

Training Supervisors of Volunteers

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Training staff to supervise volunteers has long been a concern of volunteer administrators. Insuring that the volunteer experience within agencies and organizations is productive and satisfying in part depends on having a paid staff that is willing and able to supervise effectively. During the past three years, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has developed a training program to enable paid staff to work more effectively with the more than 5,000 volunteers who serve Catholic Charities each year.

In 1987, volunteer supervisory training became the highest priority for the eight volunteer coordinators within the Catholic Charities system. Staff were also requesting opportunities to increase their supervisory skills. This past spring, Catholic Charities implemented its first full training program for staff supervisors with a 21-hour training program for 60 staff whose current or future role included supervision of volunteers.

THE TIME FRAME

Pre-March 1987: The Catholic Charities Volunteer Coordinating Committee (the paid volunteer coordinators) in conjunction with the Central Volunteer Committee (volunteer representatives from each division of Catholic Charities) defined Volunteer Policies and Procedures which were approved by the corporate board. Each division added to these policies, addressing the unique concerns of that division (*e.g.*, vulnerable children or adults, homeless issues, unmarried parents, refugee resettlement, and so on). The policies were included in the volunteer orientation, given to staff, and included in division operations manuals and program handbooks.

March 1987: In response to continuing requests for training, the volunteer coordinators explored the development of an

agency-wide supervisory training component. Realizing that there was currently no training for supervisors offered within Catholic Charities, the organization recognized the need to provide training in the basic skills of supervision.

While separate divisions of Catholic Charities oriented staff to the volunteer program, there were no consistent standards or supervisory expectations on which to base the training. Therefore, an initial step was to *define mutually agreed upon minimum standards for supervision of volunteers* (see Appendix A). During the ensuing year, meetings were held with supervisory staff members to fine tune the standards and get agreement and support to implement them.

The personnel department also included the supervision of volunteers as a function in all applicable job descriptions. These standards then became the basis for performance review on that job function. Functions which staff felt were too extensive were incorporated into a document defining how supervisors may exceed expectations (see Appendix B).

March 1988: *The Central Volunteer Coordinator*, responsible for calling together the coordinators from very diverse programs to work as a unit, *recruited a volunteer management consultant.* The consultant presented a training model that had been developed for a large multinational corporation based in the area and agreed to adapt the model for use in the nonprofit arena and specifically for supervision of volunteers.

May 1988: Prior to adaptation for supervisors of volunteers, *the model was presented to the Executive Team for its endorsement and support for staff involvement.* The coordinators then worked with the consultant to write vignettes on volunteers to be used in skill practice sessions and revise the curriculum where necessary to make applicable to volunteer issues.

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June-August, 1988: Approximately 60 managers and administrators who supervised volunteer supervisors attended 16 hours of training to learn about the model and how to coach those staff who would be trained in this model.

October 1988-January 1989: A cadre of trainers was recruited from within the agency in order to keep dependence on outside resources to a minimum, to insure thorough integration of the training with the organizational values and culture, and to allow the training to be implemented over the long term. The trainers included volunteer coordinators and staff selected for their experience as volunteer supervisors and as trainers. Sixteen agency staff members began training to become trainers. All but two of the trainers came from the 60 persons attending the original briefing on the model.

Thirteen of the sixteen who began the training completed 50 hours of training each during which time they developed the trainer's manual, participant manual, and the various exercises which would be used in the delivery of the training. This particular strategy was unique in that it used and demonstrated skill and knowledge of effective adult teaching methods by incorporating the actual development of materials and methodology of delivery into the training process. Each trainee was responsible for preparation and delivery of one training module, which was videotaped and feedback was provided by other participants and the consultant. This process also enabled the consultant and Central Volunteer Coordinator to assess the training skills of the prospective trainers.

During this time, decisions were being made about how best to deliver the training to staff. It was decided to make the training mandatory for all who supervise volunteers. The trainers were organized into training teams made up of a volunteer coordinator and at least one other staff person. At this point those involved in the "birthing" process found time to celebrate how far they had come.

