5

Orientation, Socialization, Networking, and Professionalization

Amy S. Hewitt, Sheryl A. Larson,
Susan N. O'Nell, and John K. Sauer

Direct support professionals (DSPs) who are new to an organization need a variety of supports to be successful. They need to understand how things work at the organization and how to perform their specific job roles. They also need to know whom they can turn to for assistance and support, both when they first begin the job and as they become longer-term employees. This chapter focuses on strategies organizations can use to welcome and help DSPs new to the organization find the supports they need to be successful. Three subsequent chapters (Chapters 6–8) focus on specific training and mentoring interventions that organizations can use to help DSPs learn the specific skills and competencies they need in their jobs.

DSPs at all phases of their employment need opportunities to network and to learn from one another. Providing these opportunities is an effective training and retention strategy. This chapter describes why it is important for DSPs to meet with and learn from other DSPs. It also provides case examples of associations and alliances that have formed specifically for this purpose. In addition, professionalization for DSPs is discussed.

TARGETED FRONT-LINE SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES

Primary Skills

6 Front-line supervisors (FLSs) network with people working at other service organizations to learn new ideas and strategies for supporting individuals.

FLSs understand the purpose of orientation and implement strategies to welcome new DSPs and help them feel comfortable in their new positions.

FLSs coordinate, schedule, and document DSP participation and performance in orientation and completion of self-directed learning and development.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Many organizations use orientation as a way to cover annual and mandated training requirements. Often the word *orientation* translates into approximately a week of classroom training that rapidly covers mandated topics and sends new employees to per-

form job duties with little ongoing support. Many people work their first shift without any co-worker or FLS present. Given that early turnover is so pervasive (Bachelder & Braddock, 1994; Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Health and Rehabilitation Services, Developmental Disabilities Services, 2000; Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998), existing staff justifiably feel cautious about extending themselves to new employees until the new employees have proven capable. Therefore, what little contact new employees have with existing employees and supervisors can sometimes be less than welcoming. In addition, in places where turnover is high, existing staff and supervisors may still be in the orientation and/or probationary phase of employment as well.

Orientation is not the same as training. Whereas training focuses on task performance, the focus of orientation is learning the context of the job (e.g., knowing how to fit in and relate to co-workers and supported individuals; handling routine problems; understanding expectations regarding helping and cooperating with others; following organizational rules; appreciating the politics, power, mission, vision, and values of the organization; understanding the organization's special language; supporting or defending organizational objectives) as well as learning how to cope with stress and learning about the interpersonal skills needed to succeed within the job context (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993; Wanous & Reichers, 2000). Moreover, orientation occurs during a time of high stress related to the newcomer's transition to a totally new culture, whereas training occurs throughout the person's tenure in the organization (Wanous & Reichers, 2000).

The period in which an employee is learning the ropes of his or her new job is often much longer than the industry is willing to wait. To fully socialize an employee to a new job can take 6–12 months (Hutchins, 2000b; Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). This amount of time can seem daunting to an industry that considers a tenure of 3–6 months to be long term. Many organizations do not even have a truly discernible orientation period, choosing to lump new DSPs with experienced DSPs in the same classroom training sessions. Given that this so-called orientation comes with merely a few hours to a few days of on-the-job training and supervision, new DSPs are often on their own to fend for themselves the best they can. Newly hired DSPs commonly describe orientation as sink or swim, trial by fire, boring, nonexistent, overwhelming, or redundant (Larson, Sauer, Hewitt, O'Nell, & Sedlezky, 1998).

This approach to providing orientation for new employees is at the root of much of early turnover. In the rush to get people through mandated training so that they can work without supervision, many organizations have completely lost sight of the true purpose of orientation, which is to help new employees become familiar with the company and the job at a comfortable pace and to ensure that they feel welcomed and that the choice of employment was a good one (Spruell, 1987; Wanous, 1992). Although it is understandable that organizations may feel pressure to fill DSP positions that have been vacant for a long time and may rely on overtime and use of temporary staff, the result is an ongoing circular problem. Rushed orientation practices combined with haphazard recruitment and selection strategies are part of a system in which many organizations do not expect new employees to stay on the job very long. Consequently, little effort is put into helping new employees adjust and feel welcomed and comfort-

able, and therefore even many people who have found the job to be a good match end up leaving because they do not develop the necessary organizational commitment or confidence in their ability to do the job well.

To lose one high-potential employee due to inadequate support in the first few weeks of employment (or at any point in employment) is a recruitment crisis and a waste of significant magnitude. Organizations need to use the orientation period to cultivate in new employees a sense of satisfaction and commitment to the organization and the DSP job. By the end of the first day, the employee should have a strong sense that he or she has made the right choice in taking the job (Hutchins, 2000b). By 30 days after hire, the employee should have a defined sense of commitment to the job and the organization; if not, he or she is unlikely to still be there a year after hire (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). Improving how DSPs are oriented to their organization and their role as a DSP and training them to develop needed skills are essential solutions to the challenge of keeping new employees in community human services.

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS

Employee-Centered Orientation

In human services, an industry that regulates most aspects of service provision, it is easy to consider orientation the time period in which regulation-mandated training must be provided and to consider success as having spent the designated time addressing the designated topics. Employee-centered orientation, in contrast, is designed to help newcomers cope with the stress of starting the new job. Its goal is to welcome new employees; promote positive attitudes about the job; establish open communication between the organization and the new employees; and to acquaint new employees with the organization's history, philosophy, structure, mission, vision, values, goals, policies, and procedures (Benson & Cheney, 1996; Dipboye, 1997; Goldstien, 1993; Holland & George, 1986). Providing planned opportunities for new employees to get to know other employees and the people they will be supporting before the first solo shift can be helpful in the orientation process. Pacing the information provided during orientation can also help to reduce the likelihood that a new employee will become overwhelmed with the information.

