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CareLinks

Adjust the Sails

"You can't direct the wind, but you can adjust the sails."

– A Caregiver

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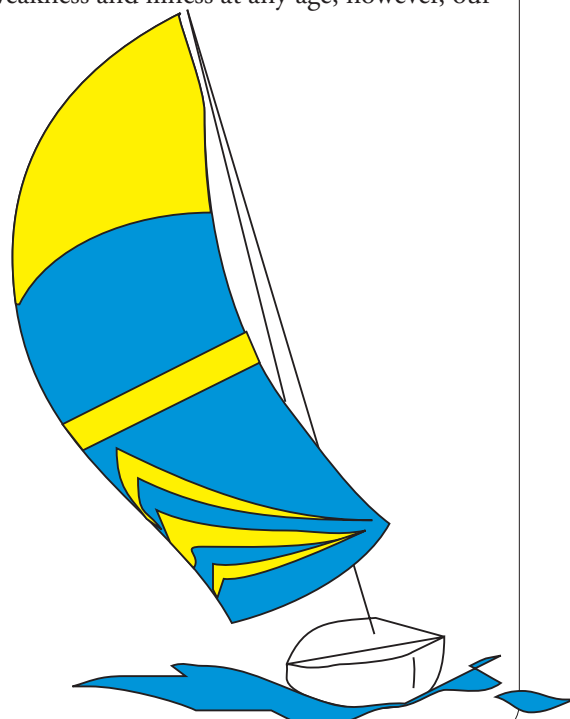
Adversity comes to us all eventually. It is the nature of the human condition that we are vulnerable and mortal. Accidents, diseases, and physical decline are viewed often as evils which befall us. They are considered unwelcome intrusions into our mastery of our lives. We may try to resolve the age-old question of a God of love and the existence of evil, but even if we arrived at the perfect explanation, we would remain vulnerable and mortal creatures. Perhaps the more relevant question with respect to vulnerability and mortality is how we respond to events in life that remind us that we are interdependent beings. The American cultural ideals of independence and self-sufficiency are inconsistent with biblical teachings that we are created as social beings who realize our humanity in relationship with others.

The Care Team program is, at its heart, an exercise in building relationships among team members and with care partners. The catalyst for these relationships is the weakness or inability of others to meet their daily needs. The presence and practical assistance of Care Team members is a moral, loving, and compassionate response to the weaknesses and needs of others. In a sense, team members and care partners are realizing their humanity together, each discovering a need for the other and finding fulfillment in these relationships of mutual care.

Our needs for each other vary over the lifespan. During infancy, we are totally dependent on others. During adulthood, our dependency may be more social, emotional, and economic, rather than physical. And, from childhood until death, we typically strive to exercise control over our lives and circumstances. During times of weakness and illness at any age, however, our physical dependency is revealed anew. The illusions of independence and self-sufficiency are shattered. We are forced to admit that our control is limited and our independence is relative.

The caregiver's comment which opens this article offers wise insight into how we may respond to weakness, vulnerability, and coerced dependency. The winds of physical degeneracy, disease, trauma, and adversity of countless kinds may build in strength during a lifetime until they throw us off course, so to speak. A tipping point is reached where we concede, privately if not publicly, that there are forces beyond ourselves greater than ourselves that we cannot control. Plans, hopes, dreams, and independence succumb to these powerful winds that increasingly dictate how we spend our days.

It is tempting to deny what is happening to us because the winds may portend a fate we wish to escape. We may minimize our losses and



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Adjust the Sails

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engage in elaborate cover-ups so that our pride and dignity may be preserved for as long as possible. We may withdraw from family and friends because we don't want to worry them, incur their pity, or risk their intrusion into our daily routines. These are powerful instinctual reactions linked to our social conditioning of valuing independence and self-determination above all else. They are ways of 'adjusting the sails' to perpetuate the fiction of independence and self-sufficiency.

