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It's About the Journey

*by Rosemary Apol-Hoezee & Lynn Bolt,
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Asheville, North Carolina: Think two steamy days in late summer. Think two women with sweaty palms and rapid heartbeats. This is where we began PAC Trainer Certification, the first step of our journey. Except we thought our journey would be a 5K run, maybe even a brisk walk. Little did we know, we were beginning a long-distance marathon.

Our organization had received a grant to effect fundamental change in the way staff cared for people living with dementia. We were appointed to lead the charge. Once we received our trainer certification, we hit the ground running with multiple sessions of Normal Aging vs Not Normal Aging.

We were nervous as cats. Wedded to our well-choreographed scripts, we still stumbled over words. We struggled mightily getting the DVD cued up to the right spots. And when we were done, we sunk down into chairs, gulped water, and worked our way through the learners' evaluations. Written comments were brief, but we began seeing "Enjoyed this class" and "learned a lot."

Within four months of our certification, we had trained nearly 230 staff. We gained a new confidence with our presentation. No longer utterly dependent on our scripts, we could focus more on the learners, not ourselves. And we began to notice things. That young woman who sat with her arms folded across her chest? Did you see how she started making eye contact and asking questions half way through? Did you notice that aide's "aha" moment when he practiced the Positive Physical Approach? Our learners now wrote more expansive comments on evaluations: "I had no idea dementia affects the brain so severely." "I'm looking at approaching dementia in a whole new way."

We had been training for six months, and we were still working our way through the entire staff roster. We began wondering about those initial learners. Were they using their new skills?

So we became [PAC Coaches](#) and a whole new world opened up for us. We started rounding, handing out the [PPA Cheat Sheet](#) to staff. They practiced their skills and began asking us about approaches with specific residents. They realized we weren't there to test them, but rather to build their toolbox. As one staff member said, "you're really invested in our learning."

Coaching has allowed us to assess our continued training needs. It has also solidified our relationship with staff. We are now partners in the journey. We have come a long way, but we have more distance to cover. That's ok. We're in it for the long run.

Rosemary Apol-Hoezee and Lynn Bolt are nurses (as well as PAC coaches and trainers). Rosemary is the director of quality & training, and Lynn is coordinator of Holland Home's Memory Care Services. They became certified trainers in 2016.

Rosemary also has a Master's degree in public health and in English literature. Lynn has been in staff education for about eight years. She has extensive experience working with the geriatric population. Rosemary's experience has been in mental health nursing both in the geriatric population and in the general population.