Realistic Orientation Programs for new Employee Stress

Another important line of research suggests the need to identify early possible stressors of the job and ensure that new hires are given effective strategies to respond to these stressors (Wanous, 1992). Realistic Orientation Programs for new Employee Stress (ROPES) is a research-based approach to supporting new employees (Wanous, 1992). The goal of ROPES is to reduce stress among new employees and to encourage them to stay in the organization. Effective socialization using ROPES should do the following:
• Provide realistic information about job stresses.
• Provide general support and assurance (one-to-one or in small groups).
• Help new employees demonstrate, discuss, and rehearse various coping skills.
• Teach self-control of thoughts and feelings.

Reducing stress for newly hired employees can reduce turnover. Research also suggests that providing realistic information about job stresses to new employees after hire can reduce turnover (Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998). Implementation of ROPES is discussed later in this chapter.

Socialization

Socialization is the ongoing process of learning the social culture of the organization and how to get along with others in the organization. For DSPs, socialization includes becoming familiar with routines and getting to know co-workers and the individuals receiving supports. It also includes developing an understanding of the mission, vision, and values of the organization. New employees often find it is difficult to get to know the routines, traits, and behaviors of their co-workers and the people to whom they provide supports (socialization) and to learn and complete their job duties and routines of their daily work (orientation) (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). Support from co-workers is important to assist them in this. A study of newly hired DSPs found that DSPs who were supported by their co-workers were more likely to stay than those who were not (Bachelder & Braddock, 1994). Six aspects of co-worker support were identified:

- Co-workers go out of their way to help new staff members adjust.
- New DSPs can understand their role by observing co-workers.
- Co-workers are personally supportive of new staff members.
- Experienced staff see advising or training newcomers as a main job responsibility.
- Experienced staff guide newcomers about how to perform the job.
- Training expands and builds on knowledge gained in previous training.

These researchers suggested that organizations design DSP orientation and work roles around groups rather than around individuals to support relationships between new and more experienced staff members; assign a specific person to assume primary responsibility for preparing, instructing, and advising new employees during the orientation period; and have supervisors and co-workers communicate a personal interest in new employees actively and directly during their initial period of employment. Co-workers were reported in another study to be the most available source of socialization information and the most helpful (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983). New employees who have mentors are able to learn more about organizational issues and practices than those who do not have a mentor during their early organizational socialization (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

Supervisor Support

Although co-worker support is critical to successful orientation and socialization of newcomers, support from FLSs also plays a key role. Research on socialization outcomes suggests that the information provided by supervisors about the tasks and roles of new employees is the most important factor in positive socialization outcomes such as newcomers' commitment, feelings of adjustment, and satisfaction with the job and the organization (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). After peers, supervisors were rated by new employees as the most available and most helpful sources of socialization infor-

mation (Louis et al., 1983). Furthermore, the helpfulness of supervisors in the socialization process was significantly correlated with employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and tenure intentions (Louis et al., 1983).

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

Improve Orientation Practices

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, existing organization-centered orientation practices are contrary to the true purpose of orientation, which is to welcome and begin socialization for new employees, get them committed to the organization, and give them a clear understanding of their job and the roles within the organization. To minimize early turnover of employees who are a potentially good organization match, organizations must redesign orientation to ensure that organizational commitment and employee satisfaction with the job choice is high and that new employees develop a basic level of job competence at a pace that is comfortable for them. Some businesses have found success in thinking of the orientation process as starting during the recruitment and selection phase (Hutchins, 2000a). Providing a realistic view of the position, the stresses, and the duties before an applicant is officially hired or is even interviewed is critical (see Chapter 3, which describes realistic job previews).

It is very important that everyone in the organization (including FLSs, current DSPs, new DSPs, and individuals supported and their families) understand the purpose and value of the orientation process. Once candidates are officially hired, orientation should be clearly distinct from training. Opportunities for new employees to meet supervisors, co-workers, and people receiving services in a friendly and calm atmosphere are important during orientation. It is also important for the new employee to get familiar with new environments and routines. Table 5.1 describes other important characteristics of effective orientation.

For orientation to be most effective, everyone in the organization needs to be supportive and assist new employees to adjust to the demands of the job and feel good

Table 5.1.   Characteristics of effective orientation

Effective orientation should

Be distinct and separate from skills training

Welcome the new employees

Provide information on the organization's history, mission, philosophy, structure, values, and goals and what makes it different from other agencies

Help new direct support professionals (DSPs) understand the human services field and the political context of their job

Assist newcomers in understanding their roles and job duties

Describe essential policy and procedures

Provide information to help new employees to manage stressors of the job

Be a supportive and fun experience

Enable new employees to connect with people who will be there to help them when they need it

about their employment choice. Co-workers and supervisors need to stop setting up situations in which "only the strong survive." This often occurs when existing employees distance themselves from new recruits because of a belief that the new recruit will soon be gone. It results in a testing of sorts and is counter to the goal of having a stable set of competent co-workers. Even if existing employees are not doing anything consciously to drive new DSPs away, co-workers and FLSs may need training and development on how to welcome, support, and interact with new employees. Understandably, existing employees may need some assurances from managers and administrators that better screening and selection is part of this new expectation, especially if these employees have been subjected to a number of new recruits that were a particularly poor match for the organization. In addition, co-workers and FLSs can be more welcoming of new recruits if they are given honest information about the training needs of the new recruits and if they understand that support will be provided up front. Administrators and managers need to be present during the orientation for new employees. They need to learn each person's name, take an interest in his or her work, and give the new recruit the message that they are excited that he or she chose to become a part of the organization. In addition, the people who receive supports and their families need to know when new people are starting and should be encouraged to welcome them.

