CHANGEMAKERS 2022
The pioneers driving the future of senior living

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Leading the Evolution of Senior Living

Senior living continues to evolve at a rapid rate — an evolution largely defined by the risks and innovations of top industry leaders who put the needs of patients, families and staff above all else. In a period of great transition, this type of leadership is critical to the clinical, technological and operational advancements needed to thrive in today’s senior living landscape.

We’re pleased to honor our 2022 class of Changemakers in this collection of exclusive, never-before-seen interview excerpts from a series brought to you by Senior Housing News in collaboration with Yardi. Read on to learn about how 2022 Changemakers view and manage change, and how they are preparing to reshape the industry in the years to come.

Visit seniorhousingnews.com/changemakers to read the full series.
What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Consumers.

Joel Nelson
President and CEO
LCS

Rising through the ranks at LCS, one of the nation’s largest senior living organizations, Joel Nelson played a key role in starting the company’s real estate business. As president and CEO of LCS, he is now responsible for leading all business lines in the LCS Family of Companies, which includes an operating portfolio of more than 130 communities.

Nelson is a major proponent of change in areas such as workforce and wellness, and a more unified approach to industry advocacy, and he believes great change will be achieved by implementing the lessons learned from Covid. Nelson is also focused on combatting the staffing crisis by making senior living an industry-of-choice for prospective employees, as well as driving change through efficiency and technology.

What changes do you think need to be made in the industry during the next 3-5 years?

The list is long, but I would break it into three buckets: The lessons we learned through COVID; the need for greater efficiency; and technology implementation.

What we learned through COVID is that we’re a misunderstood, fragmented industry, and we don’t do a very good job of telling our stories. We have to get out and not only tell our success stories, but also explain the impact those successes are having on our families and residents.

I think workforce and career opportunities are unlimited. How do we become an industry employer-of-choice versus, “I fell into this by accident” — and you’ve heard that a hundred times. In order to tell our story, another lesson learned from COVID is that we have to unify on data and data aggregation.

Next, we have to get more efficient as an industry with respect to how we deliver services and amenities to our residents. We talk about the industry being fragmented, and I think all of the providers and the majority of capital partners are striving for the same thing — vibrant communities, lifestyle, great outcomes with residents and strong health care components.

I think we have to unify and get more efficient in how we represent the industry. We’re a relatively large industry when you compare pharma, auto, et cetera. We’re represented through four different associations ... I want to compliment the association executives’ efforts ... but it’s just inefficient. We need a way to build a stronger voice within our audiences.

The last area is technology, and that’s technology in our buildings, our service delivery and data management. Almost every function and part of our businesses will continue to use some form of technology, and it will shape the future with the right balance of human connection and efficiency.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

Less fragmentation.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Listen.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Consumers.
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

What are some ways you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

I think our industry is still in an immature stage. We need to catch up to where the market is, and by that I mean I think our consumers are demanding a lot more change than we’re currently providing. That’s going to rapidly accelerate as the baby boomers move from adult children to residents. I think all the constituencies we touch or serve are demanding more and better things from us, and we are playing catch-up on all fronts. Our industry needs to get out in front of these needs.

As you look across the rest of the senior living industry, in light of the things that you’ve said, do you feel like it’s changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

No, I don’t.

Progressive and innovative industries attract the best talent — thought leaders who solve the problems you put in front of them. We’ve never been thought of as a bastion of innovative change. There are areas in which we need to be upfront if we’re to become the place that people want to come to work.

We have solutions for some of these things, but we’re playing catch-up on too many fronts. Our industry can be a beacon of innovation and our products and services warrant it, but we aren’t quite there yet.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

Have our product/service received in a more universally positive fashion.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Consumers.
Jane Arthur Roslovic
CEO
Treplus Communities

Roslovic has led her team in creating a progressive strategy to target baby boomers and their children in an evolving senior living landscape. She has also established her organization as a leading innovator and developer in the rapidly growing active adult sector.

If you could change one thing about the Senior Living industry, what would it be?

Cost.