February 23-May 23, 1989: The next phase of actually implementing the training within the agency occurred. Each of the 60 staff who supervised or wanted to supervise volunteers participated in 21 hours of training. Training teams were organized into four different

sections. Different time frames were used in order to determine which would be most effective and desirable in delivering future training.

May 26, 1989: All involved celebrated the completion of the second phase of the program. Each trainer received a certificate acknowledging his or her completion of the training and the significant commitment each had made. Further, each person completing the training received a certificate of completion and a letter from the Executive Director acknowledging his or her work. A copy of the certificate is placed in the individual's personnel file and helps meet the inservice training requirement for credentialing.

THE TRAINING PROCESS

Approach and Methodology

Effective supervision, whether it be of volunteers or of paid staff, requires skill in both the content and process areas. Content can be described as the quality and quantity of work performed, while process defines the way in which we do the work, (i.e., habits, relationships, etc.). Since society tends to be highly content-oriented, supervision is content-driven as well. This tendency is most often expressed in the supervisory complaint, "Well, I told them what to do; why didn't they do it?" Such a comment usually indicates either a lack of understanding of or the lack of skills in the process components of supervision.

In Catholic Charities, as in some other organizations (especially nonprofit human service agencies), the reverse is true: the process takes precedence over content. While the mission and goals of the organization are well documented, the training of those who work in them frequently leads toward a "human relations" style of management. A supervisory comment that often points to such a reversal goes like this: "I can't understand it! We have such a good relationship, and s/he still didn't get the job done!"

The implications for designing and conducting supervisory training in an organization which emphasizes process over content were not, in reality, very different from those that would be considered in doing the same training in an organization that values content over process. In fact, an

argument can be made that training in a process-based organization should be easier to conduct and more effective in long term results since content skills have often formed the basis for promotion to supervisory roles, and process skills are often more highly profiled.

The selection of the training design factored in the need for both content and process and insured that both were congruent with each other within the materials and training delivery, and were also externally congruent with the culture and values of the organization. At Catholic Charities, a training design was developed which incorporated solid interpersonal values, a behavior modeling focus, and a progressive problem-solving structure, with skill practices (role plays).

The interpersonal value (called Key Principles in the jargon of the program) incorporated into the training design were, for simplicity and ease of use, limited to three:

- 1) Maintain and enhance self esteem.
- 2) Listen and respond with empathy.
- 3) Ask for help in solving the problem.

The behavior modeling focus involved an emphasis on describing and demonstrating the right things to do as a supervisor as well as making sure that instructor behaviors in the classroom situation espoused the same behaviors being taught.

The progressive problem-solving structure served to emphasize such content areas as dealing with performance and work habits problems in a first meeting, handling follow-up meetings, and maintaining progress as well as motivating the average performer. This structure kept participants focused on the fact that problems *require* solutions and that those solutions can and should be formulated in a collaborative, win-win manner. The skill practices, a tightly structured role-play format, provided the learning transfer vehicle. It was particularly effective when the participants used their own work situations for practice.

OUTLINE OF THE TRAINING

Seven distinct training modules were covered during the training:

1. Fundamental Concepts of Supervision
2. Dealing with Performance Problems

3. Dealing with Work Habits Problems
4. Utilizing Effective Follow-up Action
5. Maintaining Improved Performance
6. Utilizing Effective Disciplinary Action
7. Motivating the Average Performer

Each module was presented in a three-hour block. The training was experiential in nature and a manual provided both readings and exercises. The format included presentation of critical steps to use in managing each particular situation.

