



## *To our Prospective Clients and Friends:*

We want all parties interested in our services to have the opportunity of learning as much about our company as possible, so that they can make the most informed decision. This goes for families considering entrusting us with the care of a loved one and senior-serving professionals considering a client referral.

These pages contain a selection of lessons learned, facts about Ready Hands and insights into how we approach home care delivery. We hope you find it useful. More information about Ready Hands and home care in general can be found on our website at [www.readyhands.com](http://www.readyhands.com).

*The Ready Hands Home Care Team*

## **Six Causes of Home Care Mishaps —and How to Prevent Them**

We've all heard the stories. Unexpected no-shows. Aides quitting after just days on an assignment, or completely mismatched to their clients. Constant turnover. Agency managers unreachable when problems arise.

How does such unacceptable customer service happen, and how can it be avoided? From our many years of experience, here is some of what we have learned:

### **Over-promising**

Eager to capture business in a competitive market, home care companies will often do anything to get a new client—even if it means promising what they can't deliver.

If a client's needs and circumstances make it unlikely that the company can provide optimal care, it's best to admit that up front rather than forge ahead and invite problems.

### **Failing to Consider Aides' Needs**

Happy aides mean happy clients. Our experience (not to mention common sense) suggests that an agency cannot achieve a satisfied client if the assigned aide is unhappy. If the commute is too long, the number of weekly hours insufficient to cover living expenses, the physical demands of care unreasonable, then no good aide will stay for long.

### **Poor Communication**

Good communication is the cornerstone of successful home care delivery. It starts with a visit by an agency representative to learn a client's particular needs and preferences. In turn, these considerations must drive the selection of the right home care aide(s).

If problems arise, a nurse or manager must be reachable 24/7 to address client concerns. Clients may forgive honest mistakes but will be justifiably angry if they can't reach someone in authority to discuss concerns.



### **Careless Hiring Practices**

Attracting the best employment applicants requires a planned, systematic hiring process. A key element is the cultivation of a large applicant pool by treating both applicants and employees with the utmost courtesy and respect. A reputation as a great employer is better than any employment advertising.

### **Rationalizing Misconduct**

Most home care aides are dedicated and honest, but there are exceptions. Minor performance issues can be addressed through counseling, but certain behaviors are incompatible with safe, professional service delivery. If these occur, it's time to cut the cord.

Unexcused no-shows are one prominent example. In the absence of a proven emergency, an aide who fails to appear for an assignment cannot ever again be entrusted with the care of vulnerable clients.

### **Sloppy Staffing and Scheduling**

Matching and assigning an aide to a particular client is much more than a simple dispatch function. It requires thoughtful aide selection and preparation. Provisions must be made for safe coverage in the event of an aide emergency. Without a carefully designed staffing system, mishaps are inevitable.

# Home Care Insights

## The “Match Game”: Finding the Right Aide for Every Client

In reference to a couple for whom Ready Hands provided home care for several years, a close family friend was moved to write us as follows:



Amy and her client.

*“Now that they are both gone, I feel I need to write to tell you what wonderful care and support they received from all four of the women you sent to help them: Mimi, Veronica, Bertie and Saada. I have never met kinder or more thoughtful people.”*

Ready Hands employs scores of aides for whom clients have expressed similar sentiments. We love our Home Care Aides! But achieving a high degree of customer satisfaction does not happen by accident; it requires planning in order to get a great match between an aide and client.

A particular aide might be a perfect fit for one client, but a disastrous choice for another. To make sure things work out well requires that we give consideration to many variables. Here are a few of them:

- ◆ **How will the personality and style of the aide conform to the client’s personality and preferences?** Some clients need someone who can take charge and show initiative without prompting. Others prefer to give active direction. Some clients value their private time. Others seek companionship and conversation.
- ◆ **How does the client’s desired schedule correspond to the aide’s availability and income needs?** A client requesting daily five-hour visits would not be the right assignment for an aide who is out of work and needs a full-time job. No matter how good the aide, such an arrangement cannot last and will disrupt care continuity.
- ◆ **Is the commuting distance reasonable in view of the daily work hours?** A 20-mile commute each way might be acceptable for a live-in aide or for an aide working 12-hour shifts, but not for an aide working just a few hours per day.
- ◆ **Are there pets in the home?** Some aides are allergic to cats or afraid of dogs, no matter how docile. Failing to ascertain this in advance can lead to a very embarrassing false start.
- ◆ **Are the aide’s skills and experience commensurate with the client’s needs?** An eager newly-trained aide might be perfect for a client with mild cognitive impairment with modest needs. However, such an aide would be a risky choice for a client requiring “total care”, especially if specialized tasks such as tube feedings or insulin injections are needed. And how about driving skills? Cooking capability?
- ◆ **Does the aide have conflicting obligations?** Some aides who work elsewhere or attend school during the daytime might express a desire for an overnight shift, but that would be problematic. An aide unavailable on weekends would be a poor choice for someone needing care seven days a week. Probing for such conflicts is essential.

