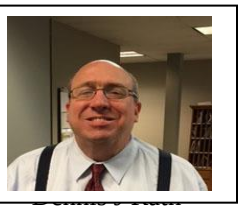
Dennis Rath
Home Sellers Newsletter



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Rocky River, Ohio

Cleveland MAGAZINE
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Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude
- Zig Ziglar

Motivation gets you going and habit gets you there!
- Zig Ziglar

In the game of life, before you get anything out, you must put something in!
- Zig Ziglar

During this time of year, I think a lot about a group of people that work 24/7, and stand ready to do a job that I think is one of the hardest, thankless jobs you could ever have; hospital employees. These people work in a place that's surrounded by injury, illness and death. It's also not the safest environment to work in. They run the risk of contracting serious illnesses or diseases, deal with people out of their minds so high they don't even know where they are, people carrying weapons, and the mentally ill. Just imagine working in a place where it's not uncommon to hear the heart wrenching screams from a parent who comes through the door holding a lifeless baby in their arms.

When people think of hospital employees they mostly think about the doctors and surgeons. However, there is a front line of employees that are almost invisible. I am talking about all of the other employees that make a hospital run. Nurses, technicians, environmental staff, laundry staff, transporters, ambulance personnel, security guards…the list goes on and on. These people are just as exposed to the dangers, and their hearts break when they hear the screams and see the faces of sorrow.

At the holidays this hard job becomes even harder. All of the patients are the sickest of the sick because the hospital will send home everyone that can be sent home, and the staff is stuck at work away from friends and family. I'm sure you think that they are compensated for the time, but you'd be surprised how little the 'behind the scenes' employees make. I know because I was lucky enough to have had a part time job that paid for my family's health care during the great recession.

Every year around this time as I pass Fairview Hospital, I think about those people doing their jobs day in and day out, with no accolades or thanks. I am hyper aware at this time of the year for a couple of reasons; one being that I started out my life spending Christmas in a hospital. I am the last of six children, so when I was born on the 23rd, my mom missed being home with her other children for Christmas that year. Being away from family on Christmas would be hard for most of us, but for my mom it had to be really bad. You see, my mom loved everything about Christmas from the decorations to the meal. Growing up, our home was an experience that you had with all of your senses. Lights inside the house and out, a regular Christmas tree, a few ceramic ones, animated figurines, two nativity scenes…and let's not forget the smells! We had fresh holly, & pine branches, and mistletoe above the doors. Every Saturday was cleaning day, bed sheets were changed, floors cleaned, furniture dusted… Growing up, my mom would wake us up to the sound of what she called cleaning music, and beginning around Thanksgiving, the Saturday cleaning soundtrack was replaced with Christmas music.

My mom often told me the story of our first Christmas in Lakewood Hospital.

The only decoration she had was a Christmas tree she could see in the window of an apartment across the street. Every evening around six the person would turn the lights on. For that year that was our Christmas tree. She would look forward to that every night. She always would end the story with how she wished she could thank them and let them know how important that tree was to her. My mom also had had a special place in her heart for the nurses that took care of us. She would often say how nice they were to us, and on several occasions they went above and beyond to make her hospital stay bearable. Every year on my birthday I get together with my siblings for pizza and cake. A tradition that my mom started when I was a kid and it continues on to this day with the only difference being that since my parents have died, I pay for the pizza. I don't know why I do it, because every year during this celebration, I am reminded that mom was not home for Christmas in 1964 because of me. So I guess it's my way of making amends to them for the year I had mom all to myself.

Now fast forward 29 years and in early December 1994, I came down with some type of bug that I couldn't seem to shake. I went to the ER to be checked out, was diagnosed with the flu and sent home. Later that day I talked with my mom and she felt something was not right, so the next day she sent my sister over to check on me. When my sister Traci arrived, I was having a hard time walking and I was slurring my words. Realizing something was terribly wrong, she helped me into the car to take me back to the hospital. I was getting worse and very quickly. So quickly that in the middle of all of the tests that Dr. Riley ordered a doctor came in and told me, "Mr. Rath, you have every symptom of ALS, but I have never seen it progress this fast." As soon as I heard that, I thought I was going to die. Dr. Riley came back in and said, "I think I know what this is, but we need to do a few more tests." The next day, I was diagnosed with Guillain–Barré Syndrome (GBS). By this time I was almost completely paralyzed. I still thought I was going to die because I never heard of Guillain–Barré syndrome. I was transported from Lakewood Hospital to University Hospital where I was admitted and immediately sent to the intensive care unit.

GBS is an odd thing. I felt normal and could think clear as a bell, but I could not move my body all the way to my mouth. During my stay in the ICU the nurses went above and beyond for me and they literally did a lot of heavy lifting. At the time, I was around 260 pounds of dead weight. Any movement that I did during that time was done by those nurses in the ICU because I had no muscle control. They had to bathe me, change my clothes, change my bed linens, and every other thing necessary. To say I was embarrassed was an understatement and they understood that and did their best to ease my discomfort.

