

LifeMapSM



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December 4, 2007

This Week's Message:

**Protecting Our
Elders.**

Paths Forward

Resources

**Have Dr. Paul speak
at your next meeting
or conference.**

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Protecting Our Elders.

Sometimes the universe has to work very hard to get my attention. I was motivated to write this edition of LifeMap by a series of three related situations I experienced over the last few weeks. I will briefly share them here and, as I do, see if you see the theme emerging. (You are also free to wonder why it took such a barrage of input to get my, obviously distracted, attention.)

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For a few evenings in mid-November I sat and visited with a lovely person: the elderly widow of great friend in rural Maine. I was amazed (and annoyed) at the number of marketing phone calls that came in and also alarmed at how she dealt with them. A week or so later I gave a talk about meeting the challenges of the 'sandwich generation' (go to www.drpaulpowers.com, click on LifeMap Archive, open 5/1/07 *A Sandwich to Enjoy*) which is now caring for both children and parents. After a public presentation it's typical for a few people to come to the podium to ask a question or share a comment that they felt uncomfortable raising in the larger group. But after this presentation I was swamped by a crowd of folks, most of whom wanted information and resources related to the care, support and protection of their elders. A week later I was catching up with a long time friend who shared the medical and psychological challenges her elder parents were facing, the difficulty of getting them to accept competent, professional care, and her frustration with other family members who seem more concerned with her folks' "autonomy" and "privacy" than they do on their well-being and safety.

Together these incidents reminded me of the complex difficulties involved in supporting, helping and protecting our elders. And they clarified three crucial elements of any plan designed to accomplish this. They are: investing the time to seek out information to meet previously unknown challenges, providing concrete and easy to use tools our elders can use in their self-defense, and the willingness and fortitude to endure short-term discomfort and disagreement in order to arrange the support and care our elders may be no longer capable of arranging for themselves. If you are now caring for an aging loved one or see that in your future here are some things to consider.

Paths Forward

- **Don't Go It Alone.** No layperson is expected to automatically be an expert on the topic of elder care. There is a lot of information out there; the trick is separating the wheat from the chaff. The AARP magazine and website (www.aarp.org) is a great source. There are many other good web sites but, as you screen them, beware of those that may be trying, even subtly, to sell you something. Peruse the stacks of your library for books on elder care (like *The Caregiver's Handbook: How To Care For Your Aging Parent Without Losing Yourself* by Alexis Abramson). If you

are not web-skilled or want to find more resources ask your local reference librarian for help - that's their area of expertise and is what they are there for. Another aspect of not going it alone is to include all relevant family members. This may stimulate some debate and disagreement but better that it take place sooner rather than later during a crisis. In the event you decide to call in professional help consider locating an expert through the National Association of Professional Care Managers (www.caremanager.org) or a highly reputable, local agency with strong references such as Sostek Home Care (www.sostekhomecare.com) with whom I've worked.

• **Get Them To Hang Up.** Over a third of all telemarketing fraud victims are 60 years or older. While I'm sure some reputable telemarketers exist, the F.B.I. says there are thousands of fraudulent telemarketing companies out there. Can your elder tell the difference? Share this fact with your elders and do your best to convince them that those we are speaking of are heartless criminals who use the telephone the same way a mugger would use a knife or a gun - to rob them. Fraud victims are often not the uneducated, lonely or incompetent old folks they are made out to be. Often they are merely civil, polite, trusting individuals who may want to contribute to a reputable charity, quickly grow their investments or win a free trip. Can your elder tell the difference between a reputable offer and a scam? See if your elder wants you to sign him or her up for the national do not call registry (tel: 888-382-1222) or (www.donotcall.gov). Be aware you have to do this every 5 years. To separate bona-fide charities from scam artists NEVER contribute money from a phone solicitation and check out any prospective charity at (www.give.org). To cut down on telemarketing and junk mail get on the 'do not mail' list sponsored by Direct Mail.com (www.directmail.com). And lastly, do your best to convince your elders that if they do not know the person calling them or that person is not from someone they already do business with (such as their pharmacy or their dentist) that it is perfectly ok - that it is not rude - that it is important - to HANG UP THE PHONE.

• **What To Look For.** Is your elder's home filled with more magazines than any normal person could ever read? Are there multiple calendars hanging around from "Save the Wombats", "Remembering the Heroes of the Great Molasses Flood" or other supposed charities that you've never heard of? Do their credit card bills show payments to companies

that are out of the state or out of the country? Is there a constant parade of contractors making bids and soliciting deposits for repairs that may or may not be needed? Do you see enough new costume jewelry to choke Ivana Trump, do you see enough vitamins to choke a moose? Is their phone constantly ringing, is their mailbox always crammed with junk mail? These are all telltale signs that your elder is a prime scam target and may already be a victim. If so, in addition to the steps I noted above, contact the National Fraud Information Center (tel: 800-876-7060) (www.fraud.org).

• **Don't Wait.** Very few of us are at our best in a crisis. Sadly, it often takes a car crash, an accident in the home or a medical emergency for an elder to allow others to become involved in their care. Dealing with difficult issues at the worst of times is unlikely to result in the most positive outcomes for your elders. As uncomfortable as it may be, try to engage your elder in a discussion of his / her desires and possible future needs before you are scrambling to cope with a crisis. I have devoted an entire LifeMap edition to just this topic with some ideas you will find helpful (go to www.drpaulpowers.com, click on LifeMap Archive, open 11/04/06 *Time To Start 'The Talk'*)

• **Their Own Worst Enemy?** A "small" kitchen fire, repeated and costly financial mistakes, improperly using powerful medications, more dents and dings in the car, "occasionally" getting lost, dangerously cluttered, dirty or infested living quarters, one partner getting obviously inadequate or inappropriate "care" from the other - these are all signs that your elder is probably putting him or herself (as well as others) at risk of serious harm. Hopefully you have already put in place contingency plans for just this situation (again, this is why starting 'the talk' early is essential). Otherwise, as the responsible and healthy adult involved, it is now necessary for you to involve other family members, health care providers, the family lawyer and perhaps some governmental offices (e.g. Dept. of Social Services, Elder Affairs or Motor Vehicles). This can be done discretely and communicated to your elders with respect. But to do nothing because of your well intentioned but now- dangerous concerns about privacy and autonomy is its own form of elder abuse.

LifeMap is about looking out for the well being, health and safety of those we care about and doing what needs doing - easy or hard - to make that happen.

Resources

Someone you know job hunting or thinking about it?

To order the best, concise, all-round job changing guide available. "Winning Job Interviews: Reduce Interview Anxiety, Outprepare the Other Candidates, Land the Job You Love" by Dr. Paul Powers, click the link below.

Stalled at work? Still struggling to find your true vocation?

Or know someone who is? To order your copy of "Love Your Job! Loving the Job You Have, Finding a Job You Love" by Dr Paul Powers, click the link below.

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Sincerely,

Dr. Paul

Email: **drpaul@drpaulpowers.com**

Phone: 781-237-0550

Fax: 781-237-5721

Web: **<http://www.drpaulpowers.com>**

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