Listen, when you’re getting old, you care about two things: your family and your financial stability. That’s so scary to me, and I’ve seen the cost modeling of the senior housing industry. I have a 93-year-old father, and my family is very fortunate that he was as successful as he was because we could not afford to pay for the kind of care he gets. We have to work on these costs. The whole industry, us and the ILs, ALs and MCs, have to be realistic about it because not all of them can move in with their kids.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Approach change thoughtfully. Be cognizant of who you’re impacting and how people are going to react. Be aware that not everyone will immediately embrace change, and make sure your communications are clear.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

The growth of the aging population.
Tana Gall has followed a distinct path in her decades-long senior living career. From rising through the ranks at Leisure Care, she went on to lead Merrill Gardens as the operator’s president. She next became an entrepreneur and founded a senior living consultancy before taking on the CEO position at Blue Harbor, ultimately returning to Merrill Gardens as president in November 2019.

Gall’s trademark as a Changemaker is her approach of bold-but-calculated risk-taking, which is reflected in the new and growing middle-market brand Truewood by Merrill. She has learned to embrace and drive change by leveraging her diverse background in property management and private equity.

How do you see technology both driving and enabling change in senior living?

The way we import and report data is critical to enabling change today. We’re able to identify the holes in our system and create a strategy to make things better using that data.

We were very paper-based when I started in the industry, and today, I am literally pressing a button to see how things are growing in virtually every department. I don’t underestimate the power of technology when it comes to data analytics. I think we have a ways to go in how we share data, but at Merrill Gardens, I’ve utilized it a lot in order to enable change.

There’s a lot of cool resident-facing technology out there as well, but first we have to determine if our residents will find value in it. I have to see where the return on investment is and understand how it’s going to make the residents’ lives easier or better. I would love to see more technology that covers all the bases to make operations more efficient. Technology can enable a lot of change, but it can also slow things down.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

The labor challenge.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Consumers.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Embrace it.
A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Confidence.

What are some ways in which you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

When I started in the industry, it was pretty black and white in terms of what you could expect. That has changed over time, however, and the industry today is driven by choice. At the same time, I don’t think we’re even close to the level of choice the boomers are going to expect, and that needs to change.

The average age in our communities is increasing, and as that happens, residents will be looking for more ways to stay active longer. We can’t just create places to live; we have to create places to thrive that deliver on lifestyle needs.

There will also be more partnerships with health systems. In a lot of our markets, we’ve spent years trying to build not just referral relationships, but genuine relationships. That takes hard work and trust.

Even coming out of covid, we built a lot of trust with health care systems because of the ways we helped them. As we move forward, I think that silver lining will serve as the foundation of our health system partnerships.

Additionally, our industry has enough data to tell the story of our organizations so partners and prospects can connect with it. That story will have to change as new consumers come into the market, and we’re not quite there yet.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Competition.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

Image.
What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Social justice.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

Affordability.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Listen to what’s happening on the ground, and listen to the people who are on the front line, seeing people every day.

In more than a decade leading 2Life Communities, Amy Schectman has worked to create a vibrant strategic plan, created a quasi-endowment to support agency innovation, built and nurtured an effective team at all levels of the organization, and launched an aggressive expansion campaign to fill the gaps in the senior housing affordability marketplace.

Schectman has championed the power of diversion, equity and inclusion initiatives within her organization and the industry at large, and she is tackling the affordability gap in aging America through 2Life’s new Opus model. Schectman has also prioritized preparing for the next aging generation and the new needs they bring to the marketplace in order to drive change at scale.

What are some words of advice for managing resistance to change in an organization?

Listen to what’s happening on the ground, and listen to the people who are on the front line, seeing people every day. They’re going to sense that long before people who are sitting in the CEO spot, in terms of what people are going to need, what people are going to want and the direction the winds are going to blow. They know it better than we do. Follow their lead, empower them to tell you, empower them to really be part of the planning and part of the structure.

If I were running a traditional CCRC, I would be talking to the CNAs constantly. I would have a group of advisors that included CNAs, occupational therapists, physical therapists, nurses and social workers — those are the people who can see what’s driving the market. On the Opus project, I had the idea to implement volunteerism as a key part, and I will say, people thought, “Is she crazy?” Then we tested it in the market and it tested really well.