Another way of 'adjusting the sails' affirms our nature as interdependent. We can accept that our capacities are changing due to illness, age, or accident. We can seek medical help to minimize or slow the process of decline. Even though some aspects of our lives are out of our control, we can realize that we can control other aspects. We can 'adjust the sails' in these other areas in ways that will contribute to the quality of our daily lives. Too often people mistakenly feel that a disease or disability *controls* every aspect of their daily existence. It is more likely, however, that a disease or disability *affects* many aspects of one's daily existence. Affecting is not controlling. In most cases, we still have power to determine how we shall spend our days and what adjustments we can or will undertake to make the best of a bad situation. In short, "You can't direct the wind, but you can adjust sails."

The people we serve may feel so beaten down, weak, and hopeless that they are incapable of seeing what control they can exercise to live as well and as happily as they can. They may feel overwhelmed by losses. They may not be able to identify the many options that they have that will help make life worth living. Care Team members can help

care partners to think about the resources and options they have, rather than focusing only on what they are losing. Team members can enable them to regain some self-esteem and self-determination by helping them exercise control over their lives where they can. This process of 'adjusting the sails' or taking control of what can be controlled may be a gradual process. Small successes lead to greater success as care partners gain confidence. Step-by-step, care partners may respond constructively to the winds that threaten to overwhelm them.

Team members can be 'enablers' in a positive way. We can help care partners to see options that they cannot see on their own. We can affirm these adjustments to the sails and celebrate with them the power against the winds that they now exercise. As tempting as it may be, at times, team members should never take control of a care partner's life or circumstances. Our role is a supportive one. We are guests in their homes and lives. Our presence and practical assistance is offered in support of their values and prudent choices. We can encourage care partners to continue to 'adjust the sails' as the winds blow and change.

A care partner's invitation to a Care Team to share her or his journey is a form of adjusting the sails. It is a declaration of human interdependence as ill-winds strip away the facades of independence and self-sufficiency. It is a basis upon which to build relationships of trust and mutual care in which we become most 'human' as we affirm and celebrate our needs for others. These relationships offer countless teachable moments for care partners and team members alike to learn and demonstrate that interdependence can be an ennobling counterweight to weakness and vulnerability.

Introducing 'Second Helpings'

Second Helpings is a new opportunity for Second Family Care Team leaders to meet together for education, training, sharing, and fellowship. Alzheimer's Care Team leaders have been meeting together as a 'Gathering Table' for several years. The first Second Helpings was held on September 30 at Bellaire United Methodist Church. The meeting featured a presentation and group discussion on 'Losses: A Caring Response,' a fun Skittles game as a way to meet each other, sharing resources, conversation about home safety, and more. Second Helpings will provide Second Family Care Team leaders and members with helpful information and skills that will strengthen their teams and enrich their support of care partners. Watch for the date of the next Second Helpings and plan to be there!

News You Can Use!

Care Team Continuing Education Conference

– Education and training are necessary for team members to be properly equipped to provide the best possible care and support to care partners. Team meetings are an opportunity for brief presentations and training exercises. The annual Care Team Conference provided a more extensive time for members of all teams to gather, learn, share stories, and have fellowship. The Care Team conference previously announced for 2009 has been cancelled in favor of a better option. All team members now will be invited to attend one or more of the four conferences for caregivers held each year. These conferences feature at least 20 workshops on topics of interest to caregivers, whether family members or Care Team members. Two conferences generally are held in The Woodlands (February and September) and two in central Houston (January and August). These educational and skill-building workshops will help team members understand the situations in which they are involved, identify resources in the community, learn information that will empower you and caregivers, and provide wonderful networking and sharing opportunities. Registration and lunch are free.

Employer Gifts – Does your current or former employer have a program that supports your volunteer role with Interfaith CarePartners? ExxonMobil VIP Program and Chevron Humankind honor the volunteer service of employees and retirees, as well as their spouses, by making grants to the charity upon request by the employee, retiree, or spouse. Chevron Humankind will donate \$500 for 20 hours and \$1,000 for 40 hours annually for retirees and employees. It also will match 1:1 financial gifts of employees up to \$5,000 annually and up to \$2,000 for retirees. ExxonMobil VIP grants \$500 for every 20 hours of individual service with a cap to the charity of \$5,000 annually. Teams

of 5 employees, retirees, and spouses can request a grant for every 20 hours of collective time with a cap of \$10,000 annually. If these opportunities apply to you, please make a grant request for Interfaith CarePartners. These programs are a wonderful and easy way for a company to honor your service and help the caregiving programs of Interfaith CarePartners to remain strong and grow.