EVALUATION

Evaluations were conducted after each of the seven modules and when the training was completed. Trainers and participants were asked to complete evaluation forms and the results were tabulated in order to determine future changes and directions for the program. Prospective trainers are being identified from participant groups for future development. Evaluation meetings with the trainers were held to review the process and identify needed changes. Some key results of evaluations were as follows:

1. The training was seen as very helpful and should be the model for the agency and be available for new staff on a regular basis. A follow-up system is essential as an ongoing evaluation of the impact of the training.
2. A system to continue coaching those persons who have attended the training is needed. Coaching such as that which was used in the training was seen as particularly valuable by participants.
3. A concern of trainers is to assure continued coordination by one person.
4. One participant who claimed she "hated" volunteers because of a difficult situation was one of the most eager participants and determined she did not hate volunteers as she had thought—she really only needed help to deal with a problem. This story has repeated itself in many different ways.
5. Participants utilized the skills they learned between sessions and brought their concerns back to the next session. Time between sessions provided an opportunity to practice and will continue to be a part of future formats.

6. The commitment of the trainers was extensive, with much work done at home/after hours. While it was a much larger commitment than anticipated, most trainers felt that it was manageable with supervisor's support. Staff trainers felt they were the best models for co-workers. Time was the key concern of the trainers, not the value of the experience.
7. On a scale of 1-5, all responses were a 3 or better on the following items:
 - trainer having good knowledge of the subject
 - trainer being responsive and flexible to meet needs
 - effectiveness of trainers' delivery of material
 - organization of content
 - usefulness of materials
 - outcomes being clear and realized
 - belief that training prepares participants to supervise
 - effectiveness of the training

FUTURE GOALS

Based on the evaluations and ongoing discussions by the trainers and training subcommittee, the following goals were set:

1. To complete training of 180 volunteer supervisors by summer 1990 and to develop a schedule for training new staff members in the program, assuring that all staff who supervise are trained.
2. To have this program available on an ongoing basis through the recommitment of the training team members, recruitment of additional trainers to replace those who have completed their initial commitment, and development of an ongoing "training for trainers" model.
3. To revise materials and format based on evaluations, and to strengthen the introduction as it deals with hiring process.
4. To conduct ongoing evaluation of the program by the Volunteer Coordinator's training subcommittee to improve the quality and effectiveness of the model. A six-month post-questionnaire focusing on specific applications of the material was suggested.
5. To explore the possibility of taking this

model to the larger community, to other nonprofit agencies, to other Catholic Charities agencies around the country and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION OF VOLUNTEERS

We ask the volunteer supervisor to:

1. Attend required volunteer supervisory orientation/training.
2. Work with volunteer coordinator to clearly define volunteer position(s) which the supervisor is requesting (including duties, qualifications, and time commitment to fulfill the position). Keep volunteer coordinator informed of changes in job description.
3. Participate with the volunteer coordinator in the selection of volunteers for the specific position.
4. Provide specific on-site orientation and training for volunteers.
5. Assure regular contact with volunteers for whom you are responsible, and provide a minimum of an annual formal evaluation session.
6. Communicate key information to volunteers which will affect the volunteer's performance (*i.e.*, current operating information, changes in schedules, training, meeting dates and changes in client status).
7. Assure report of volunteer's hours/impact to the volunteer coordinator.
8. Participate in formal and informal volunteer recognition activities.
9. Notify the volunteer coordinator of any problems or questions regarding a volunteer as soon as they become evident and prior to any decision to terminate.
10. Advise the volunteer coordinator when a volunteer terminates and/or has a change in volunteer status.

APPENDIX B

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

SUPERVISORS OF VOLUNTEERS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS BY:

1. Attending additional training regarding supervision.
2. Assisting the volunteer coordinator in recruitment of volunteers and being aware of organizational volunteers needs.
3. Designing and implementing the volunteer training and training materials.
4. Contributing to the volunteer's professional growth, including such things as resume writing, career laddering, reference letters, and special trainings.
5. Planning and implementing formal and informal recognition activities for volunteers.
6. Along with the volunteer coordinator, solving problems around potential issues/problems regarding volunteers and the volunteer program.
7. Engaging with the volunteer coordinator in the annual planning process for the volunteer program.
8. Participating in the divisional volunteer program by serving on a task force or advisory committee.