Because of the structure of human services jobs, it is not uncommon for new employees to go a long time without meeting all of their co-workers or even their supervisor. This practice should be minimized, and creative techniques should be applied to work introductions around employees' schedules. Alternative methods can help co-workers get to know each other and at least match names with faces. Providing a personalized staff book to new DSPs with each employee's picture, name, and brief biographical or job information can be helpful. Other industries that deal with extreme geographic dispersal of employees have presented this information on a computer intranet network (Hutchins, 2000a). Using the staff log to welcome and introduce new employees is also a possibility.

Supervisors need to take the time to meet with new employees immediately after hire. Depending on the particular set-up of the organization, an FLS or a senior staff member should be assigned to help each new employee during his or her transition. Building in structured time for the supervisor to meet with the employee and observe his or her work is important. It will minimize the employee's stress about unclear job tasks and provide an opportunity for the employee to ask the supervisor questions. Table 5.2 describes some useful orientation strategies.

Switching from organization-focused orientation practices to employee-centered orientation practices can be difficult. As with most strategies designed to remove the revolving door of turnover, orientation requires organizations to make an investment in changing practices. This investment can have many positive returns. Employees who bond with the organization and feel welcomed and wanted will most likely end up being long-term employees and being successful in providing high-quality supports.

As with any other intervention mentioned in this book, is important for the organization to evaluate the effectiveness of its orientation practices. This evaluation can be formal or informal, with the supervisor asking the newcomer if all of his or her

Table 5.2. Useful orientation and socialization practices

Start orientation during the recruitment and selection process.

Provide new employees with realistic information regarding stresses they may encounter and how to manage those stresses.

Make sure that new employees understand on the first day where, how, and from whom to get help if they need it.

Present information effectively using innovative principles, methods, and strategies.

Let new employees meet their supervisors and co-workers in person in a calm and friendly way, very soon after hire.

Spread out learning activities over longer time frames.

Acknowledge new employees at different points (e.g., on the first day, after the first week, after the first 30 days).

Reunite orientation cohorts and provide other socialization and networking opportunities.

Provide a peer or other mentor for the first 1–6 months. (One mentor could work with multiple mentees, if needed.)

Plan times to check in to discuss problems or issues routinely during the first several weeks of employment.

questions have been answered and whether the orientation adequately prepared the newcomer for the job. Table 5.3 shows some of the questions that can be used to evaluate the orientation process. Chapter 13, which discusses assessment and evaluation, contains surveys that could be used or adapted to assess satisfaction with the orientation process (e.g., New Staff Survey, Staff Satisfaction Survey). The evaluation results should be used to update the orientation process and materials periodically.

Create an Intentional Socialization Process

Whereas orientation typically occurs in a new employee's first week to month on the job, socialization takes much longer (Wanous & Reichers, 2000). Rushing new employees into their work roles without attending to the socialization process is not an effective practice and can lead to these employees' feeling unprepared, unsupported,

Table 5.3. Questions to evaluate orientation using employee and supervisor opinions

Employee reactions

Did the orientation prepare you well for the job?

Which components were most important?

Was enough, too little, or too much time devoted to key topics?

Did the sequence, timing, and duration of orientation fit your schedule and information needs?

Do you have suggestions for improving orientation?

Supervisor reactions

Did the orientation affect the job performance of the new employees?

Are new workers comfortable with the organization?

Are you comfortable with your role in the process?

Do you have any suggestions for orientation topics, activities, materials, trainers, time on topics, or scheduling?

overwhelmed, and underappreciated. Organizations can use several interventions to ensure that new hires are appropriately socialized into their new positions.

Welcoming Activities

The socialization process begins at hire and continues for months or even years as a newcomer learns the nuances of the mission, vision, and values of both the organization and the industry. Much of the early socialization process occurs as part of orientation. It is important that new hires get an immediate sense from their employer that they are appreciated and welcomed. New employees should know from the beginning that their employer recognizes that it is a privilege to have them as an employee and will provide all of the support they need to have a successful employment experience. Executive directors, managers, and FLSs should go out of their way to make new employees feel special and to let them know that they recognize that the newcomers have chosen to work for this organization instead of another. A simple handwritten welcome note can go a long way in conveying excitement about a new employee to that person. Some organizations also create welcome baskets. These baskets are given to new hires and may include items with the organization's logo and mission on them (e.g., T-shirts, coffee mugs, pens, balloons); survival items (e.g., chocolate bars, coffee, gift cards); or other items, such as a bouquet of flowers, that are designed to say "We are glad you are here" and "You are now part of our team." It is also common for organizations to plan a welcome dinner or lunch for new employees. If the employee is hired to work at a group living environment, supported individuals and their family members and co-workers from that site might get together for a welcome barbecue or dinner. A welcoming event might be similarly organized at an organization's offices during lunch.

