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Out of the Classroom and On to Employee Training Programs that Work

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Current methods for training employees often do not work. Industry challenges that add to the struggle include a highly dispersed workforce, a need for people to work odd hours, and complex state and federal mandates. In Chapter 6 the link between training and performance is discussed. The competency-based training cycle is introduced in that chapter to clarify the need to incrementally develop and assess skills as they are performed in the actual work setting. In order to help people develop these competencies, a variety of methods must be used that meet employees' unique training needs. This chapter provides information on ways to structure training to encourage better retention of information and in ways that are customized to employee needs. Adult learning principles; how to develop and maintain ongoing training opportunities; and the use of innovative training practices such as just-in-time training, on-the-job training (OJT), emerging technologies in training, mentoring, and intentional learning are reviewed. The implications of training a diverse workforce are also discussed.

TARGETED FRONT-LINE SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES

Front-line supervisors (FLSs) and managers are often tempted to provide most training through lectures given in a classroom. The competent FLS takes an active role and interest in ensuring that what is taught to DSPs is transferred to the actual job performance. The FLS does this by providing opportunities for DSPs to learn actively in the work environment or by finding other effective methods that help the employees learn. The FLS provides feedback to the employee regarding performance and acts as a role model and resource for DSPs. Listed here are primary and related training competencies that supervisors and managers need.

Primary Skills

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FLSs teach and coach DSPs in effective approaches to master required direct support competencies.

FLSs observe, monitor, and provide feedback to DSPs regarding the implementation of individualized support plans.

FLSs provide coaching and feedback to DSPs regarding performance-related issues.

FLSs coordinate, schedule, and document DSPs' participation and performance in in-service training and completion of other self-directed learning and development.

FLSs observe and solicit feedback from DSPs and supported individuals and their families regarding DSP training needs and desired opportunities.

FLSs share with DSPs resources and information related to supports, technology, intervention, and hot issues for supporting the individuals served.

FLSs identify potential trainers and provide resources, coaching, and opportunities for DSP training.

Related Skills

4 FLSs identify necessary resources for individuals served and DSPs, and advocate for these resources with their managers.

5 FLSs review, provide follow-up on, and discuss issues with staff regarding incident or accident reports.

FLSs provide necessary disciplinary action, including demonstrating correct performance of job tasks for staff as indicated.

FLSs monitor for medication errors and review as indicated with DSPs.

6 FLSs support DSPs in learning how to use a computer, e-mail, and the Internet.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

There is no doubt that the human services industry has significant training challenges. Lack of basic employee competence and poor training attendance, despite provider requirements and state mandates, are chronic problems for provider organizations and their training staff. The most difficult training issues are arranging training times so that DSPs can attend the sessions (according to 70% of FLSs who responded to a survey); providing training that results in changes in job performance (53%); finding conferences, courses, or workshops that are reasonably priced (42%); and finding incentives to motivate staff to attend training (41%) (Larson, 1996). These challenges make sense given the changes the industry has seen since the mid-1970s, but they also point to the major source of the problems. An estimated 78% of all corporate learning, across industries, takes place in the classroom (Caudron, 2000). A full spectrum of training opportunities can be presented in a classroom, and certainly some topics (e.g., teamwork) are best learned in a group. The successful organization, however, lets go

of its classroom training in favor of other methods. That is no doubt a shocking proposition for an industry that relies primarily on classroom training as its only sanctioned method for training employees, but times have changed and it is time to change training methods to meet new needs.

When institutional care and other large congregate care services were virtually the only direct service option, classroom training, although still dependent on the quality of the instructor and curriculum, at least made sense logistically. At any given time, dozens of employees were scheduled to work in the same location in which training was being held. Staffing was primarily shift focused. Classes could thus be conveniently scheduled before or after direct support shifts so that employees not working during the class could be expected to attend most sessions. This is not the case, however, for community providers today because of the continual dispersal and individualization of support settings.

This move to more customized supports, although invaluable to the individuals and families who need supports, has created a situation in which provider organizations have difficulty gathering employees in one setting at a common time for classroom training. Congregate care settings often had a designated room where training could be held. In community settings, this is not typically the case. Training sessions occur in varied locations, and often employers do not have well-equipped training rooms. Training that is scheduled in program locations often displace or impose upon the people who live or work in that location. Training provided in administrative offices or even in the support setting can impose a severe hardship on low-wage employees who may be asked to spend more on transportation or babysitting than they would receive as compensation for attending the training.

Dispersal of services has meant more than just changing the location of where supports are provided. DSPs are expected to have a much richer set of skills than ever before (Hewitt, 1998a; Taylor, Bradley, & Warren, 1996) and to apply them with much less direct supervision and support from peers or other professionals (e.g., nursing professionals) (Jaskulski & Ebenstein, 1996). To provide consumer-directed, person-centered supports, DSPs must have the same skills and knowledge regarding health, safety, and growth and development for people with developmental disabilities as before but within a different context. In addition, today's DSPs need to have other skill sets. They need to have good written and verbal communication skills, be creative problem solvers, be capable of independent judgment and reflection, and have a good awareness of when and from whom to seek further support. Ideal DSPs need to be savvy about providing culturally competent and natural supports; fostering self-determination; balancing choice with risk; encouraging advocacy; building community capacity; and working both independently and in partnership with the person receiving supports, support teams, and other community members (Taylor et al., 1996).

This may seem to be a long wish list given the low-wage, low-status nature of the DSP position, which is often referred to as entry level by the industry. Employers are beginning to require new skills of DSPs but are often not modifying and improving the methods or content of their training and development programs. Also, employers are increasing skill requirements while facing other challenges. For instance, to enlarge the pool of potential new employees, organizations are tapping into new groups

of people, such as recent immigrants or retirees. Revised training methods will need to address the skill gaps that new pools of employees may have. For instance, when hiring from the traditional pool of workers—American-born women between the ages of 18 and 44—most human services recruiters could count on new employees' being familiar with the common domestic duties associated with many direct support roles. Now, however, recruits may have variable levels of experience with American-style household chores and other skills.

