



VOICES

OF INJURY PREVENTION

My name is Mike Dowell. I'm with a company called Stay at Home Modifications. And we provide services for the elderly so that they can age in place, at home safely, and primarily the reduction of falls.



Note: Story is a transcript from recorded version

One of my favorite stories is one where I got a call from the daughter of an 85 year old Japanese senior and she wanted me to go to her mom's and do a home assessment.

Her mom had lived in the same house for 40 years and had lived alone a lot of the time now since her husband passed away. The daughter was concerned that the house was unsafe and she was at a high risk for falling.

When I arrived at the house, it's your typical Kaimuki Hawaii home. I was greeted by the daughter and she showed me in. And she introduced me to her mother, Gail and explained why I was there and what I was going to be doing. So right off I could sense that Gale was not happy with me being there and she really didn't want me in her house. And this is a typical response so I tried to engage her and I explained to her what the home assessment was and how it's going to help make her house safer. She offered little eye contact and was clearly uninterested at anything I had to say. So I walk with the daughter through the house and I made my recommendations as to reducing the fall hazards that I saw, these include typically removing throw rugs, putting in brighter lights, installing grab bars and other bathroom safety accessories and removing loose cords throughout the house.

We finished up the assessment and I went back out to talk to the mother. I wanted to try and reengage her again. It was clear she was, no eye contact again. She wanted nothing to do with me. Didn't want me there. Wanted me to go. So I made appointment to come back and install the modifications that we discussed, and when I got there the daughter let me in and then to my dismay promptly left to go to work, and left me alone with her mother.



So Gail was no more receptive to my being there than my previous visit so I really had my work cut out for me. I did all the modifications that I could without having Gail's input. I put in the handrails. We taped or removed the rugs, changed the light bulbs so that they were brighter, relocated the loose cords and put night lights where they were needed. Lastly I had her input for the proper height for the shower chair and the grab bars. So I brought the shower chair out in the living room, I had her sit on it, adjust it to the right height then I followed her into the bathroom and observed her getting in and out of the tub so I could install the grab bars at the right height and right location. With my work completed, I went over everything that I had done in her house, all the modifications and explained how each one of them were going to help her live safely and more independently at home.

After observing her interact in her environment, I noticed a couple of other areas that had to be addressed. So I made some plans with Gale to come back and do a couple of other grab bar installations. When I returned, Gail had a completely different attitude. She had the biggest smile on her face when she told me she could now take a bath by herself without an assistant of an aide. She no longer feared going to the bathroom. And with the help of the night lights, she could keep off the hallway light at night, and then funny enough, I noticed that she took all the clothes off the louvers, and had now hung them onto the handrail I had installed last time. So, I explained to her that the handrail didn't do any good if she had clothes hanging on it. And instantly she said I'm going to take those off and get a clothes rack.

So I really saw that I had just broken through the ice. The improvements not only helped her but it also brought a sense of relief to the daughter who was always nervous about leaving her mom alone. The changes did not involve any major renovations or cost thousands of dollars. And the house did not look like a hospital once we were complete. In the end, it was affordable, and we achieved making the house safe, and extending her ability to stay in the house that she cherished in the community she was a part of, and around the friends and family that she loved.

I think when you're talking to someone that's hesitant in doing this type of home modifications for whatever reason it is, it's always important to figure out the big picture and who it's going to affect. So if you fall in the bathroom, it's not just you that it's going to impact. It's going to impact everybody in your life. You'd have to take time off of work, you have to go to the hospital you're going to have to have rehab. Who's going to watch the kids if it's a grandparent that fell? Who's going to watch the kids? What's going to happen when they come back and they're still not done and there's still a risk for them to fall?

It's not so much self-centered as how it affects everybody around you and the repercussions of an event like that taking place in your home.

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