Opportunity to Understand the Organizational History, Values, and Purpose

New employees need to feel connected to the organization to act in accordance with the organization's purpose and mission. During the initial introduction to their new job and roles, it is important for the new hires to learn about the organization's history: when it started, how it has changed over time, the types of services it provides, its value to the people it supports and to the community, and what others have to say about the organization. It is not enough for new employees to read a mission, vision, or values statement. New employees need to see how these are lived in the organization. One way to share this is for people who receive supports, their family members, or their friends to provide testimony and stories. For example, an organization's mission is to provide opportunities for community inclusion to people with disabilities, it would be powerful for a current DSP to describe how she has helped a person to be included in a neighborhood intramural soccer league. Some organizations develop videotaped interviews with supported individuals and their family members, board members, and DSPs telling stories.

During the socialization period, it is also important for the organization to show new employees everything the organization does for its employees. Of course, this

means pay, benefits, bonuses, and the like, which have probably been discussed before hire, but it also means the more qualitative aspects of employment. For example, the organization should convey how it seeks and listens to the voice of each employee. It is also important to share the organization's representative and participatory management with new hires so that they recognize that the organization is deeply committed not only to them as individuals but also to the group of employees of which they are a member.

Immediate Connection to a Person in a Similar Role or to a Mentor

It is critical that each new DSP have access to a co-worker or a mentor who can provide support on the job from the very beginning of his or her employment. This person can be selected through a formal program such as the one described in Chapter 8 or can be a volunteer who informally takes the new person under his or her wing. In either case, it is important that a specific person be designated to assist the new employee. This designated person should be someone who has volunteered for the role and who is easily accessible to the new employee for the first weeks and months of employment. This person's role is to model for the newcomer how the organization does things.

Implementation of Realistic
Orientation Program for new Employee Stress

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, ROPES (Wanous, 1992) is a research-based orientation approach designed to reduce stress among new employees, provide realistic information about the job to these newcomers, and encourage them to stay in their jobs. If an organization implements ROPES, the information about factors that cause stress for new employees should be identified by current employees because they are in a better position to know what causes stress in their position than are others who may not work in that same situation. In community direct support work, possible stressors include not knowing the people who receive supports, not knowing what the typical day or routine is, having to provide medical interventions and treatments, supporting people with unpredictable behavior, working with peers who sometimes are not supportive of new people and new ideas, and being criticized by supported individuals' family members who are not satisfied with the supports provided.

Once these stressors are explained to newcomers, it is important to let these employees know that these are common experiences and that they are not alone. Their supervisor can let them know that it is common to feel fear, frustration, disappointment, and sometimes even anger in their new positions. More important, in the very early phase of employment, newcomers should have an opportunity to talk with other new employees about their feelings, fears, anxiety, and so forth. Sharing both the difficulties and the successes of the job is one of the best ways to alleviate stress.

Early in the socialization process, it is also important for the organization to provide new employees the opportunity to demonstrate, discuss, and rehearse ways they can cope with the stressors they will encounter in their jobs. This needs to occur before they encounter the stressors so that the employees feel competent that they have strategies to use when stress arises. Stress management is not a new concept; however,

it is not often included in typical orientation and socialization programs for DSPs in community human services settings. Stress management techniques such as the following should be taught to new hires:

- Deal directly with the stress (e.g., get a written schedule of your workday so that you know what to expect as the day goes on, ask other staff the five things the people you support like the most or least).
- Change your perception about the stress (e.g., reappraise the situation; remember that everyone makes some mistakes at the beginning; keep in mind that everyone else is stressed, too).
- Manage the symptoms of stress (e.g., exercise, meditate, use deep breathing).
- Recognize that what stresses one person out might not stress you out; therefore, not all of the job stressors that others describe to you may be stressful to you.

The life and work experiences brought to a new job by each employee are unique. ROPES may need to be modified to acknowledge these differences and to provide specific ideas for people with various backgrounds. For example, a person who has never worked with individuals with disabilities might be most stressed about how to communicate with a person who does not talk, whereas another person might be more stressed about how to fit in with other staff members.

Support Networking Opportunities

Networking is the next step in building a successful career in direct support. With a good orientation and with opportunities for socialization, a DSP is prepared to continue learning and growing in his or her career. Supervisors reported that opportunities to gather with people in their own organization or with supervisors in other organizations were a very helpful component of learning their new job (Larson, Sauer, et al., 1998). DSPs can also benefit from having networking opportunities. Networking with colleagues can help DSPs to get professional advice on how to provide certain supports, to get a different point of view when dealing with a difficult situation, to help find funding or services that are beyond the organization's scope, and to maintain contacts in the event that one needs to leave an organization and find another direct support job. Networking opportunities can take many different forms, including developing relationships with mentors; participating in organizationwide staff meetings or celebrations; and participating in external conferences, trainings, and professional growth opportunities. Opportunities to network with DSPs in other units or divisions of an organization can help a DSP better understand his or her own work in the context of the organization as a whole. For example, a DSP in one organization was invited to attend a statewide meeting of organization staff as a reward for excellent performance during her first 12 months in the organization. By networking with other staff and listening to the speakers, she learned many new things about her employer. She reported after the meeting that she had had no idea that the organization did so many different things with so many different kinds of individuals. Attending this statewide meeting helped her put her work within the organization into better perspective. Similar advantages can be conferred by making it possible for DSPs to attend state or regional conferences (either those developed specifically for DSPs or those on topics that the DSPs are particularly interested in).