In addition, across industries, American companies are struggling to find new employees with basic literacy and math skills. This is the result of a combination of decreasing abilities in the pool of applicants combined with increased job responsibilities (Rottier, 2001). Increased diversity of the workforce means that corporate expectations in dress, grooming, language, and timeliness have to be examined for bias. Once a comfortable standard is developed for these areas, the standards need to be clearly and proactively shared with new and existing employees and potential applicants. (To learn more about the specific skill sets needed by DSPs, refer to Chapter 6.)

Within community human services, components of training practices are dictated by regional, state, and federal requirements; in some states the actual curriculum to be used by an employer is prescribed. This often leads organizations to develop prescriptive, limited training programs in which the number of hours and topics for training are predefined for the employee (Hewitt, Larson, & O'Nell, 1996). Most often this training is done in a classroom because the curricula are usually developed to be delivered this way. Although the topics may be based on important direct support skills and the curriculum itself may be of a high quality, this training is unlikely to meet the needs of all employees, whose backgrounds vary greatly. Mandates are often well intended and almost always include minimum standards. Training for DSPs, however, must go far beyond what is prescribed to be comprehensive enough to develop the full complement of skills that a new employee may need.

Employers face a multitude of issues regarding training DSPs. Some issues are well beyond the capacity of individual organizations to change; however, improving internal training and staff development practices is something that individual organizations can and should do to improve retention of DSPs.

Unfortunately, training often does not take into account established adult learning principles (Lieb, 1991) or accommodate individual learning styles and areas of need. Organizations often ask DSPs to take responsibility for their own training, but in practice this usually means that DSPs are responsible for signing up and attending standard, repetitive, annual trainings, which is a far cry from DSPs actually identifying their own skills gaps and development needs and seeking out training that meets those needs in a timely manner. Many training topics and curricula are outdated or meet the needs of only a small portion of the direct support workforce. Training events are held at times and places that are inconvenient for most DSPs. Worse, most training does not review transfer of the skills learned to the actual work environment. Current training practices are most certainly discouraging, as most organizations put a significant amount of time and resources to their training programs; however, in absence of necessary innovations, this activity is not successful.

Although many organizations think that DSPs do not show a lot of drive to attend organization-sponsored training, training plays an important role in retention of employees. DSPs point to their own lack of confidence in their competence and that of their supervisors and co-workers as primary reasons for experiencing dissatisfaction with their jobs (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). American employees in general are very concerned with their co-workers' and their own competence. Feeling that they work on an effective team is critical to job satisfaction (Laabs, 1998). Despite the fact that relationships with co-workers and supervisors are commonly cited reasons for turnover, organizations rarely offer DSPs training on team-building or professionalization. New employees do not know what is expected of them and therefore experience increased stress and job dissatisfaction, which in turn makes them more likely to resign (Hewitt, 1998a). In addition, there is decreased job satisfaction on the part of competent employees, who feel they have to bear the brunt of co-worker incompetence and that they have reached a plateau in their own development (Hewitt, 1998a).

In the Spotlight: Ark Regional Services

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Ark Regional Services is a nonprofit organization serving adults with developmental disabilities in Laramie, Wyoming. Ark is committed to training, developing, and supporting its DSPs and other staff. The goal for the competency-based training system is to ensure that staff are competent and confident and can deliver the highest quality of care to the individuals receiving supports. All newly hired DSPs go through new employee orientation. New hires are given training on the Ark mission, history, and policies; safety training; CPR and other first aid; and Mandt crisis interaction training. They also are introduced to eight competency-based skill areas, Ark's professional standards, and Ark's educate, model, observe, and evaluate (EMOE) training program. Ark has adapted and customized EMOE from a training method developed by Perry Samowitz, Director of Training at YAI/National Institute for People with Disabilities.

After orientation, DSPs continue their skill development both at Ark's Center for Professional Development and at their job site. New DSPs are scheduled to complete online training modules on Ark's skill competency areas and some of the modules from the College of Direct Support. Supervisors are given classroom and site training on how to observe the skills of DSPs, how to develop skill development plans, how to give constructive feedback, and how to evaluate their programs and staff performance. Supervisors are supported by mentors who work extensively with the supervisors on-site to ensure that each DSP can develop the eight skill areas and be successful as a DSP.

It is important that Ark's supervisors also be competent because they are the models and they support their staff's success. It is important that each supervisor and DSP can see what the skills look like as experienced staff members model them on site. After modeling, the supervisor and DSP discuss strategies that are effective in the actual work setting. Ark strongly believes that only by observation and feedback on a regular basis will DSPs work in a competent manner and ensure that the individuals they support really enjoy quality of life.

A key aspect of Ark's training program for both DSPs and supervisors is the use of creative training techniques. The first technique is using organization-made video

vignettes. Short, prerecorded role plays are used to demonstrate a point or concept clearly. The videos promote lively discussion, and often new staff members ask to be in the next videos that are scheduled to be recorded. Staff are also recorded completing the skills required in their daily jobs. Every staff member, whether a supervisor or a DSP, must be videotaped at least once per year. The videotapes are then reviewed by a levels committee that uses the tape as one component in determining awarding pay increases. Ark has also designed skill development plans for each of the eight skill areas so that each DSP is being supported to develop skills for successful relationship-building with the individuals whom he or she supports. This is an opportunity for DSPs to build success in partnership with their supervisors. At Ark, it is crucial that staff not only gain new knowledge but also be able to demonstrate the skills associated with that new knowledge.

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS

See Chapter 6 for research support for competency-based training.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

Current direct support training practices need a major overhaul if the promise of high-quality person-centered supports is to be achieved. To stop the loss of good employees due to inadequate training and support, organizations are going to have to become training innovators that use the best of what is available to meet the needs of each employee. Many of these training innovations are summarized in the first column of Table 7.1.

