

You Solve the Case

I'm Bored!

A man with early-stage dementia complains that he is bored and that there is nothing for him to do. He was a business executive, and says that he does not want to be with “a bunch of sick old people” at a senior center or adult day health care center. What should the family do?

Who is this person? This is a person who had a great deal of responsibility, and who managed other persons. He probably does not want to do anything to challenge his self-image as a highly competent and capable individual. He is not interested in taking part in any activity that he would believe to be “trivial” or “beneath him.”

Making use of abilities that remain. Is he mobile? Can he read? How are his social skills? Can he converse? Can he give directions? Can he handle materials without any problems?

Gather the evidence. Did he ever help organize or take part in charitable events? When did he feel most important or “at his best?”

Use the formula. When is he NOT bored? Is this a case of under-stimulation in his environment? Who does he consider to be his “social equals?”

Solution. He could be a volunteer at an adult day center or assisted living program, and run activities for persons with dementia. This would give him a role that is meaningful, as well as being helpful to clients and staff. This is a version of the “tai-chi defense,” where we would use his belief that he is different from clients with dementia and give him a badge with “volunteer” on it. In fact, he would be a volunteer. This allows him to come to the center while preserving his sense of being different. The role allows him to have a position of responsibility. Once he begins to interact with clients with dementia, he may begin to see them as persons. However, this only happens if he comes to the center, and letting him have a role that lets him believe that he is different is a means to get him to the center.

CLUE: What role at the center would make sense to this man?