In the Spotlight: Mid-Hudson Coalition

The Mid-Hudson Coalition for the Development of Direct Care Practice, Inc. (MHC), created in 1992, is a working partnership of governmental, educational, and private institutions; individuals; and international groups. MHC is a membership organization consisting of DSPs, students, supported individuals, and organizations from the Hudson Valley region of New York State. It has more than 30 member organizations and several hundred individual members. The coalition is founded on the principle that providing quality care is a responsibility that all citizens share. MHC is committed to improving the quality of life for supported individuals through an educated and competent direct support workforce.

MHC's mission statement is as follows:

MHC's panoramic vision of the future forecasts a society where services are readily accessible through the aid of a professional direct care staff member whether in the home, the community, [or] a residential center or via a public assistance program. Such a caring society is built upon effective partnerships among specialists, direct care professionals, and persons with disabilities.

To meet this mission, MHC works collaboratively across organizations and communities to

- Develop new higher education programs for the direct support workforce
- Provide scholarships (paid for with membership dues, conference proceeds, and other resources) for tuition and books to DSPs who are enrolled in approved, participating educational programs
- Establish effective methods of direct support practices representing the diversity of direct support work in the Hudson Valley (across human services types and populations)
- Sponsor forums for DSPs throughout the year and an annual conference for DSPs to explore recommended practice in direct support and to network
- Sponsor an annual forum for executive directors and human resource personnel, to offer relevant training and networking and support opportunities to attendees
- Provide a newsletter to keep members connected with the coalition and its activities
- Offer leadership roles for DSPs within the organization and respond to the needs expressed by DSPs in the Hudson Valley region

This organization has proven that through commitment, collaboration, and a common mission, DSPs can and will become better educated and more committed to the field of community human services work. According to MHC, its organizational members have remarkably low annual turnover rates of DSPs when compared with other organizations in the region and state. Their leaders are committed to improving the working conditions and public image of DSPs. Most member organizations have found ways to build career paths and pay competitive wages. For more information, contact MHC, 36 Violet Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601; 845-452-5772 x119; fax: 845-452-9338; e-mail: info@midhudsoncoalition.org; http://www.midhudsoncoalition.org/

Encourage the Professionalization of Direct Support Professionals

Welcoming and supporting new employees also includes socializing them into the profession of providing direct supports. As with networking, professionalization is relevant throughout a DSP's career. It is important for DSPs to understand that they are part of a profession that extends well beyond the home or site in which they pro-

vide supports and even beyond the organization for which they work. Helping new-comers to the direct support profession to understand the national context of their work is critical. Unfortunately, in most settings, although DSPs are expected to dem-onstrate professional skills, they are often not treated in a professional manner, nor do they have opportunities that are typically granted to most professionals (e.g., training, education, networking, adequate wages).

Sometimes organizations fear providing networking opportunities because they fear that DSPs will jump ship or form a union. This thinking is shortsighted. Provid-ing professional recognition and opportunity may actually cause employees to be more committed to the organization. It is critical to create the opportunities that em-ployees need to be challenged and to help them grow (Harvey, 2000).

Professions such as nursing, social work, physical therapy, and teaching share several components. For example, to work within these professions, a person must have a certain amount and type of accredited training, they must pass a test or main-tain certification to be able to practice, and they must obtain continued education. Each profession has a body of knowledge that is reflected in the literature and a pro-fessional association that one can be affiliated with. In addition, in each of these pro-fessions, a professional can lose licensure or certification if he or she behaves in an unethical or illegal manner. Most often, members of these professions are able, through their credentialing body or professional association, to sanction other mem-bers for this type of behavior.

To create a direct support profession, a group of individuals and the organizations they represented formed the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) in 1994. This group of interested individuals and organizations has worked hard to begin to build the foundation for the profession of direct support. Figure 5.1 identifies the goals and objectives of the NADSP.

The NADSP is committed to the well-being and full participation of all people, including people with disabilities, in everyday life in American neighborhoods and communities. The NADSP recognizes that DSPs are crucial to this commitment and that that employment conditions must be improved throughout the United States to

---

The NADSP mission is to promote the development of a highly competent human services workforce which supports individuals in achieving their life goals. We have organized our mem-bership into committees to address each of the following goals (in order of priority):
1. Enhance the status of direct support professionals.
2. Provide better access for all direct support professionals to high quality educational expe-riences (e.g., in-service training, continuing and higher education) and lifelong learning which enhances competency.
3. Strengthen the working relationships and partnerships between direct support profession-als, self-advocates, and other consumer groups and families.
4. Promote systems reform which provides incentives for educational experiences, increased compensation, and access to career pathways for direct support professionals through the promotion of policy initiatives (e.g., legislation, funding, practices).
5. Support the development and implementation of a national voluntary credentialing process for direct support professionals.

Figure 5.1.   Mission and goals of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). (From National Al-liance for Direct Support Professionals. [n.d.]. *NADSP guiding principles.* Retrieved from http://www.nadsp.org/about/princip.html; reprinted by permission.)

ensure the continuity and quality of support necessary for the self-determination and community inclusion of all people.

The NADSP has been instrumental in developing several important products that align with bringing professional identity to the DSP: *Frontline Initiative*, The Moving Mountains Commitment, and the NADSP Code of Ethics. *Frontline Initiative* (see Figure 5.2) is a national newsletter written by and produced for people working in direct support roles. Its purpose is to codify the exact body of knowledge required of and used by DSPs.

The Moving Mountains Workforce Principles (see Figure 5.3) were developed by the NADSP to encourage organizations and individuals to adopt policies and practices that result in a competent, committed direct support workforce. The NADSP asks organizations to pledge to advance the workforce principles.