Provide Innovative Training

Providing innovative training is a lot more than applying new "bells and whistles" to the same old training methods and materials. Innovative training is really about getting away from ensuring that each employee is in the classroom to complete a certain number of required training hours on a certain list of training topics and, instead, developing more productive, competent, and satisfied employees focused on achieving the organization's mission, vision, and business goals. The following points are important to consider when revamping training:

- Training should meet individual employees' needs in terms of location, time scheduled, topics, pace, and learning style.
- Training should be offered close to the time when the employee can use it, that is, "just in time."
- Training should improve actual competence on the job.
- Training should provide employees with new challenges and opportunities (promotions, new duties, pay increases, further educational opportunities).
- Training should be a collaborative process between employee and employer, with both having roles and responsibilities for employee training. Employees also should be encouraged to acquire skills outside of formalized training.
- Training and development should focus on helping the organization meet its mission, vision, and business goals (as opposed to focusing only on meeting legal mandates).

Table 7.1. Training do's and don'ts

Do	Don't
Align training with applicable competencies, job descriptions, and employee skill gaps as identified by job analysis, performance appraisal, and competency-based assessment	Train for the wrong reasons (e.g., solely to meet legal mandates for a certain number of hours per year)
Integrate skill development and training in a system of recruitment, selection, and corporate culture that expects, supports, and rewards employee competence	Expect training to take care of all performance problems (Laabs, 1998; Caudron, 2000)
Use adult learning principles and competency-based assessment	Use only lecture-based or classroom training and knowledge-based assessment
Provide training that meets the individual needs of employees	Repeatedly train employees on knowledge and competencies they already have
Provide opportunities for employees to learn at a comfortable pace	Overwhelm trainees with too much, too fast, or demean them by providing too little, too slowly
Train on a variety of skills, including "soft skills" such as teamwork and communication	Train only on technical skills such as medication administration or documentation
Expect employees to take responsibility for identifying their own training needs	Assume that the organization knows what employees need to know and mandate all training
Use a variety of training formats to meet the time and location constraints of employees	Set training schedules that meet only the trainer's needs
Encourage employees to seek and capitalize on naturally occurring training opportunities	Compartmentalize training to specific times and places
Accurately assess employees' training needs	Assume that some training topics are "just common sense"
Keep training and orientation separate. Use orientation to help reduce stress among new employees, help them develop initial skills, and enhance their commitment to the organization.	Ignore the needs of new employees and/or use orientation to meet annual training needs
Make a clear connection between training and the organization's mission, vision, values, and goals	Train employees without helping them understand how the training relates to higher-quality supports

The training setting (e.g., on the job rather than in the classroom) is only one component of innovative training. Employers can choose whatever setting will work best for individual employees. For instance, if a state mandates the use of a certain curriculum, it is important to ensure that employees understand and can apply the content included within that curriculum. The curriculum does not necessarily have to be taught in a classroom setting, even if it was developed to be taught that way. There is nothing preventing an organization from developing self-paced training modules around the content of the curriculum or permitting employees with previous experience to test out training on the content by demonstrating the skill. Although the regulating agency might seek indicators in a personnel file that training has been accomplished, defining indicators focused on actual competence in the work setting is probably all that will be needed. It is unlikely that state or federal oversight agencies would insist on a record of classroom attendance if alternative documentation of competence exists. Similarly, for organizations in states that mandate a certain number of annual training hours and set of topics, evidence that each employee understands and

can apply knowledge in topic areas is critical and should be documented. Annual hours of training do not necessarily have to be on the state-mandated topics. Furthermore, if the mandated hours are not enough for an employee to achieve satisfactory competence in essential job skills, the organization should not stop training once the hours have been reached. Remember, mandates are usually geared toward minimal standards, not what is needed to truly get the job done. Organizations need to move beyond just offering these topics. Experienced staff should be urged to participate in annual test-out of competence in mandated topical areas. Performance evaluations that are well-written, combined with a short knowledge-based test, should serve as ample evidence that employees have competence in most mandated areas. Additional training can be then selected from a literally infinite list of exciting possibilities. (See the section in Chapter 6 that describes Step 7 of the competency-based training model for more information on linking performance measures and training.)

Along with reconstructing the way in which training is provided, organizations are urged to reconsider the breadth of topics that they offer to their employees, particularly DSPs. Often seminars, advanced education opportunities, and conferences on the most innovative concepts in community human services are offered almost exclusively to administrative staff. Opportunities to gain exposure to exciting new developments in the field are rarely offered to DSPs, who most surely would benefit from understanding the changes in values and strategies that are affecting and changing support systems. Contemporary direct support requires a wide variety of skills, from an understanding of home economics to an understanding of self-determination. Activities on topics such as stress management, diversity, sensitivity, facilitation of services, development of natural supports and community readiness, organizational participation, foreign language, computer skills, and cross-cultural supports, as well as basic skills training in literacy, motor vehicle safety, and grocery shopping, are all legitimate staff development activities. Because direct support is about supporting better lives, almost any training topic or development activity is justifiable if it translates into increased worker competence and longevity.

Put Innovations into Practice

Contrary to popular misconception, innovative training does not have to be more expensive or require more energy than current training practices. But, to be successful, it does require cost shifting and a change of focus. Using innovative training does not mean ignoring training mandates, but it does mean understanding how to creatively apply them in ways that meet the real needs of employees. Although supervisors in small organizations may feel at a disadvantage because of having fewer resources to allocate to training and development, many smaller organizations have the advantage of quicker decision-making processes, easier assessment of the success or failure of training innovations, and a better understanding of the needs of each employee.

To be most effective, training needs to be part of an overall organization design that is focused on employee performance and one in which a system for defining, assessing, and supporting employee competence pervades the organization. The competency-based training cycle (Hewitt, 1998a; Hewitt & Larson, 1994) and its relationship to overall performance issues is discussed in depth in Chapter 6. The remainder of this

chapter describes specific training techniques and methods that enhance learning retention and success.

