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Motivating Staff: The STEP System

Ellen Clippenger, *At-Your-School Child Services, Inc., Indianapolis, IN*



Unless one is fortunate enough to work for a large, multi-site agency, positions in the school-age care field are often very limited — in most programs, the positions above site director are few. Workers are often frustrated coming in at the bottom of the heap. An agency can provide alternate dimensions of opportunity for its staff by developing a Staff Training and Empowerment Plan—STEP.

Envisioned and constructed by administrators and staff together, STEP has five components—Orientation, Training and Inservice, Performance Appraisals, Staff Incentives, and Staff Appreciation. Each component builds upon and complements the others. The first three components are the training elements of the plan:

- **Orientation** grounds the employee in the agency's missions, goals and policies, and introduces the opportunities available within the program.
- With supervision, the employee develops a training and service program, setting his or her own goals based on the demands of the job.

- **Performance appraisals** and self-evaluations then examine individual performance and measure the outcome of the training program.

While these initial components lay the groundwork for the plan and provide the opportunity for progress into the higher levels of participation, the final components recognize that employees want to be motivated, challenged and rewarded:

- **Staff incentives** reward employees for such things as attendance at inservices. Staff incentives could be participation in leadership development programs, peer supervision and evaluation, or community relation programs.

• **Staff appreciation** is a continuous celebration of accomplishments, from certificates of appreciation or recognition in a newsletter to vacation day bonuses. When staff feel appreciated, their level of commitment remains high. These arenas entice high-achieving workers to utilize their creativity and expertise to further the agency's mission, and may outweigh the financial gain that another job might offer.

To document achievements, the employee should develop a portfolio to include documentation of coursework, lesson plans successfully developed and implemented, or testimonials from parents, children or support staff in the program. A personal professional philosophy should also be included. The portfolio is the validation of employee's accomplishments while with the agency.

cont. on page 2

Creating Dynamic Professional Team Performance

Robin Spampinato & Nancy Hart, *ABC Care Inc., Sykesville, MD*

Are you having a hard time keeping staff? Are you the only problem solver in your organization? Does your staff go to continuing education just to pass time and satisfy the minimum requirements?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you need to transform your organization from a collection of individuals into a dynamic professional team work-

“Staff with a clear understanding of what is expected of them report higher job satisfaction, resulting in lower staff turnover.”

ing towards a common goal. To set this in motion, focus on staff turnover, problem solving skills, staff training and performance rewards.

One of the first steps in building a team is fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to your organization's goals. Each

cont. on page 3

INSIDE

Award of Excellence	2
Video Licensing Fee.....	2
Membership	Insert

—COMPLIMENTARY ISSUE—

Team Performance

continued from page 1

member needs to be brought on board with a uniform staff orientation based on a staff manual which includes: a philosophy and mission statement, job descriptions, evaluation forms, on-site and administrative procedures, resource information and professional conduct expectations. Staff with a clear understanding of what is expected of them report higher job satisfaction, resulting in lower staff turnover.

Secondly creating a climate of trust and open communication allows team members to view problem solving as an opportunity for new ideas and creativity. Participation in decision-making gives members a sense of ownership and control over their professional future, reducing conflicts and freeing you, the director, to pursue your professional priorities!

The next step involves empowering your staff to develop skills and apply them in the center. Because school-age care is an emerging field with limited access to formal degree training, it is essential to provide

inservice and continuing education opportunities. Providing your staff with a list of local training opportunities, as well as reimbursing them for training, demonstrates your commitment to professional development. Furthermore, incorporating time at scheduled staff meetings for team members to teach new skills and knowledge increases staff motivation within the center. The better trained your staff is, the higher the quality of your program.

A key component to pulling your team together is understanding that goals are best accomplished with the mutual support of interdependent team members. In addition to individual recognition, rewards for team performance reinforce collective responsibility for achieving team goals. For example, recognition can be given for high quality State inspections, on-site observations, and special team efforts. A recognition program contributes to increased motivation and job performance.

Remember, creating dynamic professional team performance results in higher job satisfaction, lower staff turnover, and overall improved job performance! ♦



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