

Taking PAC to the People

By Ed Youngblood, *Coping with Dementia, LLC*



Through Coping with Dementia LLC, Debbie Selsavage and Ed Youngblood take PAC-based training and counseling anywhere it is needed throughout the Nature Coast Region of Florida.

Recently, during a dinner meeting with Debbie Selsavage and Ed Youngblood following one of her workshops in Sarasota, Florida, dementia expert Teepa Snow said, “I don’t know anyone else who has done what you are doing with my Positive Approach to Care (PAC) training. No one else has formed a company to market this concept to the public.” Typically, those trained by Teepa are affiliated with health care corporations where they apply PAC to their internal training curricula.

Debbie Selsavage learned about dementia the hard way; by caring for her husband Albert who died in 2010. She remembers it as a horrific experience with one Assisted Living Facility after another refusing to care for him because he was “combative.” Selsavage recalls, “He was a gentle man, and I was baffled by how quickly his behavior changed under professional care. He was kicked out of three ALFs and on one occasion [involuntarily committed] and put in four-point restraints. He came back from that one battered and bruised.”

Fortunately, a few months before Albert’s death, Debbie found a small facility run by a cheerful Jamaican couple who told her, “Don’t worry, he will never leave this place. We will love him through this.” Debbie says, “I had no idea what they were talking about, but I saw it work. Albert’s final months were serene and free of conflict. They practiced what I would later learn to call ‘compassionate care.’”

Debbie and Ed Youngblood met in 2012 and became a committed couple. She had become core trained, had earned her license as an ALF administrator, and was running a memory care facility in Crystal River, Florida. Debbie was determined that other families would not suffer through her care-giving experience, and she began to practice her own methods of compassionate care.

Despite leading her community to a State of Florida deficiency-free rating within a year, work as an ALF administrator was not a happy experience. Ed explains, “Corporate leadership just didn’t get it. Once she was even reprimanded for spending too much time with the residents and their families. Can you imagine that?”

After hearing about her situation, a friend told Debbie, “Look, you are killing yourself to help a couple-dozen people with no thanks for it. Why don’t you form your own consulting company, be your own boss, and help thousands?” Debbie says that it took some time for the idea to sink in. She and Ed had never done anything entrepreneurial

in their lives. Youngblood's career had been spent in communications and management with a well-established and highly-structured non-profit corporation.

In September 2014, Debbie and Ed organized a conference for family caregivers they called "Coping with Dementia." Ed recalls, "It was a surprising success. With no advertising budget and publicity only through word-of-mouth and press releases, we brought in 200 people! We were stunned and giddy with excitement. It proved to us that there is a market for what Debbie does. That night she submitted her letter of resignation, and we incorporated Coping with Dementia, LLC."

Selsavage immediately completed her PAC training, became a caregiver support group facilitator for the Alzheimer's Family Organization, and both she and Youngblood became Certified Dementia Practitioners. Simply stated, Coping with Dementia's mission was to "Make life better for individuals and families living with dementia."

They created a menu of three training programs that includes "ABC of Dementia," designed for family caregivers, "Dementia Friendly Business Training," and "Culture of Compassionate Care," designed for professional elder care companies. In addition to this, Debbie has frequent speaking engagements, runs her monthly Alzheimer's Family Organization caregiver support groups, writes a monthly column for the Citrus County Chronicle, serves on the Alzheimer's Family Organization board of directors, and offers confidential one-on-one counseling for individuals and families.

Ed, who handles the communications, marketing, and business planning for the company, says, "A great deal of what we do is *pro bono*. Our business training, professional health care, and counseling are fee-based, but ABC of Dementia and public speaking are free." He continues, "We have no debt and have structured the company with revenue streams that can sustain us indefinitely, so we are not under immediate pressure to make a profit."

Coping with Dementia, LLC's business philosophy is a little unconventional. Ed explains, "For me, the primary purpose of a business should not be to make a profit. It should be to deliver a quality service or product and to benefit the community in which it operates. If it does this well, profit will be the by-product."

Friends of Debbie and Ed have looked at the Coping with Dementia business model and suggested they franchise it, noting that there will be a thriving market for family dementia care training in the coming years.

Ed replies, "That's not our ambition right now. Our focus is to operate within the Nature Coast Region of Florida, including Citrus and surrounding counties. This is a big enough task, the two of us." "Besides," he says, "The problem in expansion is style and quality. You can achieve quality control for fried chicken and sell it far and wide with a cardboard cutout of Col. Sanders, but how do you duplicate Debbie Selsavage? She is an absolute star with an uncanny talent for connecting with people and families living with dementia. Her dedication, her personality, and her commitment to our mission are what make this company go."

Recalling the start-up days of Coping with Dementia, LLC, Debbie Selsavage says, “We’ve confronted a lot of rigid thinking in health care. I cannot count the times I was told, ‘You can’t succeed; you’re not a nurse.’ But neither is Teepa Snow, and it is her PAC training that has made this possible. Her company is willing to invest in people like me, and part of my goal is to pay that back by taking the wonder and beauty and gratification of compassionate dementia care to the people.”

For more information about Coping with Dementia, LLC go to www.coping.today.