The NADSP Code of Ethics (see Figure 5.4) is a set of ethical practice guidelines to support people in direct support roles to make solid decisions based on ethical practice.

In addition to developing these important products, the NADSP has challenged its member organizations to embrace DSPs as leaders. For example, the NADSP worked with the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) to develop a division on direct support and to offer *Frontline Initiative* to AAMR members. NADSP encourages and mentors new state and local chapters of AAMR. The following In the Spotlight segment overviews one such statewide organization in Missouri.
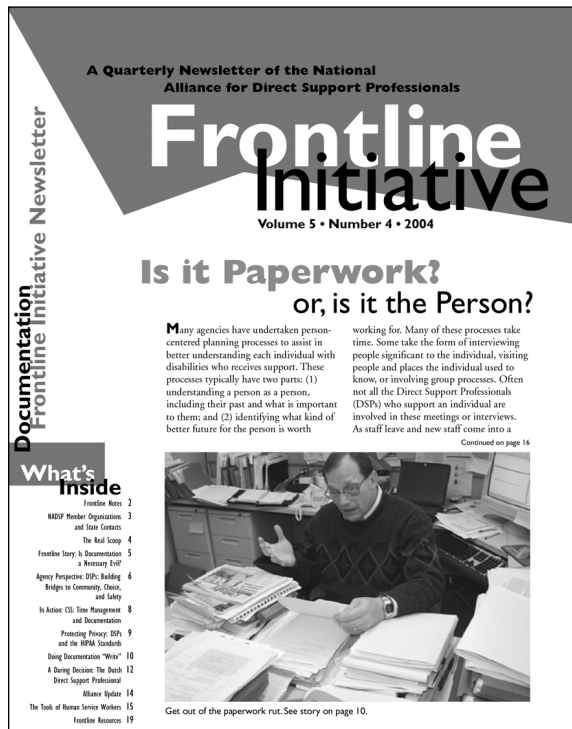

Figure 5.2. *Frontline Initiative,* a newsletter of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). Reprinted by permission of the NADSP.

Actively shape conditions of employment to enable direct support professionals (DSPs) to sustain themselves and their families in a self-sufficient manner by working to

- Provide health care benefits to all employees (pro-rated for part-time employment).
- Support employees in acquiring resources to meet basic life needs (e.g., housing, transportation, child care).
- Provide a living wage indexed to the cost of living that is regularly adjusted by geographic region.
- Offer flexible employee benefit plans (e.g., cafeteria plans).
- Support employee assistance programs and work conditions that encourage health and wellness and prevent job burnout.
- Prevent excessive administrative costs (e.g., salaries, bonuses, overhead) from draining resources for adequate DSP salaries and benefits and high-quality support.
- Work vigorously to raise both public and private funds necessary to provide adequate supports for participants and favorable salary and benefit conditions for DSPs.
- Ensure equity and fairness in determining salary, benefits, and bonuses for employees at all levels within the organization.

Promote ethical practice in direct support and partnership with support participants by working to

- Ensure that direct support practice is consistent with the NADSP Code of Ethics.
- Promote the empowerment and advocacy of people receiving support and their families through education.
- Rigorously screen job candidates to eliminate those who have committed acts of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or other criminal activity.
- Include the voices of support participants and their families and DSPs in the governance and evaluation of support activities.
- Honor committed DSPs by actively striving to coach, discipline, or terminate ineffective employees.

Value and empower DSPs by working to

- Ensure active and comprehensive participation of DSPs in organizational practices, policy development, and decision-making.
- Include DSPs in developing plans of support for people who receive services.
- Promote a professional identity for direct support.
- Develop organizational cultures that recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of direct support.
- Promote public awareness of the achievements of DSPs.

Ensure continuity and quality of support by working to

- Modify existing or develop new organizational practices to enhance recruitment and increase retention through the use of effective interventions.
- Track employee recruitment and retention statistics to improve outcomes.
- Provide high-quality, consistent supervision.
- Assist DSPs to overcome the isolation of decentralized environments by providing opportunities for peer support and interchange.
- Provide mentors to DSPs.
- Emphasize DSP performance outcomes that are aligned with what support participants want in their lives.

Develop a career focus regarding direct support by working to

- Identify career and educational paths for DSPs and support DSP advancement along these paths.
- Provide incentives for DSPs to pursue professional development opportunities.
- Develop and use multilevel skill and knowledge frameworks that result in recognized awards or credentials tied to advancement (e.g., on-the-job certification, credential and apprenticeship programs, postsecondary certifications and diplomas).
- Provide professional development opportunities such as job readiness, basic skills training, and advanced and specialized direct support.
- Use valid skill, knowledge, and ethical practice sets as the foundation for professional development.
- Provide high-quality educational experiences by using quality materials and effective instructional methods.

Figure 5.3. National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) Moving Mountains Workforce Principles. (Adapted by permission of the NADSP.)

Direct support professionals (DSPs), organization leaders, policy makers, and people receiving supports are urged to read the NADSP Code of Ethics and to consider ways that these ethical statements can be incorporated into daily practice. The beliefs and attitudes associated with being an effective human services professional are the cornerstones of this code.

Person-Centered Supports

As a DSP, my first allegiance is to the person I support; all other activities and functions I perform flow from this allegiance.

Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being

As a DSP, I am responsible for supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the individuals receiving support. I will encourage growth and recognize the autonomy of these individuals while being attentive and energetic in reducing their risk of harm.

Integrity and Responsibility

As a DSP, I will support the mission and vitality of my profession to assist people in leading self-directed lives and to foster a spirit of partnership with the people I support, other professionals, and members of the community.