Revamp Training Practices

Most organization training is instructor focused. That means the timing, location, format, content, and method of delivery are selected for the convenience of the instructor. This is a fine system if the goal is simply to gather signatures on a page to put into personnel files but is not a good system to ensure employee competence and job satisfaction. Training calendars that vary little from year to year may be easier for the trainer but often exacerbate attendance problems. Although many organizations perceive lack of attendance as an intrinsic flaw in the DSP work ethic, the truth is many employees want to be competent and feel good about how they do their work. But instructor-focused training is not the path to increased competence. With that kind of training, combined with sometimes extreme inconvenience in scheduling and location, it is no wonder that these training sessions have low or no attendance.

To maintain employee motivation for training, employees must perceive that the training has value. Some ways to provide training that meets learners' needs include group training, on-the-job training (OJT), computer-based multimedia training, intentional learning and learning contracts, mentoring, and job aids; these methods are discussed later in this chapter. Remember, however, every training method can be executed well or badly, depending on whether it is learner or trainer focused.

Creating a learner-focused training system may seem overwhelming to trainers and supervisors, but employees by definition have to become more involved in defining and identifying training needs. This takes a huge burden off trainers and supervisors who feel responsible for identifying training needs and enforcing attendance. Although the organization still has significant responsibility for defining the competencies necessary for each employee and assessing skill gaps, the responsibility for developing skills becomes a partnership between the employees and employer. If the goal of training and development activities is meeting the mission, vision, and goals of the organization, then employees and trainers alike have a point of focus to help them make sense of employee training and development. In addition, employees become more adept at identifying their own skill gaps and needed resources for achievement.

Adult Learning Principles and Learning Styles

Adult learners have physiological differences from child learners, including decreased vision and hearing, decreased short-term but increased long-term memory, less energy, and slower reaction speed (Miller, 1998). Adult learners are goal oriented and quickly become impatient with material that seems irrelevant to their needs. They like and need to apply information rapidly to retain it. Even if they are completely new to a job, they come with a host of life experiences that they are ready and eager to apply to the setting, and they thus expect to be treated with respect and to be heard during training.

Learning styles vary from person to person and within the same person, depending on the content or timing of the training or other aspects of the training or the person's development. Thus, no one instructional format will ever meet the needs of every employee. The instructor needs to vary training styles and methods of presenting in-

formation and check for understanding at frequent intervals, ideally through demonstration of skill in the actual environment. The key is not to peg a person as one type of learner or another but to always show respect for the learner and his or her individual needs.

During training sessions, the instructor should assist learners in reflecting on learning. To facilitate this, goals of the learning opportunity should be made clear to the learners up front. In addition, an assessment by the instructor or a self-assessment done by learners of current understanding should occur so that training can be customized to each learner and so that each learner is aware of his or her own training goals and skill gaps. In large groups, instructors can do this by asking participants to share what they know about the training topic; after this, instructors provide supplemental information in line with the instructional goals.

The training should have learners use a combination of reading, hearing, seeing, and doing (and touching and smelling, if they are appropriate to the content). Materials should be a mix of instructor presentation and learner application to ensure participants' full understanding, retention, and ability to apply their learning. See Table 7.2 for advice on ensuring that training addresses multiple learning styles and is effective with adult learners.

There are many sources of information on adult learning principles and learning styles, and new information will always become available, especially as workforce diversity increases. Some studies have suggested that workers from various immigrant groups may have very different training preferences. For instance, although most adult learning principles are based on the premise that adult learners are self-directed, some cultural data on training suggests that people from certain cultural backgrounds prefer training in which directions are clear and specific and the instructor defines what is right or wrong over training that is self-directed or open ended (Thayer, 1997). In addition, any inventory tools used to identify trainer or learner styles may have some cultural, gender, or other biases. Although some of the specifics may change, much of what is known about adult learning styles will likely remain valid for some time to come.

Table 7.2. Principles for providing training to adults

Use some or all of the following training methods: lecturing, demonstrating techniques or giving examples, encouraging the learner, testing, questioning, providing resources, modeling, providing feedback, interacting with the learner, listening, negotiating, and evaluating the learner.
Make materials easy to read and hear.
Provide immediate reference to how the learning will be used and applied in the work setting and how it will meet a learner's needs or skill gaps.
Provide opportunities for learners to share their experiences, ideas, and suggestions.
Set clear but flexible goals and objectives for the learning.
Provide opportunities for learners to see, hear, do, and (if applicable) touch and smell during learning.
Provide opportunities for learners to evaluate their own learning and to assess their skills and levels of understanding.
Provide immediate and informal feedback on performance.
Provide additional and relevant resources related to the topic at hand.
Include individual and group activities in the training.

Just-in-Time Training

Just-in-time training (done within minutes or hours of being needed in the actual setting) is completely foreign to many organizations. One quick test of an organization's current capacity for just-in-time training is this question: How far in advance is the training calendar posted? If an organization usually knows in January what training will be available in December, chances are that this organization does not use just-in-time training.

Employees have to use the information they learn from training to retain it. Organizations that train people in 40-hour blocks or according to the trainer's schedule are wasting a lot of effort. In fact, training and development professionals should be considered part of an organization's inventory. If it isn't used, then it is a waste of a product that has potential costs (Carr, 1992). Think of it this way: When a person is hungry, a meal is prepared to suit his or her appetite. It wouldn't make much sense to serve a year's worth of meals in one week. The person could not eat it all, it would not keep the person from being hungry later on, and the amount of waste would be huge. Yet, the approach of "force-feeding" training to DSPs is almost standard practice in the human services industry. A DSP who receives training that is too distant from the point of using it will not retain the skills. This means that the organization will need to spend more money and time retraining the employee or that the employee will lack essential skills. Either scenario will cause frustration on the part of the employee and his or her co-workers and may put the people receiving supports at risk.

Identifying just-in-time training needs is usually part of a comprehensive organizational environment that regularly assesses employee skill gaps. It is likely that the employee can provide good feedback about his or her most pressing skill need at the moment. Supervisors, co-workers, and people being supported and members of their support teams, as well as written documentation and direct observation of employee performance, are other good sources for identifying immediate employee skill needs. These immediate skill gaps provide the foundation for just-in-time training.

