time to objectively measure what changes they needed to make. "The results opened our eyes to our customers' point of view," said Kislowski.

According to Kislowski, Summerville selected ServiceTRAC because of the comprehensive product and service with strong statistical significance. They also liked that the survey benchmarked the community against others in the industry. She went on to stress the importance of the implementation process to be championed and utilized by the corporate office and managers. "From the report came valuable information that prompted Summerville to meet one-on-one with family members of residents. From this opportunity, we are gaining additional critical feedback allowing for constant improvement."

Kislowski says her interaction with the ServiceTRAC staff has been very positive as well. "It was nice that the CEO of ServiceTRAC got on the phone and walked us through the report personally. They are very prompt, responsive and customer-focused."

Knowing your market, your competition, and most importantly, your residents is critical to the success of your business. But what about the employees? How is the company morale impacting the satisfaction of your residents?

Happy employees mean happier residents. A key component of human resource development is to understand what matters to employees. Communities that have utilized the employee satisfaction survey and implemented changes as shown by the data have found they enjoy lower turnover, increased productivity, increased morale, higher standards and overall lower cost--all important factors that directly affect resident satisfaction.

Jay Shetler, CEO of Glencroft Retirement Community, a CCRC located in Glendale, Arizona, says what attracted him to ServiceTRAC for their employee satisfaction research was the long history with the senior

living industry. "Ultimately, ServiceTRAC understood the many nuances unique to senior housing and we knew it would fit well with the Quality First Initiative," says Shetler. "We wanted to know what was working for us, and what wasn't working, from a modern day human resources perspective and create a strong, competent workforce."

Glencroft wanted to survey their employees to better understand how they experienced the organization and to establish a baseline on how to best retain staff over the long run.

Shetler says the process was very easy, provided a great deal of confidentiality for the employees, and gave management the feedback they were looking for. "The employees were very pleased to be surveyed and were very much interested in the results," says Shetler. "The results from the survey have had a positive impact of each of the departments and things are going well for the company." Shetler says Glencroft has launched new internal initiatives based on the key areas for improvement and the atmosphere is remarkably "less stressful."

William J. Nowell, president and CEO of ServiceTRAC says he is proud of how the process has grown over the years. This survey initially started as a co-survey with ALFA eight years ago, and has since grown by more than 30 percent annually. In 2003, ServiceTRAC satisfaction department tripled production and revenue, and those numbers are expected to keep increasing through 2004.

Nowell says what sets ServiceTRAC apart from the competition is four-fold. First, the company leadership is comprised of senior housing experts. Prior to starting ServiceTRAC 12 years ago, Nowell worked for 15 years in a variety of capacities in senior housing. His tenure includes working as an administrator, regional marketing manager and sales manager, providing him with an inside perspective that many other competitors do not share. "We understand what is involved in running a community and know what managers need to be able to do their job," says Nowell.

Second, ServiceTRAC has the most reliable and valid measurement tool among the industry providers of satisfaction research. More than seven years ago, a rigorous process was undertaken to develop a reliable and valid survey tool which speaks to the unique needs and wants of today's seniors and their families. The survey thoroughly addresses the everyday issues experienced in any retirement community – issues that significantly affect residents' (and family members') perceptions of the quality of care and services provided.

Third, ServiceTRAC has the industry's only true benchmark in all areas of service, which are broken down into four specific areas.
The Importance Index pinpoints the needs that are most significantly contributing to satisfaction. The Index Score tells you how you compare to the benchmarks. Then the Distribution Index and the Verbatim Reports help managers develop a focused comprehension plan. From each of these areas, ServiceTRAC devises the Action Plan for Success™, which takes an overwhelming amount of qualitative and quantitative data and delivers it in an easily understood and actionable format.

Lastly, Nowell says what sets ServiceTRAC apart is the quality of service provided by the team. "We have a quick turn-around time and work with communities directly to meet their individual needs. Our mission is to exceed our clients' expectations by helping them exceed their own customers' expectations."

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William Nowell is President and CEO of ServiceTRAC, LLC., a Scottsdale, Arizona based full service marketing firm that provides customer-focused solutions to those in the senior living industry. Nowell has 15 years experience specific to the senior housing industry and specializes in sales, marketing and training to help communities raise occupancy rates and improve customer satisfaction.

Mr. Nowell co-authored the 1999 ALFA National Assisted Living Resident Satisfaction Study. More recently he authored a research paper on sales performance measures for the 2001 Johns Hopkins University, Seniors Housing & Care Journal. *Nowell has also authored articles for* Assisted Living Today, Housing Executive Report, National Sales and Marketing Management, Speaker Magazine, Long term Care Magazine, Quirks Research *and* Arizona Society of Quality Management.