Confidentiality

As a DSP, I will safeguard and respect the confidentiality and privacy of the people I support.

Justice, Fairness, and Equity

As a DSP, I will promote and practice justice, fairness, and equity for the people I support and the community as a whole. I will affirm the human rights, civil rights, and responsibilities of the people I support.

Respect

As a DSP, I will respect the human dignity and uniqueness of the people I support. I will recognize each person I support as valuable and help others understand his or her value.

Relationships

As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain relationships.

Self-Determination

As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to direct the course of their own lives.

Advocacy

As a DSP, I will advocate with the people I support for justice, inclusion, and full community participation.

Figure 5.4.   National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) Code of Ethics. (Adapted by permission of NADSP.)

In the Spotlight: Direct Support Professionals of Missouri

Don Carrick

Direct Support Professionals of Missouri (DSPM) began in 1997 after a series of person-centered change meetings were held in the northwest Missouri area. Attendees realized DSPs were not represented well at the meetings and that without them, real and effective change could not occur. Other meetings were organized by DSPs to provide enhancement training and a chance for direct support to discuss the difficulties and successes in their jobs. The first DSP meeting was well received, and the organizers began looking for ways to continue.

With the help of a grant from AAMR, DSPM grew. The organization held several conferences, bringing together DSPs from across the northwest Missouri area and sponsoring presenters, including Dave Hingsburger, an internationally known writer and speaker about disability rights and advocacy. Due to the popularity of these meetings, and interest from other areas, the core group involved in the overall direction of DSPM began to look at ways to expand across the state.

DSPM's mission is to elevate the lives of the people supported through their staff of DSPs. The organization does this by getting DSPs together, promoting the communicating of ideas, and providing training and information to this segment of human services. DSPM has also become an advocating force for direct support in Missouri. DSPs can voice their concerns and are listened to at small, local meetings, and their comments are brought to the attention of the leaders in the human services industry. DSPM participated in a successful campaign to increase direct support wages by $1 an hour and continues to fight for additional wage increases in Missouri.

Since its inception, DSPM has also worked with the Missouri branch of the AAMR, and DSPM continues to assist with conferences and other projects. DSPM has begun to work with People First of Missouri on ways to inform direct support applicants about what the job entails and what it means to the people being supported. In addition, the organization has become an affiliate of the NADSP. DSPM is proud of its participation in assisting NADSP to form a nationwide code of ethics for direct support (see Figure 5.2).

DSPM's web site (http://www.dspm.com) gives basic information about the group and provides news and links on direct support issues both in the state and nationwide. DSPs can become members of DSPM at no cost. Members have access to a message board on the web site where they can discuss their jobs and receive important news updates. DSPM hopes to expand across Missouri. For further information please contact DSPM, Post Office Box 454, Maryville, MO 64468; 660-582-7113, fax: 660-582-3493; e-mail: dspm@asde.net.

OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Probably the biggest barrier to success in implementing effective orientation, socialization, networking, and professionalization practices is the pressure organizations face to fill vacant positions as soon as possible because staff turnover rates are too high. This chapter has presented both research support and practical information to demonstrate that rushing through orientation and ignoring socialization are mistakes. Instead of fixing the problem of vacant positions, organizations risk making turnover and vacancy rates even more of a problem. Successful retention requires attention to the practices described in this chapter.

Several barriers are common for organizations wishing to improve networking or professionalization opportunities for DSPs. For example, providing good networking opportunities requires creativity and financial resources. Organizations that are considering professionalization efforts often worry about the cost of employing individuals with increased training or credentials. There is not an easy answer to this concern. Organizations that have created higher standards and that have paid correspondingly higher wages have found, however, that the benefits of doing so in terms of quality of services and retention are great.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. When a newly hired employee starts working at your organization, what steps does your organization take to make him or her feel welcomed and supported?

2. What stressors do DSPs experience when they start new positions in your organization? What is your organization doing to support new staff in coping with these stressors?
3. How do you communicate your organization's mission, vision, and values to new employees?
4. Does your organization have a specific socialization plan in place to assist new employees and employees who have recently been promoted to learn the roles and expectations of their new positions?
5. Does the first week on the job for DSPs focus on orientation and socialization, or is a year's worth of training crammed into that time instead?
6. What opportunities exist within your organization or community for DSPs to network to share ideas, provide support, and learn from one another?
7. Does a professional organization exist for DSPs in your area? If not, what could you do to start such an organization?

CONCLUSION

Addressing recruitment, retention, and training challenges requires careful attention to the experiences of DSPs from the time they learn about a potential job in your organization until the time they leave your organization. This chapter has focused on interventions and practices that can help people who are newly hired or those in new positions to learn the ropes of the organization and those new positions. This chapter also describes strategies to support employees throughout their tenure in the organization through networking opportunities and professionalization. If new employees are leaving in the first 3 months after being hired, then the orientation and socialization interventions described in this chapter may remedy that situation. If current employees are dissatisfied with their jobs because the organization does not offer adequate opportunities for career development, the networking and professionalization interventions in this chapter may be helpful.

RESOURCES

National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) (http://www.nadsp.org/)

The official web site of the NADSP contains information from local chapters across the United States with tips and resources for how to start a local, regional, or state professional association for DSPs.

Wanous, J.P. (1992). *Organizational entry: Recruitment, selection, orientation and socialization of newcomers* (2nd ed.). Boston: Addison Wesley.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the organizational entry process. It synthesizes the research in a manner that provides concrete ideas about how to implement recommended-practice interventions. Written for both academic and practitioner audiences, this book may be somewhat technical, but it is an essential tool for readers who want to understand more about the theory behind the strategies.