Recycle Used and Broken Electronics – Do you have used or broken electronics cluttering your home? You may recycle a laptop computer, cell phone, iPod, Wii, Xbox, Play Station, digital camera, or Game Cube by bringing it to a team meeting to give to your staff person from Interfaith CarePartners. We'll send it for recycling, protect the environment, and secure funds to support the spiritual care of older adults. Consider conducting a collection drive in your congregation. Many teams have found this to be a good way to publicize your team, recruit new members, and care for God's creation.

Government Employees - We would be grateful for federal employees to invite your colleagues to support your caregiving by designating Combined Federal Campaign gifts to Interfaith CarePartners (agency number 33728). State employees have a similar opportunity through the State Employee Charitable Campaign (agency number 334012). Thank you for participating in this special form of caring.

Dates to Remember – Alzheimer's Care Team 'Gathering Table,' Thursday, October 29; Houston Caregiver Conference, St. Luke's United Methodist, Saturday, January 30, 2010; The Woodlands Caregiver Conference, Christ Church United Methodist, Saturday, February 20, 2010; Sweet Charity, Sunday, February 28, 2010.



www.InterfaithCarePartners.org

Our Internet web page has been totally revised and updated. Visitors to the site will learn about our history, programs, values, mission, vision, awards given and received, newsletters, accountability documents, volunteer opportunities, and see the stars who have donated appearances in support of our programs. The team member timesheet is still there for you to complete each month so we can report the team's activities to your congregation at your next anniversary. Take a look! We hope you will learn something new about Interfaith CarePartners.

“I’ve noticed that the older, the more gnarled the cherry tree, the greater the profusions of blossoms. And sometimes the oldest and dustiest bottles hold the most sparkling wine. I’m drawn by faces lined with crow’s feet, those ‘credentials of humanity,’ beautifully lit from within.”

–William Sloane Coffin

Who Writes CareLinks?

A team member called to ask who writes CareLinks? She particularly liked an article, but did not know who to compliment or thank. Although ideas and suggestions for articles come from staff members and team members, the articles are the musings of Dr. Earl Shelp, president and co-founder of Interfaith CarePartners. I also write the **Connections** newsletter which is sent to team members, care partners, donors, and friends, whereas **CareLinks** is sent only to team members.

It is always satisfying to hear praise, rather than criticism, but all responses, comments, and suggestions are welcome. You may reach me at 713.682.5995 or EShelp@interfaithcarepartners.org. As I often say in presentations, we are all students of caregiving, learning from each other, research, and the persons we serve how to care with greater sensitivity and expertise. I learn from others as I hope they do from me. Don’t be shy. Send me your thoughts, comments, suggestions, criticism, and praise. I promise to learn from you.

Care Team Anniversaries (October-December)

AIDS Care Team

Trinity Episcopal, Baytown [20]

Alzheimer’s Care Team

Bellaire United Methodist [2]

Grace Presbyterian [16]

Jersey Village Baptist [12]

Memorial Drive United Methodist [16]

St. Anne Catholic, Tomball [2]

St. John the Divine Episcopal [9]

Westminster United Methodist [8]

Second Family Care Team

Corpus Christi Catholic [9]

Epiphany of the Lord Catholic, Katy [11]

Holy Cross Lutheran [5]

Hosanna Lutheran [14]

Olivet Missionary Baptist [4]

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic, Rosenberg [7]

Pearland United Methodist [1]

St. Anne Catholic, Houston [12]

St. Cyril Catholic [2]

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic [7]

St. Martha Catholic [5]

St. Patrick Catholic [8]

Willow Meadows Baptist [8]

Woodlands Community Presbyterian [11]

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