## Fast Facts and Stats

**Year Ready Hands founded:** 2002.

**Ownership structure:** locally owned and operated small business, not a franchise.

**Total hours of service provided:** over 2 million.

**Average weekly hours/client:** about 75.

**Percentage receiving live-in care:** 15%.

**Comparative size:** more than four times larger than the average U.S. home care company.

**How clients hear about Ready Hands:** senior-serving professionals (68.9%); present or former clients (12.9%); internet (8.3%); other (9.9%).

**Longest service to a single client:** 12 years and counting!



## Live-in vs. 24-hour Care: What’s the Difference?

Ready Hands has many clients who require assistance both day and night. In these instances we assign two primary aides, each working 12-hour shifts—one for daytime and one for nights. Each is relieved on periodic days or weekends off. Such an arrangement constitutes true 24-hour care and is charged at our standard hourly rate.

An alternative for select clients is live-in home care. Ready Hands is one of a dwindling number of companies that offer this cost-effective option.

Live-in care can be a good choice for a client who is unsafe to be left completely alone, but who does not require active assistance at night. In a live-in arrangement, a single Home Care Aide stays on assignment for extended periods and is relieved no more often than every other weekend. The aide is permitted periodic breaks during the waking day and sleeps through the night in a private bedroom.

Consistent with federal wage and hour rules, live-in aides enter into written agreements with Ready Hands to waive compensation for sleep and meals times. Therefore, even though a live-in aide is present in the home for 24 hours a day, Ready Hands can charge clients a daily rate that is considerably less than our normal hourly rate.












Cynthia and her live-in client

# Home Care Insights

## Home Care Checklist:

### Things to Consider when Making your Choice

Private duty home care is a fragmented industry with many small competing companies. When the need for care arises, most consumers face a steep learning curve. Choosing a provider can be daunting. Although there are many questions to ask, here are a few considerations that we feel are particularly important in differentiating among home care companies.

QUESTION	IMPORTANCE	READY HANDS
Is the company licensed as a Home Care Organization by the Virginia Department of Health?	Licensure assures numerous protections for consumers, including credentialing standards, background and reference checks, bonding, insurance coverage and much more.	
Does the company use W-2 employed caregivers rather than 1099 independent contractors?	Companies using true employees must carry workers compensation and other insurances, handle payroll taxes, obtain state licensure and supervise their staff. None of this is true for 1099 companies.	
Does a qualified health professional, usually a registered nurse, perform an initial assessment, prepare a plan of care and make periodic supervisory visits?	The nurse meets with the client and family, learns the client's needs first hand and in turn provides written and verbal guidance to aides and monitors care going forward. The nurse is the family's primary point of contact for care-related issues.	
Is a supervisor available 24/7 to address urgent matters?	Clients need to reach a company supervisor at any time when necessary, without delays or answering service run-arounds. At Ready Hands a manager is on call at all times and answers directly.	
Does the company provide a replacement if an assigned Home Care Aide is unavailable due to an emergency?	Vulnerable clients cannot afford to go without care. Ready Hands will send a replacement aide after conferring with the client or family.	
Does the home care contract permit clients to cancel services without advance notice or penalty?	Clients should be able to discontinue services without having to give notice or suffer financial penalties.	
Can company representatives articulate a clear set of guiding core values?	Core values give a company its identity and help guide decisions and behavior. Ready Hands stands for 1) Great Customer Service, 2) Honesty, 3) Achieving Optimal Aide/Client Matches and 4) Keeping our Promises.	
Does the company provide care continuity, using a primary caregiver for each client, or will caregivers change frequently?	Continuity is critical for elderly clients, especially those with cognitive impairment. Most companies send multiple caregivers to avoid overtime costs or for other reasons. Ready Hands does not.	
Is the company's focus private duty home care (sometimes called non-medical home care or just "home care"), or does it attempt to also offer skilled home health care, geriatric care management or other services.	Companies rarely succeed at delivering high quality private duty care <i>and</i> such other services because the delivery models, payer sources and other factors are so different. In addition, concerning conflicts of interest may exist. At Ready Hands we stick with the one service we know we can do well.	