The more competent the employee, the more additional evaluation and exploration will be needed to help the employee identify just-in-time training needs, but for workers new to direct support, and particularly those in the orientation phase, just-in-time training is a critical component to success. An example of just-in-time training in the community human services industry is training on how to use a Hoyer lift with an individual who has extremely limited mobility, such as for helping to transport the individual from his or her bed to a wheelchair. Although the employee may be introduced during the first week or day of training to the use of the lift, the actual instruction on the lift's use should happen *exactly* when the employee needs to use it. This means that using the Hoyer lift may appear on a list of OJT topics but that the time of the actual training must match the need of the employee being trained and not the employee or supervisor doing the training. In practice this means that if due to other training needs, the employee will not be in a situation to use the lift independently for some weeks, training should not happen until then. Many organization and OJT trainers, however, will demonstrate the use of the lift in the first few days of employment and assume that the employee will retain the knowledge until he or she uses the lift in-

dependently for the first time a few weeks later. In this scenario, there is a high chance that the employee will not use the lift correctly and potentially injure him- or herself and the person being lifted.

Just-in-time training is an excellent method to teach specific skills related to the needs of people being served. Moving from classroom modeling and role playing to the actual work environment where the learning will occur is at the foundation of just-in-time training.

Create Real Staff Development Opportunities

Employees want to feel competent performing their jobs. For some employees in direct support positions (often employees who have other career goals or who plan to leave after a period of time), this feeling of competence may be enough to keep them from prematurely leaving a position. Community human services organizations must nurture the potential long-term employee who is seeking to create a profession out of direct support and shorter-term employees who might stay longer in the field given development opportunities that are intentional and appropriate to the employees' needs. The future of the direct support industry as well that of as individual organizations may depend on constructing and offering effective staff development.

To create effective staff development, training must have a greater purpose than meeting immediate organizational needs and regulatory mandates. To maintain employee motivation, training must lead employees to new opportunities (e.g., promotions, new duties, pay increases, higher quality of life, increased recognition, personal satisfaction, enhanced skills, further education). A lack of such incentives is one of the reasons that long-term employees dread repetitive organization training. They have nothing to gain from attending the exact same training they attended the year before, and the year before, and so forth. Jazzing up the content of stale training by creating cute games and serving food does not hurt, but the training still will not lead to any desired outcomes for the employee. It's the same old stuff—just served up in a slightly different way.

Creative linking of training to real development opportunities is important. The development can be personal or professional. The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP; http://www.nadsp.org/) can provide more information about what is going on nationally in this area. Organizations should let employees guide the identification of what opportunities are most meaningful to them. For example, organizations can support staff development in areas such as

- Achieving educational goals such as completion of a GED or postsecondary credit-bearing coursework
- Developing literacy in English or in another language of interest
- Passing driver's licensing tests
- Joining a social club or sports league
- Learning a new skill such as ethnic cooking, painting, or yoga

A staff development questionnaire or plan is another way to solicit information from and engage DSPs in their own learning and development. A simple DSP training development plan is included at the end of this chapter.

The support that organizations provide for these opportunities may range from providing stipends and time off to complete learning goals to offering the training on site. Because the employees' abilities to provide direct support are enhanced the more they are connected to their communities and the more they feel positive about their own opportunities and lives, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, commitment, and diversity of skills and experiences by providing richer development opportunities. Knowing that committed, personally satisfied employees stick around longer is an added benefit (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

Make Best Use of Available Methods

Organizations can use many different training methods to teach employees necessary skills and knowledge. The choice of method has to do with the content and the practicalities of meeting people's individual needs. The following subsections describe various training methods and how each can best be used to maximize its effectiveness.

Group Training

If the competencies to be developed are best learned in a group setting and if several employees need to develop these skills at the same time, then group training can be the way to go. A prime example of this is the development of a new support site where several employees need training all at once.

Topics that may be best in a group setting are ones that are less tangible or hands-on and more about teaching attitudes or values (e.g., diversity, team building, or sensitivity, as opposed to medication administration or first aid). Such topics are enriched by a variety of perspectives, and the human experience, as opposed to specific job experience, is valuable fodder for group discussion and learning. Often it is expected that group learning begins and ends with the time spent together. For many topics, however, a group kick-off to develop basic levels of understanding, with independent work and practice in the real world and then a return to the group for people to share experiences and discuss applications of their learning, is terrific for developing deeper understanding of complex materials. This is sometimes referred to as a cohort model. This instrumental approach keeps the group learning sessions fresh and provides opportunities for members to share, rethink, and learn from one another.

In group or cohort training situations, trainers should see themselves as guides, resources, and facilitators, and they should work to create a group experience that helps employees learn from each other and that provides a rich experience. Like every form of training, group training should include a mixture of instructional strategies to meet the needs of a full spectrum of learners. The training experiences should have learning objectives and should be evaluated for effectiveness in terms of transfer and application of skill in the actual work environment.

On-the-Job Training

People learn most of what they do on the job as they face work situations. When this learning is unstructured, people may learn the wrong way, the least efficient way, the less respectful way, or they may not learn at all. Common pitfalls of poorly designed OJT include the following:

- The people who do the OJT training (whether DSPs, FLSs, or managers) do not know how to train. The ability to train others requires understanding how to present and teach materials and how to assess for understanding. Most people do not naturally have these skills, especially when instructing a learner who has limited literacy or special learning needs.
- The OJT trainer does not have the necessary skills to do the job task he or she is teaching (Dipboye, 1997). It seems obvious, but if the OJT trainer does not know what he or she is doing, he or she cannot train anyone else how to do it. The trainer will either skip the material or will make something up.
- The OJT trainer is resentful and grudging. A person doing on-site training needs to be excited about training the new DSP and needs to be focused on teaching new skills, not on catching people's mistakes. Even extremely dedicated DSPs and supervisors or managers burn out and may feel that it is a waste of valuable energy to train a new staff person who most likely will soon leave the organization.