Every day in the I.C.U., I had a treatment called plasmapheresis. It's a process of removing all of the plasma from the blood by running it through a machine sort of like dialysis, and it took hours to complete. During one of the procedures my arm twitched and the needle in it went through the vein and my blood pressure dropped like a rock. I had tunnel vision and blacked out. When I woke up I was in the Trendelenburg position, my head was near the floor and feet were in the air. My room was full of hospital staff, there were alarms going off everywhere. After that happened along with the A.L.S. comment I was convinced that I was going to die and I slipped into a very dark place. Lying in my room in ICU, unable to move my body, my thoughts consumed with my death, in walked my nurse. I don't know if she had any formal psychology classes or it was just her experience, but she knew something was not right with me. She engaged me and got me talking and slowly began to pull me out of the darkness. She would say, "You know you're alright." and "That happens sometimes, we are ready and prepared for it. Don't you worry you're going to be just fine."

A few weeks ago I was reading that people recover faster, and they think more often from major illnesses when they have faith. After reading that, I have thought what would have happened if my nurse just changed my I.V. and walked out leaving me in that dark place? After all, it's not in her job description to see that the people in her area are doing well emotionally.

On my 30th birthday I was moved into a regular room, and I was organizing a pity party for myself because I was now 30 and still very dependent on others for every human need. I was unsure about what the future held, and mad as hell about spending my birthday and Christmas in a hospital. As you can see, back then gratitude was not my go to response. It should have been after all, I was out of ICU and on my way to recovery. The hospital staff went all out for me.

I can recall thinking they must have had a memo go around informing everyone about my birthday because it seemed to me that every hospital employee from the housekeeper to the phlebotomist came into my room to wish me a happy birthday.

Then later that night my nurse came into my room and gave me one of the best birthday gifts I have ever received. She asked, "Do you have someone that could drive you to your parents' home for a few hours on Christmas? They would have to get you back here by 7pm." YES! I do! I called my sister Mame. On Christmas Eve lying in the hospital I had a hard time going to sleep just like when I was a kid. I was so excited to be going home for Christmas even if it was for only a few hours!

I will always remember a few of the things that happened that Christmas day; the first was sitting in the family room alone as everyone was cleaning up the dishes after dinner. The only lights on were on the Nativity scene and two animated angels holding candles. I kept thinking about what my ICU nurse said, "You're going to be fine." Maybe she was right. After all, I was in my parents' home. I did not want to go back, but I resolved that I would do whatever was going to be asked of me.

The next thing was a gift Jen gave me. It was an autographed photo of Zig Ziglar. He is a motivational speaker best known for his first book '**See You at the Top**". That photo sat by my bed in the hospital to remind me to stay positive. The overnight nurse asked me, "Is that a picture of your daddy? Is your daddy Bob Barker?" The nurse asking me, "Honey, why do you have a picture of Bob Barker next to your bed?", was the first time I had laughed since the whole thing began. Even today it makes me chuckle.

The other funny thing was a typical mom thing. Before I left to go back to the hospital my mom gave me boxes of candy for the nurses. Her instructions were "This candy is not for you, it's for your nurses. Don't eat any of it!" "Ok fine." I said. Then she said, "Don't bother them tonight, it's Christmas." "Mom," I said, "I cannot move without assistance, I need their help!" Not paying attention to my last comment her reply was, "I know, just don't bother them, and don't be a pest!"

A few days later I was sent by ambulance to Metro hospital for rehab. Metro also had a great staff. They went above and beyond as well. After my normal rehab, the staff made sure I did not just lie in my bed and watch TV. They got me up and they played cards with me and pushed me around the hospital. I was very lucky to have such great people around me. It seemed like they were always up and positive. I was sent home after a few weeks for out-patient rehabilitation, and was back to work around 6 or 7 months later.

Once I recovered, I remembered that my mom always said she wished she could thank the people with the Christmas tree that year I was born, so I went back to thank the nurses. I was hoping to see the ICU nurse that gave me the reassurance, but I did not see her. I have had the opportunity to visit a few people in the hospital that have come down with GBS, and my goal is to give them the hope that was given to me.

The last thing that makes me appreciate hospital workers this time of year is that I have worked at Fairview Hospital and have worked a few holidays including Christmas. I can tell you from my experience that I have never worked with a better group of people. I was blessed to get a job at Fairview during the great recession. The job was part time and it had the healthcare I needed to have for my family. My job was cleaning operating rooms. It was a hard, dirty job, and I had a front row seat at the real inner workings of a very busy hospital. Being in environmental services, every day I could see people going through some of life's most serious issues and you can't help but be changed by it. I have watched my fellow employees walk out of a room with tears in their eyes for a patient that has died, and I have seen some with a smile so big they could have eaten a banana sideways. Every day working in a hospital is like a rollercoaster of emotion. Working holidays for me was very difficult. The only operations being performed are emergencies, so I was moved down to clean emergency rooms. At the end of a holiday shift if you were not grateful for your healthy life, you were not paying attention.

The people that work in a hospital all have an extra gene; the gene of compassion. They have our backs and are willing to help the helpless. When our life has been turned upside down, they stand at the ready to help us put it back together. So this holiday season when you pass by a hospital, hold a good thought and say a prayer for all of them.

Thank you for the trust you have placed in me, I am very grateful to all of you.

From my family to yours, merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

Dennis, Jen, Claire and Charlie

See you next Year!

Dennis J Rath
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