Develop staff involvement and autonomy  
  
Why - How  
  
P Champvert  
Director of home facilities and services   
Vice President of the AD-PA Directors' Association  
France

Why?   
  
Isaac Guetz, a French psychologist who worked extensively in the US, is the initiator of the Free Enterprise movement.   
It states that (on average in France):  
  
7% of staff are involved   
  
75% are not involved   
  
18% even go so far as to sabotage the work of those involved   
  
This simple statistic shows that the traditional hierarchical model must be exceeded in all sectors of activity  
  
However, it must be even more in ours   
  
1 Indeed, the activity of homes and services for elderly people is to produce human relationship   
  
Human relationships are produced from women and men.  
Professionals must therefore be as good as possible in their function so that they can then be comfortable and produce quality relationships with our seniors.   
  
That is why, in my view, the empowerment of professionals is inseparable from the empowerment of older adults.  
  
2 There are many factors that put pressure on employees on a daily basis:  
  
First of all, ageism, this discrimination that devalues the time that passes in each of us and therefore our own aging, and devalues even more the elderly and very old.  
  
Professionals in our sector have chosen to engage in it to better help the elderly and are subject to the contradictions of society according to which very old people do not have value, Hence a fundamental question about the value of their trade and sometimes even their own value.  
  
Restoring a good image of themselves requires their ability to be listened to and to participate in everyday decisions.

3 The devaluation of the elderly and the sector leads the public authorities in different countries such as France to underequip institutions and services.   
  
Lack of resources often forces professionals to act too quickly, which is a real abuse with people who precisely go slow and need time.  
  
4 To effectively combat the effects of ageism, it is important to empower elderly people who are accompanied to listen to them on a daily basis about their lives, their expectations and their desires.  
  
However, implementing an empowerment logic for seniors implies the transition to an empowerment logic for professionals.  
  
  
Managers and professional leaders are right to ask the public authorities for suitable means and should continue to do so.  
  
However, they cannot remain passive and must also take over the situation.  
  
As Gandhi said, let’s be the change we want in the world.   
  
This commitment to a more participatory approach by older people and professionals is basically what our society expects.  
  
To do so, all specialists in the movement of empowerment of personnel (liberated enterprise, learning enterprise, autonomous team Buurzorg... ) consider that a certain number of recommendations are necessary.   
  
II How to do it?   
  
1 The management of the structure must be fully convinced of the process.   
  
Communicating or initiating empowerment initiatives without going all the way there is a risk that it will not only be useless but even harmful to the structure due to the additional demotivation risks it may entail.   
  
The management team must therefore first and foremost reflect on this issue.

2 Any work of empowerment of the elderly and teams requires a support with a consultant or an experienced professional who will allow to adjust according to new processes and situations that will arise.  
  
3 Giving more power to the people accompanied initially decreases the mechanical power of employees.   
  
Giving more power to employees initially reduces the mechanical power of managers.  
  
It is therefore a matter of accompanying these two approaches with many training courses, especially personal development to better understand the relationship of each person to his profession, to his functions, to authority, to power and ultimately to himself.  
  
The profound transformation of work exercises is concomitant with a transformation of each.   
  
To free the company is to free everyone, those for whom it works and those with whom it works, including those who run it.  
  
4 The reorganization of working and operating modes will require a lot of team meetings and a lot of decentralization.

Some teams decide, for example, to create a WhatsApp group to better communicate with each other and make decisions such as substitutions.

Teams can participate in the recruitment of their colleagues and organize their schedule.

It is also interesting that older people are involved in recruitment.

In this sense, we can rely on the skills and preferences of each person and not on social status.

One employee will be very competent to develop the activity, others to organize the schedules or replacements in connection with all their colleagues.

This profound questioning of the objectives and functioning of institutions and services for the elderly is completely in line with the democratic logic of our European countries.

Too often, institutions and services operate without concern for the feelings of seniors, or even teams.

This results in a great deal of mistrust among the institutions and services.

In the 1970s, the Canadian sociologist Irving Goffman said that there can be no island of totalitarianism in a democratic society.

Institutions, even home care services that accept, for example, the confinement of elderly people participate in this totalitarianism.

Fundamental reflection on our objectives and how we operate is, in my view, the only way to reconcile our activities with society and advance the fight against agism.