Despite the ways in which OJT can go wrong, OJT has a number of benefits, including being inexpensive, convenient, and providing natural settings for employees to practice and demonstrate actual competence. OJT can be offered as just-in-time training and can help build staff relationships when done right (Carr, 1992).

Effective OJT is structured so that the people doing the training are qualified and competent. Keep in mind that seniority doesn't always mean the employee is the best trainer. For example, few DSPs' job descriptions list providing training to other DSPs, despite the fact that DSPs often are qualified to do so by virtue of their training and experience on the topic. OJT trainers should be given the time and resources to do the training properly, and they should be acknowledged and rewarded for their role.

Regardless of how qualified trainers are selected, it is important that OJT time not be used to read policies and procedures unless they are immediately important to the specific setting (e.g., read emergency procedures at the support setting and in conjunction with the first practice drill). Otherwise, organization policies, such as those that govern leave time, holidays, and how to sign up for benefits should be addressed during orientation (see Chapter 5). OJT opportunities should be short and modularized. OJT works best with concrete duties such as bathing someone and conducting a fire drill. As much as possible, the new employee should perform the tasks learned while the trainer is present to observe the new employee's performance. As with other kinds of training, it is also important to pace learning and OJT schedules to meet the needs of the employees.

OJT checklists can be effective tools to structure this type of training. These checklists, however, need to be focused on behavior outcomes. Before using them, OJT trainers need to learn how to use the checklists and should explain their purpose to the learner. A sample OJT checklist is provided at the end of this chapter. The list is only a sample and is not intended to be inclusive of all needed skills, as checklist items would vary across organizations, sites, and skill competency areas.

Computer-Based Multimedia Training

Computer-based multimedia training has been widely embraced by certain industries with similar training challenges to those faced by the community human services industry (Benson & Cheney, 1996). When people have trouble coming together for

training and when people are at different skill levels, computer-based multimedia training can provide customized training that is accessible to employees at home, at work, or almost anywhere there is a computer. Multimedia training offers a number of advantages over other types of portable training such as videotapes or books. For example, if multimedia training is done well, it can be customized to each learner, it presents material in a variety of ways, and it checks for understanding. Studies show that learner retention with multimedia training is higher because learners can pace themselves at a comfortable rate and materials are presented through pictures, text, videos, and learner interaction (Hall, 1995; IBM Multimedia Consulting Center, 1994; Ouelette, 1995; Williamson, 1994).

The biggest barrier to computer-based multimedia training has been the related expense of hardware and software. Today, however, high-capacity computers should easily fit in to the training budget of even small organizations. In addition, public libraries, schools and workforce centers often have computers available for use. The College of Direct Support has developed an exciting new national curriculum available over the web that is aimed at critical skills specifically needed by DSPs. This curriculum has made accessibility to high-quality training anytime and anywhere a reality in the community human services industry (see the In the Spotlight segment about the College of Direct Support).

In the Spotlight: The College of Direct Support

The web and computer technology offer new and exciting ways to make high-quality training opportunities available to people in their own homes, at the work site, or anywhere that they have access to a computer and the web. The College of Direct Support is a place to find these high-quality training opportunities (http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com).

The College of Direct Support offers modularized courses in topics that are important to DSPs, their employers, and the people they support. Courses cover positive behavioral supports, health and safety, first aid, and empowerment, self-determination, and many more topics. DSPs can pick the courses or even individual lessons that are most meaningful to them and their employers, and DSPs can participate in training when and where they want. For example, a DSP who needs to learn how to support a person with challenging behavior can get the information when he or she needs it and can then apply it instead of waiting for the training to be offered by the organization.

The courses in the College of Direct Support are based on state-of-the art knowledge in the field and on a set of nationally validated competencies, the *Community Support Skill Standards* (CSSS; Taylor et al., 1996), as well as on established ethical guidelines for DSPs, the NADSP Code of Ethics (see Figure 5.4). Content is self-paced; each lesson is approximately 30–60 minutes long and contains opportunities for DSPs to reflect on and interact with the material throughout the learning experience. A record of training is kept in the College of Direct Support database so that each learner can measure his or her progress. Assessments that can be used with the courses include multiple-choice pre- and posttests as well as suggested on-the-job assessment and portfolios. After successfully completing all of the lesson posttests in a course, the DSP receives a certificate of completion listing the stated course objectives and related competencies from the CSSS.

The College of Direct Support is a collaboration between MC Strategies, a multinational company experienced in computer-based training; the University of Minnesota,

Institute on Community Integration, Research and Training Center on Community Living, a leader in research and training in DSP recruitment, retention, and training; and the Sertoma Center, an organization that provides support services for more 150 individuals in the east Tennessee area. The College of Direct Support was originally funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. After initial development of 11 core courses, updates and new development have been maintained through customer fees and supple-mental grants.

Intentional Learning and Learning Contracts

As explained earlier in this chapter, the best training is identified and achieved through a collaborative process between employee and employer. Intentional learning, in which the employee defines the process by which he or she will achieve learning goals, helps the employee understand how to identify training needs and takes responsibility for seeking resources as needed. Learning contracts are one way to set up intentional learning. The employee and supervisor agree to the goal of the learning, the resources needed, and the timelines; then the employee takes responsibility to achieve necessary learning utilizing whatever method works best for him or her.

Because of limited resources, regulatory mandates, and high turnover in human services, training for DSPs is often punitive. Employees are told that they are required to attend training and are given ultimatums. An intentional learning environment sets a totally different tone for learning. The organization has a purposeful plan or means for the employee to acquire knowledge and skills—but the employee is a part of the plan. The organization assists in determining the when, where, why, and how regarding the learning.