## How to Deal with Resistance to Care

When the prospect of home care is presented to an elderly loved one, he or she will quite commonly be resistant at first. Why is this, and how should families deal with such resistance? Here are some thoughts based on our experience.

To begin with, your loved one is probably experiencing loss—loss of independence, mental or physical capacity. It is natural for someone in this situation to feel angry, vulnerable or frightened. He or she also may think that accepting help amounts to “giving in.” Cost and privacy may be concerns. Cognitive impairment may limit his or her ability to comprehend the need for help.

The good news is that, in our experience, home care is almost always successful despite these initial barriers. Clients eventually come to appreciate the assistance and become reliant upon their Home Care Aides. However, certain strategies can increase the likelihood that things will go well:

- ◆ **Encourage at least an initial interview with a company representative.** The no-obligation assessment visit by a Ready Hands nurse is a non-threatening way to begin building rapport.
- ◆ **Present the initiation of home care as a trial run.** This will give your loved one the opportunity to experience the service without feeling irrevocably committed.
- ◆ **Emphasize your needs, not theirs.** Explain that you would gain peace of mind knowing your parent/loved one was receiving help. Accepting help may be more palatable if



posed as being for your benefit.

- ◆ **Point out that home care can prolong independence.** Without help, a frail senior might experience fall injuries, preventable hospital admissions and other occurrences which might necessitate transfer from home to a supervised long-term care setting.
- ◆ **Practice the art of the possible.** Home care decisions entail weighing safety, cost and quality of life. There is nothing wrong with a practical compromise that considers safety but does not allow it to trump every other concern. If you feel round-the-clock care is needed but your parent will only agree to eight hours a day, a concession on your part may be reasonable. You can then monitor the situation to determine if adjustments need to be made.
- ◆ **Focus on help with household tasks.** Your loved one may be more accepting of meal preparation and household help than with personal care such as toileting and bathing support.

Acceptance of personal care comes more naturally once client and caregiver get to know one another.

- ◆ **Enlist the help of a trusted authority figure.** The advice of a personal physician, lawyer or clergyman may carry more weight than the opinion of family members.
- ◆ **Involve health professionals if dementia is present.** Serious self-injury can result if a senior incapable of reasoned decision-making is permitted to refuse obviously needed care. If dementia exists, don't give up; get help from a physician or other knowledgeable health professional.

## Delivering the Consistency that Seniors Need

Frail seniors with functional limitations do best with consistent providers of care. Constantly changing faces cause confusion, frustration and significant risk of complications. Although this seems self-evident, there is in fact considerable scientific evidence supporting the importance of consistency in care providers.

Imagine a vulnerable elderly client greeting an unfamiliar Home Care Aide one morning. One of the first tasks of the day will be the morning bath. How comfortable is that senior likely to be? And how fatiguing will it be to explain where everything is, go over the daily routine, communicate meal preferences, etc. etc.? Now imagine a client with dementia in the same situation.

Of course, starting home care always entails getting to know a new caregiver at first. Comfort and familiarity take a little time to develop. However, in an ideal world, recipients of home care assistance should be able to count on one primary caregiver, relieved only occasionally with carefully prepared substitutes.

The real world, however, is far from the ideal. It is not unusual for home care companies to “cover” their sched-

uling obligations by assigning different caregivers to the same client over the course of each week. In some companies home care workers are given a different schedule every week.

In addition most home care companies limit employees to 40 hours a week, thus denying them overtime pay. A client requiring assistance for 12 hours each day would therefore have in the best of circumstances at least two, perhaps three different caregivers every week. Add emergency “fill-ins” and the number could be higher.

At Ready Hands, we strive to match each client with a single primary Home Care Aide (or two, when 24-hour care is provided). They are generally relieved on alternating weekends. The arrangement works well for both our clients, who need the predictability and consistency, and our employees, who need the income. We pay our employees competitively and assure continuity for those who depend on our services, while holding our charges at or below prevailing norms.

Senior care recipients need consistency. We have always understood that.