



Shaping Your Own Destiny

By Randall Rollinson, President, LBL Strategies, Ltd.

At a recent leadership conference for the senior living industry I was reminded of Spencer Johnson's timeless book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* You may remember that in this story four characters living in a maze face unexpected change when they discover their "Cheese" has gone missing. Sniff and Scurry, who are mice, and Hem and Haw, tiny people the size of mice, each adapt to change in their maze differently. One didn't adapt at all.

This enduring allegory reveals insightful truths about people and organizations dealing with change. In short, most people don't like change. And for good reason: It disrupts established patterns of behavior and almost always results in increasing levels of stress, anxiety, uncertainty and even anger. To avoid these uncomfortable feelings we sometimes become overwhelmed and choose to do nothing rather than confront (let alone embrace) a new paradigm, hoping that it will just go away.

Whether we like it or not, changes unfolding in the senior living industry are not going away. Public policy is shifting to emphasize the importance of serving people in their homes, 78 million "boomers" are making it clear they want new alternatives, and health care delivery is being driven to integrate across the acute/post-acute continuum of care. What's even more challenging, the resources necessary to fund this repositioning process are increasingly limited or will come from sources not yet identified or at least fully developed.

In time, the exact scope and nature of this new paradigm will become clear. However, by the time clarity is upon us it will be too late for many organizations to make the shift. Our recommendation is to first become expert at creating scenarios that describe multiple alternative futures, and then to be a cautious and flexible early adopter of the most likely scenario. For example, consider leading the development of a robust network of community providers who actively collaborate to help seniors live as independently as possible in their own home and community. This shift in strategy will require long-term care providers, doctors and hospitals to align within a supportive, efficient and dependable fabric of community services. The increasing costs and penalties associated with re-hospitalizations will drive this alignment in the future.

Common sense tells us there will always be a place for more intensive service models delivered in a campus-oriented setting. However they can no longer be our exclusive or maybe even the primary strategy going forward.

To locate your organization's "cheese" in the future will require a clearly stated yet flexible shared vision, practical strategy, and most importantly the development of new strategic and operational capabilities. From our perspective these new capabilities include the following:

- The ability of governing boards to be thoughtful and engaged strategic leaders (***in the big picture***), rather than competent but passive stewards of the status quo;
- The ability of executives to actively collaborate and partner across the formal and informal service delivery system of the future;
- The ability of management and front line staff to carve out and hone niches of "excellence" rather than continuums of "good," including the development of clear measures for these;
- The ability of management to measure, document and efficiently report tangible impacts on service quality and sustainable reductions in operational costs;

- The ability of integrated service delivery systems across a specific community of need to be flexible in response to certain and often disruptive environmental changes which are surely in store in the current environment of constant re-invention.

Even in the most progressive and well-funded stand-alone long-term care organizations or integrated health care systems there is always a gap between where they now stand and where they are trying to get to. Jeanenne LaMarsh in her powerful book entitled Changing the Way We Change refers to this gap as the “Delta”.

The delta is where change occurs. It is where people stop operating in the old way, learn new ways, make mistakes, mourn the loss of the old, test the new way and integrate it into ongoing operations.

The level of change organizations in senior living and aging services are facing will be a major challenge for their boards, management team and operational staff. It is critical that they also know that adapting to change is the only way forward – if they want to keep eating cheese.

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