Skill Mentoring

Skill mentoring can be used to help DSPs develop technical skills or to enhance DSPs' socialization and therefore commitment to the organization. Like OJT, mentoring provides a chance for DSPs to develop skills in the actual job setting and to learn from experienced employees. Mentoring has similar pitfalls to those of OJT in regards to who is selected as a mentor (for the mentoring experience to be useful, the mentor has to be qualified and competent). Unlike OJT, a mentor–mentee relationship is for a specified period of time and is focused on relationship building and skill building. The mentor assists the newer employee in understanding the ins and outs of the job and fosters the development of essential problem-solving skills. Much of the work of the mentor involves supportive listening, guidance, and support. Mentoring programs take time and effort up front to develop. Chapter 8 focuses on mentoring and describes how to design and implement mentoring programs.

Job Aids

Job aids are checklists or other environmental prompts that help employees remember the steps of tasks that are complicated or used infrequently. They are typically used as supplements to more in-depth training on the procedure and should not be used in absence of structured training. These aids are often used and developed by conscien-

tious employees who find methods to remind themselves of the critical steps they must take to ensure they are doing something correctly. In the community human services industry, job aids could describe, for example, how to conduct safety checks before driving, how to complete medication administration, or how to add the proper amount of thickener to a food item. Other areas may be quick "cheat sheets" on the daily routines of people supported or the recipes that need to be prepared. It may be useful for an organization to prepare job aids in an employee's native language. Organizations that employ many individuals with limited English reading skills often use picture- or icon-based lists. In general, job aids are inexpensive, reasonably quick to produce and are effective tools for learning and remembering many tasks.

OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Developing an effective training program is not easy. A substantial investment of time and resources may be required to revise current practices. The rewards, however, of having a successful program are impressive. A common obstacle to success is resistance to change from the people who have developed the current system. In addition, trainers may lack skills in using the new training techniques and may have a limited understanding of how to actually implement the needed changes.

It is not wise to plan to radically and suddenly change a current training system. Like other interventions, changes in training require the investment of the stakeholders, in this case, the people who are being trained, who are doing the training, and who are developing the training, as well as the individuals being supported and those in charge of resources. An organization can bring people on board by offering them training and resources on best practices in training. The organization can let these people develop energy around necessary changes and guide them as needed. The organization can keep the parts that are successful in the existing program and supplement as needed. Incremental development and implementation keeps people from becoming resentful and overwhelmed. It allows them to learn from mistakes and make improvements in a manageable way.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Does your organization have an annual training calendar? Does it usually include the same topics year after year?
2. What formats does your organization currently use to train employees? What flexible training opportunities could be developed? Does your organization permit employees to test out of training? What new topics have been recently introduced?
3. How fast are new workers expected to be prepared to take on full responsibilities of the job? Has this time increased, decreased, or stayed the same as the skills of candidates have changed?
4. To what extent are existing employees and people receiving supports involved in your organization's attempts to reduce turnover, including training efforts? How

might people in various roles behave differently during orientation and training of new employees?

5. Who is doing training in your organization (e.g., existing DSPs and FLSs)? Are all of the trainers competent in providing training to others?

CONCLUSION

It is clear that current training methods do not always work, as evidenced by organizations that consistently admit (often behind closed doors or off the record) that they have serious concerns about worker competence and the ability to sustain growth in developing community supports for the individuals served. Organizations, however, can and should take action to improve their current training practices. Organizations that are going to survive and thrive in the changing direct support environment are going to have to become training innovators that can take the best of what is known about training and apply it in multiple formats that meet individual employee needs. Ultimately innovation in employee training in the community human services industry is much like innovation in support services. It requires the understanding of individual needs and then the application of individualized supports and resources to create a positive training experience that translates into real worker competence and increased retention of high-quality employees.

In the Spotlight: Special People In Northeast

Special People In Northeast (SPIN) is a nonprofit human services organization founded in 1970. Today SPIN supports more than 2,000 people in a variety of settings, with 634 staff members, 72 students, and 320 volunteers. In 1998, during a major reorganization, a leadership position in direct support called *home life coordinator/community life coordinator* was developed. The position requires an associate's degree and has a $28,000 per year starting salary. More than 50 DSPs are now working in these roles. Simultaneously SPIN worked with its union and staff to articulate a mission, values, and expectations for a new position called direct support professional (DSP).

To help staff obtain the new skills necessary to become DSPs, SPIN develop a curriculum of six new training courses. From September 1999 to May 2000, all habilitation instructors and coordinators and managers completed the courses. In July 2000, 300 habilitation instructors were recognized as DSPs in a celebration ceremony. Even though the organization highly valued education and offered tuition reimbursement, in 1998 only seven DSPs had college degrees or were currently enrolled in college courses. To improve this, SPIN created several new educational opportunities:

- With the Community College of Philadelphia, SPIN offers college-level instruction at job sites. Employees can earn an 18–credit hour Certificate of Recognition, a 33–credit hour Academic Certificate in Human Services, or associate's degree in human services with links to a bachelor's degree.
- With Pierce College, SPIN offers an on-site business degree program.
- With Arcadia University, SPIN offers on-site graduate courses in special education and leadership development.
- SPIN pairs each student with a mentor to support study skills, test preparation, and organizational skills and to provide encouragement and recognition for achievements.

- SPIN supports and recognizes students through study skills workshops, babysitting assistance, and computer workshops and access.
- SPIN provides bonuses to students for each 15 credits completed and provides organizationwide recognition for accomplishments.

Now, 56 SPIN DSPs have bachelor's or associate's degrees, and 19 are enrolled in college.

SPIN's initiatives are not limited to formal education. The organization also trains all managers in Joe D. Batten's (1989) "tough-minded leadership." This training teaches a values-based management philosophy that involves providing clear expectations and stretching them; using a "time with" approach to support DSPs; and focusing on strength discovery, development, and deployment. Seventy-five managers have completed the 48-hour course and are invited to attend monthly Batten leadership seminars to sharpen their skills.

