

CHRISSY MORGAN, BSN, RN, CDONA

How This Regional Director Transcended Her Environment and Found Purpose

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Chrissy Morgan, the Interim President of the newly established Kansas NADONA association, has always valued empathy. Beginning in childhood she felt compassion for those who had survived traumatic events. In fact, one of her earliest childhood memories is going with her grandfather Jerry (who had a side job as a professional clown) to homeless shelters during holidays and passing out presents. "I root for the underdog. I root for the person who struggles in life," she says.

As a Regional Director of Clinical Services for Mission Health Communities, it's fitting that she now provides empathy training to nursing communities. In her previous position, as the Director of Nursing at a struggling community, she developed training based upon the two videos linked at the bottom of the next page. This training encourages participants to look at what they have in common with co-workers rather than their differences. Chrissy felt that training was essential because the nursing home staff seemed to be defeated by the work environment and often quarrelled with each other. "I've had people in tears because we forget the human side of us and we become so focused on work and...work performance," she says.

Chrissy notes that it is unrealistic to expect that all staff can leave their personal problems at the door. "You don't



know what someone has gone through or why they continue to make the decisions they make," she says. "Many don't realize that this job may be their refuge from home." In her current position, she is helping Mission Health Communities develop a process to identify the emotional state of employees and to offer guidance to those who are dealing with difficult situations.

Temporary Refuge From a Challenging Childhood

Growing up, Chrissy herself sometimes felt defeated by challenging life circumstances. She grew up in a single-mother household, living as a child in various poor neighborhoods in the Phoenix area. She experienced frequent disruptions, as her small family moved every year from Grade One through Grade Seven. When she was 12, Chrissy moved with her mother and her older sister Katie to a small town in Barton County, KS, a place where stable two-

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parent households were the norm. Chrissy states: “I didn’t realize that’s what I was missing until I came to Kansas. I didn’t realize that I was missing not having a dad.”

At 13, the family moved again, this time to the small town of St. John, KS. During this period of relative stability—they stayed put for three years—Chrissy took up long-distance running (800, 1,600 and 3,200 meters as well as relays). “Running gave me freedom, a way out, space and air to breathe.” In the beginning, though, she was a “hot mess” as a runner, she’d run fast, then slow down, then start sprinting when another runner was on her tail. Her coach, who was a father-like figure and a mentor, instilled his love of running onto Chrissy, teaching her how to pace herself and to breathe correctly and to kick it in gear at the end. She progressed to become the fastest female runner in her school, running two years in state cross country and one year in state track in the 800-meter dash. “He pushed me to not give up even when I wanted to slow down,” she says. “To see an adult with so much determination to push me into not giving up, made me have a special place in my heart for him.” He later came to her wedding, which meant the world to her.

Veering From a Path of Destruction

Chrissy, who never stayed in one place long enough to make lasting friendships, felt like she belonged in St. John and that she had a purpose in life. When her mother decided to move again in Chrissy’s junior year, she “felt a huge loss, like a death.” In her hopelessness, she dropped out of regular high school, later switching to an alternative school. She also gave up running and did not return to it until she was an adult; she now dabbles in it from time to time. “Going out in the morning and smelling the crisp air brings me back to one of the happiest moments in my childhood, that I will never forget.”

For a couple of years, Chrissy was headed down a wrong path. “I hung with kids that made bad choices and I knew that was not the direction I wanted to go,” she says. Luckily, at 18, her life took a major U-turn. She had developed a crush on Bryan Morgan, a young man with similar feelings for Chrissy who gave her an ultimatum: straighten up or move on. “Amazingly, I didn’t have a reason to go in another direction till I met my husband, and he was my way out.”

She and Bryan hung out for two years and dated for one year before getting married in 2004. The couple currently live with their 21-year-old son Myles and 15-year-old daughter Madyson, a bulldog and two young cats in Wichita, KS. When she and Bryan were first together, Rebecca, Bryan’s mother, who worked as a nurse’s aide, took Chrissy in as her own child. She also encouraged her to look for work in a nursing home and subsequently paid for her to take the CNA course.

Chrissy, who eventually became an LPN, then an RN, started her career in hospitality, making beds and passing out ice water. Later, as a CNA she advocated for patients even if that meant ruffling the feathers of co-workers who seemed to

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prioritize smoke breaks over patient care. “I could have been complacent. I could have just done all the work of several people and not said anything, but that’s not the person that I am,” she says. “I didn’t care if I ever got fired from a job. I wasn’t afraid to voice what was right.” If she doesn’t quite understand a decision or a process, she still doesn’t just follow blindly—she poses questions or seeks a rationale.

After she received her RN degree, she worked in hospitals as an ER and ICU nurse, before moving back to long-term-care. “You see a side of life in the world that many don’t even know exist[s],” she says. “We think we have this safe area... but if you go and you work in the ER in a big city, you’ll see that there’s a total other world.” In the hospital setting, Chrissy focused on caring for patients who were physically and emotionally vulnerable, including people who came in with gun shot or stabbing wounds. Two memorable patients are a couple of adolescents who came into the ER, one who was strung out on meth and the other, a runaway who had escaped from her sex trafficker.

Chrissy points out that her life story didn’t start out the best, which is why she gravitates to people who are vulnerable and struggling to find a way out. “Some may see this life as shameful, embarrassing or not something to be proud of, [but] I find that my life has made me who I am today, an advocate, strong and empathetic. I still don’t know what my calling is but I know that my life has a greater purpose to serve not only the elderly but others as well.” 🐾

More Resources

- Empathy (View senior care through someone else’s eyes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovHcr1tOpBs>
- All That We Share <https://youtube/jD8tjhVO1Tc>

Katherine O’Brien is a freelance writer/editor/ghost-writer in the B2B/B2C health, aging and non-profit sectors who creates content that engages and educates target audiences and sells brands. She has written about advanced health and medical topics like dementia, cancer and aging for both general audiences as well as healthcare professionals and administrators.