

UNIVERSAL ENHANCEMENT

In Place/Just In Time Training

The Changing Environment

Historically, approaches to staff training in the human service field relied predominantly on the traditional classroom setting model. The classroom model utilizes a lecture method, in which a teacher presents himself/herself before the class and verbalizes the content to be learned. The lecture is frequently supported with reading that the student is expected to complete. Written tests, in various formats, usually follow to assess the extent of information the student assimilates, through the lecture and readings. This method assumes that what was said was understood, and can and will be applied outside of the classroom setting by the student.

In an effort to enhance the learning experience of the students, an interactive or didactic approach to learning began to reshape the traditional classroom training sessions. The teacher, utilizing role-play and simulation, acts not only as a lecturer but a training facilitator as well. This is considered a radical departure from the well-known and respected lecture method. This synergistic approach to learning recognizes that the learning of skills and constructs can be facilitated if the student is given the opportunity to perform in a simulated manner in the classroom. As part of the role-play, the student receives critical feedback from his/her peers and teacher.

Unfortunately, though somewhat tongue in cheek, these classic approaches to the training of Support Providers in the human service field are frequently augmented by or replaced with a training procedure known as Tribal Knowledge. This system of training is similar to the well-known game of telephone. In Tribal Knowledge the supervisor/clinician shares information and knowledge with new staff. The new staff then shares the information with a staff who is hired subsequent to them. This staff in turn shares the information they heard with a staff who is hired subsequent to them-so on and so for the. As the information is passed along, distortions and half-truths flourish. Tribal Knowledge as a staff training procedure is about as dangerous as another all too common approach to staff training which is-giving the newly hired staff the keys to the van and instructing them to “go forth and do good things.”

Though these aforementioned classical instructional approaches are still considered mainstays of our general educational system, they are failing in a variety of ways to meet the unique training needs of Support Providers in the human service field. There are numerous significant factors, which influence the need to rethink and restructure staff training approaches. Listed below are several of the predominant influences, which necessitate the development of an alternative approach to training.

- The transition from congregate residential and employment settings to individualized sites. Residential and employment settings supporting 1-3 people vs. large groups of individuals at single site settings is consistent with current and projected trends for

service delivery. This downsizing results in organizational structures that require supervisors to oversee multiple sites that are frequently geographically dispersed. Consequently, staff at these settings do not experience the benefits of an extended onsite presence of their supervisor. Thus, immediate feedback and reinforcement is not generally available to enhance the performance of the Support Provider.

- Staff turnover is at an all time high. Staff who historically had very limited employment opportunities are now confronted with virtually limitless employment options. Thus, staff are “jumping ship” for as little as .25 cents per hour salary increases. This turnover in staff necessitates that staff training be a continuous process versus an occasional event. The need for such extensive and ongoing training, as a result of staff turnover, places a considerable financial burden on many organizations.
- There is a new enlightenment regarding the values, philosophy and vision that serve as the foundation for service/support delivery. The “do for” or “do to” ideologies of the past are gradually fading. The best practice, contemporary approach to providing supports is commonly described as “do with.” The “do with” approaches are grounded in the values of empathy, bonding, participation, courtesy and self-determination. These principles of the inclusionary model are most effectively taught in the environments where the skills are to be exercised. These tenets of the inclusionary model are complex abstractions, differing greatly from the staff skills required to “pass medication”, “assist in transferring”, or “complete personal hygiene tasks.”
- Historically, reimbursement systems provided sufficient funds to relieve staff from their assigned duties allowing them to attend “training.” Systems of reimbursement that allowed for overtime pay or paying relief staff to fill in for staff attending training were usually available. These off site sessions were typically delivered in a lecture format in a classroom setting. Reimbursement rates were commonly formulated on a per diem basis. The per diems were calculated to include the historical costs associated with staff training time. The shift from per diem reimbursement methodology to individualized units (typically one hour or unit of service rendered) more often than not excludes from reimbursement, staff time not directly spent in providing supports to the support recipient.
- Employment is at a record high. The number of funded unfilled positions in human services is also at an historic high. The paucity of staff makes it difficult, if not impossible, for agencies to “cover” those staff redirected from their assigned duties to attend formal classroom training away from the service site.
- The pool of job applicants available for consideration has significantly diminished as a result of the extremely tight labor market. Women with little to no post secondary education, who in many organizations historically comprised 90% of the support staff, are now attending and graduating from college in percentages that exceed men. Thus, the pool of potential or qualified job applicants is diminishing annually. The individuals employed appear to have both a limited tolerance/receptivity as well as the facility to learn new skills in a formal classroom setting. The influx of foreign

immigrants into the human services labor pool makes traditional classroom lecture formats even less effective for those who are not fluent in English.

Given these factors influencing our service delivery system, significant refinements and modifications are immediately required to address the changing need in staff training. Subsequent articles will detail the high impact low cost/no cost Universal Enhancement strategies of In Place/Just In Time Training.

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