Other recruitment, retention, and training initiatives at SPIN include the following:

- Cross-functional quality council groups for staff, consumers, and families to develop, initiate, and implement change
- A five-county, 60-organization image marketing campaign to attract DSPs and to improve their status
- Spin Traditions, an orientation program that integrates the mission, values, and expectations at SPIN with personal stories from families, consumers, and staff, and focuses on welcoming new staff members
- A leadership path that gives exemplary DSPs an opportunity to earn more money for taking increased responsibilities in staff recruitment and development (roles include ambassador, strengths development peer, team leader for new staff orientation and socialization, and traditions presenter)
- A "right-fit" philosophy that is used in the hiring and preservice training to ensure that new employees share SPIN's values and mission and can meet expectations
- A recruitment and retention plan that provides increased pay for positions, longevity bonuses, recruitment bonuses, and leadership opportunities at all levels
- Staff recognition efforts such as rewards for achieving tenure benchmarks starting at 1 year

These efforts have helped SPIN to maintain a turnover rate for adult services employees of less than 33% since 1998. For more information, contact Kathy Brown-McHale, Special People in Northeast, 10521 Drummond Road, Philadelphia, PA 19154; 215-613-1000; http://www.spininc.org.

RESOURCES

American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, Virginia, 22313-2043; 703-683-8100, 800-628-2783; fax: 703-683-1523; http://www.astd.org/

A professional association for people working in training roles. ASTD has many resources to help trainers be more effective at what they do.

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

The NADSP web site contains information from local chapters across the United States. In many cases, NADSP chapters have emphasized education and training of DSPs.

Training trainers towards excellence: A day of interaction and dialogue for people who train, or are interested in training, direct support professionals. Conference proceedings from a statewide training conference cosponsored by the Minnesota Department of Human Services State Oper-

ated Services and the University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration (ICI), Research and Training Center on Community Living, St. Cloud, MN. (Available fromthe ICI publications office, 150 Pillsbury Drive, SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455; 612-624-4512)

This report is a short conference summary that contains many useful tips for training. It includes tips on how to use overhead transparencies and other visual aids, how to use different training styles, and how to work with adult learners.

Taylor, M., Bradley, V., & Warren, R., Jr. (1996). *Community support skill standards: Tools for managing change and achieving outcomes.* Cambridge, MA: Human Services Research Institute. (Available from the publisher, http://www.hsri.org/)

The *Community Support Skill Standards* (CSSS) are a job analysis of the roles and competencies of direct support practitioners who work in community human services organizations. (See Chapter 6 for more on job analysis.)

Direct Support Professional Training Development Plan

Date: _____ Your name: _____

Dates of employment at [insert organization name]: _____

Current work location: _____

1. What are your personal interests (e.g., yoga, stained glass, weight lifting)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What training or learning is required for these personal interests? _____

_____

_____

_____

3. What are your professional goals (e.g., to become an employment specialist, to become a support coordinator, to be a teacher)? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What training or learning is required to meet these professional goals? _____

_____

_____

_____

5. What are your educational goals (e.g., GED, A.A., B.A., M.S.W.)? _____

_____

_____

_____

(continued)

6. What training or learning is required to meet these educational goals? _____

_____

_____

_____

7. What are the special needs or interests of the people whom you support (e.g., takes multiple psychotropic medications, wants to learn family genealogy)? _____

_____

_____

_____

8. What training or learning is required to support these individuals in their needs and interests?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. What are three priority learning or training goals for you? List each goal and timeline for achieving that goal.

	Goal	*Timeline*
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____

Employee signature: _____

Supervisor signature: _____

Structured On-the-Job Training Checklist for Newly Hired Direct Support Professionals

Competency area: Safety at home and in the community
Purpose: The purpose of this on-the-job training (OJT) checklist is to guide your learning on the health and safety for the people to whom you provide supports. Our expectation as your employer is that you will schedule a time to meet with your supervisor or skills mentor and receive training in the skills identified in this checklist. You will also be expected to demonstrate these competencies.

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Home telephone number: _____ Cell phone number: _____

Your work site: _____ Your supervisor or skills mentor: _____

- ☐ The direct support professional (DSP) identifies what is considered high-risk behavior for the people he or she supports.
- ☐ The DSP identifies real and perceived vulnerabilities for the individuals he or she supports based upon each individual's personal history.
- ☐ The DSP implements safety policies at home, at work, and in the community, based on individual needs and universal best practices.
- ☐ The DSP identifies and ensures resolution of safety issues in the home of the individual supported when they occur.
- ☐ The DSP completes formal and proactive assessments of potential safety hazards in the home environment based on the needs of the individuals who live there.
- ☐ The DSP knows where to find and how to use the fire safety plan where he or she works.
- ☐ The DSP identifies and rectifies any potential fire hazards where he or she works.
- ☐ The DSP periodically practices fire drills with individuals supported.
- ☐ The DSP uses planned fire escape routes when conducting drills.
- ☐ The DSP understands and follows state and organization fire safety standards.
- ☐ The DSP describes the specific action he or she would take in the event of a fire at the place in which he or she works. This action would include specific detail about how to adequately protect the people who receive supports in this setting.
- ☐ The DSP accurately assesses the day's activities for the people he or she supports with regard to community safety precautions that need to be taken.
- ☐ The DSP accurately identifies current and potential risks in the community for the individuals he or she supports.
- ☐ The DSP teaches and models safe behaviors in the community for the people he or she supports.
- ☐ The DSP drives safely and avoids risky behavior while driving.
- ☐ The DSP teaches and models appropriate traffic and automobile safety behavior when working.
- ☐ The DSP implements individual safety protections for the people he or she supports while riding in vehicles.
- ☐ The DSP washes hands using correct procedures at all appropriate times while working.
- ☐ The DSP uses universal precautions as appropriate when in contact with bodily fluids.
- ☐ The DSP correctly cleans and disinfects contaminated surfaces while working.
- ☐ The DSP appropriately cleans and disinfects food contact surfaces while working.
- ☐ The DSP appropriately handles contaminated laundry as needed.
- ☐ The DSP uses appropriate steps when exposed to blood or other bodily fluids.
- ☐ The DSP follows organization procedures regarding incidents in which people have been exposed to the bodily fluids of another person.
- ☐ The DSP completes documentation as needed and accurately in response to incidents and accidents.