In the Spotlight: Harry Meyering Center

Traci L. LaLiberte

The Harry Meyering Center (HMC) in southern Minnesota serves 145 individuals receiving supports through semi-independent living services (SILS), in-home services, supportive living services, and intermediate care facilities (ICFs). As staff work together to address issues of DSP recruitment and retention, they welcome and connect with newly hired staff.

Each new staff person is immediately assigned a peer mentor who assists in welcoming the staff member to the organization and offers an ongoing support to that staff member. The initial connection between mentor and mentee is made through face-to-face contact. Mentors are assigned to every new hire and are selected by their supervisors for their skills.

To connect new employees to current staff throughout the organization, a digital photograph of each new hire is posted in the staff lounge for approximately 2 weeks. After the photos are removed from the staff lounge, they are placed in a staff photograph album, which allows for continued connections and recognition between staff members. Staff members who work opposite shifts or at separate sites can also use the photo album when trying to swap shifts.

A formal staff welcoming program presents new hires with a welcome basket. The employees receives a brightly wrapped basket containing a coffee mug that says "Welcome to HMC," a can of soda, a bag of popcorn, and candy. In the basket is a note from the staff development director, welcoming the individual to the organization. In addition, the executive director of the organization includes a personalized note for each new hire. She may comment on a particular strength or skill the employee brings to his or her new position or acknowledge the education pursuits of a new employee who is also in school. Reaction to these personalized notes has been very positive.

As new employees settle into their new position, the efforts to make them feel welcome continue. The newcomers receive a recent HMC newsletter in their mailbox. This external newsletter is widely distributed to supported individuals and their families and other key stakeholders. Occasionally, new hires also find candy in their mailboxes. During the first 2 days of orientation, the organization also provides new hires with lunch. The first day is a working lunch, but the second day is a social lunch attended by management staff and mentors.

For some new hires, the organization provides business cards and appointment books because these new staff members will be out in the community networking and using their cards to recruit. People have reported that they *really* like this perk.

Checklist for Orientation,
Socialization, Networking, and Professionalization

Orientation and Socialization

_____ Have the newcomer's direct supervisor greet and welcome the new DSP in person the first day (keep this as social as possible).

_____ Give a note of welcome from the CEO or executive director.

_____ Provide welcome baskets.

_____ Let the supported individuals and family members know about the new hires and encourage them to call or send notes to the newcomers to welcome them.

_____ Hold a welcome dinner or lunch where newcomers will be working, attended by people who receive supports and co-workers

_____ Challenge supervisors, co-workers, and supported individuals and their families who work with newly hired staff to each give at least one positive comment regarding performance or attitude to the new DSP in the first week of employment.

_____ Assign an experienced peer to the new employee. Arrange a face-to-face meeting early in the orientation week. Let this person be the first point of contact for questions about the company.

_____ Set up face-to-face meetings in the first several weeks of employment between the FLS and the new employee(s). Use this time to check in regarding what is and is not working from the perspective of the new DSP.

_____ Create a computer-based orientation and networking environment that helps people keep in touch with each other and feel connected to the organization. Consider some of the following:

- An e-mail system that alerts current staff and supported individuals and their families that a new DSP has been hired and urges them to call or send a note of welcome

- A page on the web site listing people associated with the organization, with photographs and short biographies listing areas of specialty and roles in the organization. Include when, how, and why to contact this person. Get a digital camera and post new DSP information on the first day of orientation. Display it as you show newcomers this section of the web site during the orientation period.

- An on-line list of questions frequently asked by new employees. Have an interactive and supervised on-line bulletin board for new questions.

- An e-mail address for each new staff to communicate with others as needed for organization business. Clarify do's and don'ts for computer use, e-mail use, and web access up front to avoid misunderstandings or misuse.

Networking and Professionalization

Internal Opportunities

_____ Hold weekly open brown-bag lunch conversations with the director.

_____ Have a social hour once a month for all staff following staff meetings.

_____ Ensure that all staff meetings for DSPs are run by and for DSPs.

_____ Have DSPs take part in cross-functional work teams and action committees at the organizational level.

_____ Create logical work teams connecting people who have regular contact with each other. Teams should consist of organization employees and individuals supported and their families. On a periodic basis, randomly assign each person another person's name. Within 1 week, each person is to post on the web site or other designated spot a positive comment about the person whose name he or she received.

_____ Have DSP appreciation events in which administrators, FLSs, and supported individuals cook, serve, and share a meal with DSPs. Provide small but personalized tokens of appreciation for each DSP.

_____ Have experienced DSPs create and deliver their own training to each other.

External Opportunities

_____ Sponsor and send DSPs to local conferences and workshops designed for DSPs.

_____ Create a local professional association for DSPs.

_____ Have a statewide DSP day of celebration endorsed by the governor.

_____ Use DSPs as organization representatives in community action committees, industry associations, or informational forums.

_____ Provide a paid volunteer day to all employees once or twice a year. It gets employees out into the community and builds their esteem. Give employees a chance to share their good works with others.

_____ Give DSPs business cards, organization literature, and any other trappings of professionalization that are provided to other organization staff. This helps DSPs to share information with others and helps community members and others take DSPs and the organization seriously.

_____ Create public service announcements (for television, radio, billboards, and so forth) that highlight and thank committed, competent, and caring DSPs for their contribution to the community.