Talent Search: “Bridge the Gap” Podcast Explores How to Recruit Young Leaders

The urgency to attract the next generation of industry leaders was recently discussed on an episode of the podcast, “Bridge the Gap.”

The podcast is hosted by Lucas McCurdy, owner of The Bridge Construction Group, and Joshua Crisp, CEO, Solinity, an owner/operator. They came up with the idea for a podcast about a year ago at the NIC Conference. Their goal is to help shape the culture of the senior living industry to drive quality outcomes for the aging population.

The Bridge the Gap Senior Living Podcast has a mission to inform, educate and influence the future of housing and services for seniors. What follows are the edited highlights of the episode on how to recruit young leadership talent. The hosts met in Nashville with Andrew Smith, chair of NIC’s Future Leaders Council (FLC), and senior director of innovation and sales operations at Brookdale Senior Living. (To hear the full podcast, click on a link at the end of this piece.)

McCurdy: We’ve got really great topics today. But first, Andrew (Smith), can you tell us how you got connected to senior living and Brookdale?

Smith: I’ve got a story that’s similar to a lot of folks in our industry. I fell into it. I’ve been with Brookdale for about 10 years. I went to Vanderbilt University here in Nashville. I didn’t know much about the seniors housing industry and didn’t aspire to work in it. I was a research analyst at the state government.

So, nights and weekends I was doing some consulting, designing adult education and training programs. I have a master’s degree in adult education. Brookdale was a client and my first job for them was designing an orientation program for new sales hires for their memory care product called Clear Bridge. I lived in a memory care community for a weekend and just fell in love with the industry, its mission, and its position at the intersection of real estate, hospitality and healthcare.

I begged them to hire me. And they gave me a chance. I’ve had four different jobs at Brookdale since then and I’m going to make a career out of this. It is absolutely an industry that fills your heart and your head.
McCurdy: That resonates with me and I know it does with you, Josh (Crisp).

Crisp: Some of the most passionate folks about the industry didn’t actually know anything about seniors housing and didn’t aspire to be in it. There are huge opportunities for young people just entering school, or the workforce, who want to fall in love with a mission.

Smith: That’s why this podcast is great—telling stories about the industry. It goes a long way to educate people who don’t know about the great opportunities for a career in the industry.

McCurdy: That’s a great transition to talk about the NIC organization. What is NIC?

Smith: NIC is a shortened acronym for the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care. It’s a nonprofit organization. NIC’s mission is to support housing access and choice for America’s seniors by providing data, analytics and connections among operators and capital providers.

One of its most well-respected offerings is the NIC MAP® Data Service (NIC MAP). Industry stakeholders rely on the data to make informed decisions.

Crisp: When I got my first call from NIC as a young administrator, I didn’t know what they did. I had the opportunity to attend a NIC conference which honestly for a young administrator was very overwhelming but awesome. Since then I’ve been very involved with the industry and have a great appreciation for NIC.

Smith: What’s unique about NIC is how it brings investors and capital providers into the conversation. I’ve worked for an operator my entire career in this industry. Through my interactions with NIC, I’ve learned to consider the role of the real estate investment in operations and the future growth of our industry.

McCurdy: What does the FLC do?

Smith: The FLC is a group of about 25 executives who each serve a three-year term. The members are up-and-coming leaders working to help advance the industry. We do a lot of work on behalf of NIC as volunteers.

McCurdy: Let’s dive into how we’re recruiting new talent through university outreach and the internship program.

Smith: Not enough people know about the opportunities in seniors housing. One of the goals of the FLC is to increase awareness of the industry in university and graduate level programs. FLC members reach out to their alma mater or a nearby school to find forums to talk to students about senior living.

We also recruit employers to host internships offered through NIC’s university outreach and internship program. It’s a relatively new program and growing. Last year, seven companies provided internships and three universities participated in the program.
It’s a great effort that gives young, enthusiastic, smart students the opportunity to experience the industry through an internship.

**McCurdy:** Tell us about your university outreach Josh (Crisp).

**Crisp:** For years, I’ve had the opportunity to speak at a lot of different universities and colleges. It’s usually to senior level classes with students looking for a job. Most of the students have never heard of senior living or they have a very negative opinion of it. When they actually experience senior living and its mission, they’re sold.

**Smith:** Our industry offers a very unique value proposition no matter what kind of role you’re interested in. I tell students that they don’t have to operate a building. They can work for a capital provider or in human resources, or marketing. I tell students that they can do well and do good at the same time in the senior living industry. That’s a value proposition most other industries can’t offer.

**Crisp:** What are some successful strategies you’re implementing at Brookdale to spread the industry’s mission to young workers?

**Smith:** The FLC university outreach program is a big driver for us. From Brookdale’s perspective, we are trying to leverage our marketing expertise to reach potential associates. If they’re searching on Indeed or LinkedIn, we have targeted messaging that explains what Brookdale could offer as a potential employer.

Some smaller operators and regional providers do a great job of forming relationships with local universities to build pipelines of talent. I think that’s a phenomenal strategy because it also connects the operator to the community.

**Crisp:** I love that because everybody has the ability to develop local relationships, whether you’re a single community operator, a regional operator, or as big as Brookdale.

**McCurdy:** Senior living really has the upper hand compared to all the other real estate segments because it’s so much more than real estate. Bridging that gap of knowledge and awareness about the industry is where we need to focus.

**Smith:** I think the issue of aging is going mainstream. Society is more aware of aging as the baby boomers get older. I’m excited to see the growth of the industry.

**Crisp:** Honestly, it’s going to take the creativity of the younger generation to think outside the box to solve many of the challenges that face our industry—which are also great opportunities.

**Smith:** Anyone who wants to help create more awareness of senior living can reach out to their university. If you’re a student, check out NIC’s industry internship program. If you’re a provider or at a company that serves the industry, we’d love to have you host a NIC intern. We have a big pipeline of great talent from top universities, and we’re looking for more hosts for interns.
Crisp: Be the bridge.

McCurdy: That’s right. Be the bridge. That’s what we always say. We hope to connect with you in the future, and thanks for listening to another great episode of “Bridge the Gap.”

- Listen to Podcasts
- Watch YouTube Video
- Check Available Internships
## Seniors Housing & Care Industry Calendar

**March 2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/13-14</td>
<td>AHIP National Health Policy Conference</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/14-15</td>
<td>2019 PREA Spring Conference</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17-20</td>
<td>LeadingAge PEAK Leadership Summit &amp; Great Minds Gala</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/18-20</td>
<td>Nineteenth Population Health Colloquium</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27-28</td>
<td>Health Datapalooza</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>McKnight’s Expo Webinar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## NIC Partners

We gratefully acknowledge our following partners:

### Premier Partners

- CapitalOne
- CIBC
- KeyBank Real Estate Capital
- LANCASTER POLLARD
- LTC
- OMEGA Healthcare
- VENTAS
- welltower

### Official Partners

- BERKADIA
- Blueprint
- BOK Financial
- Capital Funding Group
- GRISTSTONE
- HCP
- HUNT
- Marcus & Millichap
- mb financial
- MERIDIAN CAPITAL GROUP
- midcap
- NH
- Wells Fargo