'Why would you give them that power?' How caregivers built their own app

- By Kimberly Corbitt

Three years ago, seven of us sat in a semicircle around the conference table upstairs at Biscochito, watching a software demo. The California company said its platform could give workers more decision-making power at the point of work.

So I asked: Could caregivers adjust their own schedules?

The salesperson laughed. “Why would you give them that power?” she asked.

I explained that we believed the people doing the work were best suited to make important decisions about the work. She told me, flatly, that we would fail. The ridicule in her young voice was startling.

Any service business needs software to run. Every practice management system we looked at was strictly top down, built to keep decisions out of the hands of the people doing the work. Anyone who wasn’t a manager had to go through one.

We chose the nicest one we could find, made by a lovely Canadian company whose people are, at least, quite polite about their software not doing the things we need the way we want.

Even after we started using AI heavily, we thought we’d have to hire experts to make the platforms work the way we want. Last week, we learned otherwise.

In September, I wrote about Super Subs, our plan to grow without adding layers of management. Peers supporting peers. But the job is complex, and it takes support. Nina Martinez and Roberta Payne have done this work for years. They know what good support looks like.

> So, we got in a room with them for a couple of hours and cataloged the most important tasks. We started with the story, not the software.
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> I stood at the whiteboard and talked through the whole scenario, every wrinkle of it, while voice-to-text caught every word. I rambled.
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> The team watched,
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> ...wondering whether the AI could make sense of any of it.
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> **It could.**
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> It turned my rambling into a mockup of the app, and we refined it together.

Then, Maxine Swisa built the layers underneath, asking the AI how to do the next step when she was stuck. She has spent about six hours on it so far.

Here’s how it works.

A caregiver calls in sick.

The Super Sub opens the app on their phone. It shows the day’s shifts, pulled each morning from the scheduling software. They tap the open shift and see a list of caregivers who know the client or want more hours this week.

One tap calls the first person on the list. If that caregiver can’t take it, the next green phone icon calls the second. If no one is free, the Super Sub takes the shift. Each call is logged to a shared Google Sheet, so the next Super Sub sees what happened.

If you want to try something like this: We used Claude, an AI assistant anyone can subscribe to, for the mockup and the build. The app is one webpage on Netlify, an inexpensive host. A small Google Apps Script saves each call to the sheet.

That one call keeps all three promises we make to caregivers: a supportive community, a consistent and reliable schedule and the highest hourly wage possible. A peer, not a manager, solves the problem. No one rearranges their week.

And because Super Subs are regular caregivers taking a support shift, their numbers can flex as client hours rise and fall. That flexible support replaces expensive layers of management, so as our margins grow, caregiver wages can grow, too.

By the time this column runs, Super Subs will be using the app.

Three years ago, a salesperson asked why we would ever give workers this kind of power. The answer is, because it belongs in the hands that do the work. Now, we're building the tools that support those hands as they hold it.

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