

Peace in War Zones

What is the right environment for the workplace? Maintaining an atmosphere that is productive, pleasant and happy for everyone affected by it is important, to be sure. For those of us who work in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, keeping the right balance for service to residents and a positive team approach in which associates feel fulfilled and cheerful is even more essential.

LeAnn Thiemann, a nurse for more than 30 years and a speaker at a couple of annual meetings for Life Care directors of nursing, offers an illustration on this subject. She is co-author of the *New York Times* best-seller *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul*, as well as *Chicken Soup for the Caregiver's Soul* and others. Here is the story she tells:

A tornado hit Iowa hours before she arrived to visit her 93-year-old mother in her assisted living home. Fallen trees and electrical lines blocked impassable streets as she careened in her rental car to finally arrive and hug her. "I was shocked to find the 30-bed facility, operating only on generators, to be an oasis of calm amidst the disaster in my rural hometown. Nurses and caregivers, many of whom I later learned had lost their own homes and/or possessions the night before, calmly and cheerfully served Mom and others. Only when I inquired about their lives and families did they share their losses. I complimented the director, Bethany, on the peacefulness and positivity that reigned in spite of surrounding turmoil.

"This is what you speak about,' she reminded me. (She had read my book, *Finding Peace in Our War Zones*). In our conversation, I learned that she had taught all of her staff to bring peace, positivity and calm to the workplace. Then, knowing they cannot give what they do not have inside, she took it a step further. 'I want this place to be one of peace and positivity and calm for *my staff, too*, because some of them have war zones in their own lives.'

"How often have we heard (and I agree) that health care workers need to leave their pain, problems and personal storms at the door, for we cannot bring it to the place and people we serve," Thieman continued. "But how often do we hear that a director wants the workplace to be a place of calm and balance for the worker?"

Then Thieman asked a probing question: "What if all facilities strived to help their staff find physical, mental and spiritual balance in the workplace? What if they all cared for their people like Bethany? I know what would happen. They would all give competent, compassionate care to my mom and others, no matter what the storms."

LeAnn Thieman is right on target. Success in our buildings is achieved through leadership that can orchestrate such a balancing act.

– Beecher Hunter