

## What's In a Name? A World of New Possibilities

by Gene Mitchell

A visitor touring The Mather in Evanston, IL, Mather LifeWays' newest CCRC, may notice some unusual nomenclature on the signage—some terminology that doesn't fit the typical retirement community. New language reflects the organization's desire to create a new culture, a desire to "turn senior living upside-down," in the words of Sara McVey, vice president/experience director at The Mather.

"We thought a big part of this was creating a culture where everyone is empowered to do the right thing," McVey says. "Part of that was asking how to handle [job] titles, which put people into categories. We wanted to create a culture where staff is encouraged to 'act like you own the place.'"

The idea is to instill a new set of "Core Values": lifelong engagement, excellence, relationships based on respect, and transformation.

A new "dictionary" has been created for staff, full of traditional department or service terms to be avoided, and suggested updates. "Dining Services" becomes "Culinary Services"; "Housekeeping" becomes "Dusters & Suds"; the nursing home, hospital or care center becomes the "Life Center"; "The Lobby" becomes "The Drawing Room."

Relationships also have a linguistic overhaul. "My staff" or "the people I supervise" become "the people I work with." Lazy nicknames for residents ("Honey" or "Sweetie") are replaced by the more respectful "Mr." or "Mrs."

Negative responses are turned around to reflect possibilities instead of impossibilities. "We can't" becomes "This is what is possible" or "This is what we can do." "Issues" or "problems" become "opportunities."

"I introduce myself as the experience director at Mather," says McVey. "It's created a different conversation, helps people see us differently, and we have to really get behind it so if something goes awry, that's good failure that we can learn from. There's so much serious business we have to do, it's nice to bring some levity to the place."

To request a copy of the Mather "dictionary," e-mail [cgrefalda@matherlifeways.com](mailto:cgrefalda@matherlifeways.com).



The director of nursing or whomever is on duty at the time.



The activities director's office.



The social worker needs a name that avoids the forbidding nursing home/hospital connotations.



A better term for a room that might otherwise have the uninspiring multipurpose" designation.



You can guess who these folks are.



Behold the clean linens!



The salon, home for rejuvenated hair, nails, and pedicures, with a separate area for bathing.