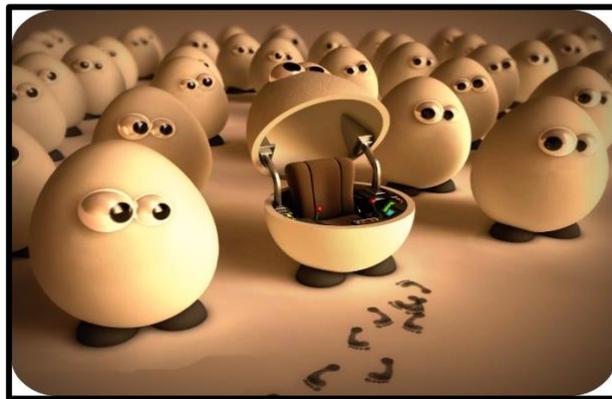


The 21st Century Recreation/Activity Professional

Part I: Unique Me!

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Unique

Being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else (Adjective)

A unique person or thing (Noun)

~ Webster Dictionary

Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary.

~ Cecil Beaton

You, yes *you*, today's Recreation/Activity Professional, are truly one of a kind. We know that people share the usual bits and pieces that many of us have in common; i.e., essential body parts, etc. But, here is where the similarities end!

According to CMS and other healthcare agencies across this world, the primary focus for the Recreation/Activity Professional is to oversee and implement person-centered therapeutic and recreational activities for their specific populations. This *unique* healthcare professional may work in a variety of settings: independent/assisted living retirement homes, skilled nursing centers, adult senior day communities, geri-psych hospitals, children's/adolescent group settings; however, their job remains essentially the same. "Activities and Recreation Professionals address the whole person and his or her cultural, spiritual, physical, and education needs." (Myron Gelsinger, Therapeutic Recreation Director, Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center, Baltimore).

Just think; your unique and individual life experiences have made you the dynamic person you are today! Many of us already "come to the healthcare table" knowing how to grow and tend beautiful, lush gardens; care for our furry friends; sing to the top of our lungs/play sonorous music on an instrument; build great structures; skillfully throw and field a ball; and finally solve complicated puzzles and algorithms. Once again, this *uniqueness factor* can be found everywhere; in our personal experiences, what we pay attention to, beliefs, genetics and most definitely in our creativity. In addition, our uniqueness can be expressed in how we dress and show up to work every day. This is why we love and look forward to each holiday throughout the calendar year!

It is the combination of these very things that have earned us the distinct title, *Quality of Life Champions!* There is absolutely no one who is identical to you, so let's celebrate the fact that you are unique and have specific, God-given contributions to make in this world as a healthcare professional. In fact, our individual healthcare teams, residents, and their family members count on *you* to positively affect lives. Your presence, each and every day, changes their world in ways that could not have happened had you not been there!

Each Recreation/Activity Professional influences change no matter what the name plate on his/her desk may say. Indeed, you may not be able to lead an Interdisciplinary Team meeting or completely change the direction of your healthcare community, but you can effect and impact change on the parts of the community that you do touch; residents' lives! We need to carefully reread and rethink the old adage, "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody's around to hear it, does it make a noise? If you really know what makes you unique, but you're too afraid to show it, does it truly make an impact on the individuals that you serve? So many times, we worry about what other team members will think that we are too afraid to show them our true colors. In a healthcare world that places high value on conformity and rules/regulations, it can sometimes feel daunting to embrace our uniqueness. Gregory Compton, MD, states a poignant thought; "Recreation/Activity Professionals are too often the Rodney Dangerfield of therapies. These professionals challenge patients/residents in a unique way. Although it may look like they are just playing games and having fun, everything they do has a purpose...they are an integral part of the team when it comes to helping residents relearn how to interact with the environment and other people." (Joanne Kaldy, Caring for the Ages, A Monthly Newspaper for Long-Term Care Practitioners, January 2009).

Temple Grandin, Colorado State University Professor, states the following; “The world needs different minds working together.” Here are two of Grandin’s ideas/inspirations for how to identify, embrace, and harness our own unique characteristics as Recreation/Activity Professionals:

A). Identification

You probably already know the basics of what sets you apart in this field. It’s the things you do naturally, and love to share. It’s also a great idea to tune-in on your unique qualities knowing where you shine.

Consider setting aside some time to brainstorm the following questions just by yourself:

When do I feel the most comfortable in my skin?

What conditions bring that about?

What compliments do I hear most from others?

What life experiences have shaped me most?

When did I last feel true joy? And why was that?

What would I pursue in life if I knew I couldn’t fail?



B). Curiosity

One of the best ways to find and harness your uniqueness is by staying curious. This means, don't accept everything at face value. Find out why, how and everything else! When you keep wondering about the world around you, you're able to grow and connect in meaningful ways.

Finally, be proud of your originality and embrace what it is that makes you a *Quality of Life Champion*. Given today's worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the healthcare world recognizes the heightened stress and anxiety over what will happen in the coming days, weeks and even months. We are humbled and inspired by all that Recreation/Activity Professionals are doing right now to support the safety and welfare of their communities across the world; from emergency services to meal/snack provisions to creative programming and we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing our residents and families with the most up-to-date information and resources available.

As many healthcare communities throughout the world make difficult decisions to "close and shelter in place" we acknowledge the significant role that we will play in our individual and collective physical and mental health. Physical distancing may be the new normal, but person-centered programming remains central to our residents' health and wellness.



These are undeniably challenging times. Recreation/Activity Professionals, like you, remain dedicated and, as ever, among the critical solution providers in your communities. Continually embrace the courage to express yourself. Your healthcare community will be a better place for everything that you do!



“The one who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. Those who walk alone are likely to find themselves in places no one has ever been before.”

~ Francis Phillip Wernig