Amy Schectman
President and CEO
2Life Communities
What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

The changing character of our resident population.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

The standardization of the industry.

What are some ways in which you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

I think the industry needs to start thinking about each community as serving a different need. Each of our 72 communities will have its own character, and I have to believe that each individual within those communities will have unique needs. I’d like to think of our business as a business that serves the needs of the individual, and while there needs to be some corporate discipline and standards, we have to take into consideration the community specifically that we’re serving.

Through his transition from commercial real estate to senior living, Watchowski became a master of adaptation, and he is constantly searching for new ways to morph his business to best serve the consumer. Watchowski has built a strong leadership team in alignment with his vision for change, and it is a key differentiator for American House and REDICO in a competitive senior living landscape.

I think the industry was very quick to standardize and find economies or efficiencies. I think that’s good and needed, but at the end of the day, standardization doesn’t enable you to recognize the needs of the individual. That’s really what differentiates us from others and makes us a great company and a great place to live.

Changemaker Dale Watchowski has more than 30 years of real estate expertise in both local and national platforms, with a diverse background in acquisitions, development, capital markets and operations. He has also held senior management positions at some of the nation’s largest financial institutions including Travelers/Citigroup, HSBC, and J.P. Morgan Chase, and he currently serves as president and CEO of American House and its parent company REDICO, in addition to others.

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

The changing character of our resident population.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Change is inevitable. It’s going to happen at a very rapid pace, so you best be comfortable with it.
A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

**Dig deep and keep going.**

Do you feel the industry is changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

I have witnessed a great amount of progress in the span of two years, with the pandemic playing a crucial role in how the industry has evolved. Covid demanded that the industry address some of its institutional challenges, such as adopting more technology and wellness services that strengthen the health of our communities.

I was quite shocked by the lack of integrated technology across the industry, and beyond our teams, only 50% of our residents wanted to engage with technology. To date, 80% of our residents have adopted the use of technology, as a result of our efforts in introducing initiatives such as online price transparency and virtual tours, to name a few. The challenge is continuing to foster such technology-driven services and amenities for the growing boomer generation.

As we look to the future of 55-plus independent living communities, I believe there is more change ahead in how we are attracting boomers and making a collective effort on evolving the market perception towards aging and senior living.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

**The market perception of aging.**

What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

**The prospects themselves.**

Danette Opaczewski is the EVP, Resident Experience and COO of Revel Communities, an independent living brand developed by The Wolff Company. After an extensive career in hospitality, Opaczewski joined Revel in January 2020 and assumed overall responsibility for the operations and financial performance of the management company.

Opaczewski leans on her background in hospitality to drive customer-centric change by redefining the resident experience in senior living through the introduction of technology, enhancement of resident amenities, and offering tools that empower seniors to live happier and healthier lives. She is also an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives to make change within her organization and across the senior living industry as a whole.
The labor market.

Employee recognition and development.

In the battle of rock and stream, water always wins due to persistence.

The labor market.
What’s the single-greatest driver of change in today’s senior living operating environment?

Wendy: The changing consumer.
Jim: Consumer preference.

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

Wendy: Perception.
Jim: Increase the workforce.

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

Wendy: Listen.
Jim: Don’t give up.


doe you feel the industry is changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

Jim: Right now, capital partners and operators have clearly recognized that there's not a one-size-fits-all product. I think we’re moving from a generalist phase to a specialist phase, where we'll be in a position to give the consumer a myriad of products to choose from.

Wendy: From before Covid to after Covid, we saw our team collaborating like never before. Everybody has become more dedicated to the residents, to each other, and that has even extended beyond our walls.

Financial approaches such as rental versus entrance fee versus buy-in are changing as well. That’s exciting to watch and participate in, even within our own portfolio. We're operating a CCRC now, which is new to us compared to our traditional rental approach. We are looking at development deals, and I think that’s going to be the next frontier, and it’s not like others haven’t done it in the past, but I think having operators like us explore that and execute on that will be exciting.

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Some of the biggest operators pulled together in order to get a huge supply of PPE. The associations were on top of it with protocols and so forth, and if there’s any good that came out of Covid, I think that’s it. We already overcame a crisis together, so we are ready to take on the next.

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