

UNITED SERVICES, INC.

“BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPERVISOR TRAINING”

INTRODUCTION

United Services believes that knowledgeable and well-trained supervisors form the backbone of a strong agency. Supervisors are our front-line leaders, ensuring that the mission and vision are carried out on a daily basis and that all employees understand the organization’s values. Supervisors are also responsible for setting clear, consistent and fair expectations for the performance of employees, are accountable to ensure that all work performed is high quality, and are responsible for both monitoring risk and reducing potential liability for the agency and within their program. For supervisors to be able to achieve these goals, training and on-going support is crucial. United Services has developed both formal and informal mechanisms to ensure that supervisors are adequately trained and supported. The following describes our “best practices” for training supervisors.

UNITED SERVICES “BEST PRACTICES”

The Start

With the hiring of a new Director of Human Resources in February 2000, United Services began to examine its hiring and training practices. Several problems pointed to the need to correct the past practice of not properly training newly hired or promoted supervisors. Among these problems were:

- 1) the continued employment of non-performing employees due to a complicated, maze-like discipline policy and the lack of clear guidelines for supervisors, 2) the filing of numerous union grievances for inconsistent application of policies, discipline and general supervisory practices, 3) the need to terminate several new employees who might not have been hired if supervisors were trained in how to screen candidates more effectively, and 4) the lack of knowledge expressed by many supervisors on more technical issues such the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and wage and hour laws.

As these problems became evident, a multi-pronged approach was developed to educate and train supervisors to be more effective in all aspects of their job.

Instilling Mission, Vision and Values

Our new approach began with the idea that each supervisor needs to be able to clearly articulate our mission, vision and values. They in turn, are expected to actively role model these daily. Step one was to ensure that all newly hired supervisors are individuals who themselves believe in the mission and are able to communicate our mission and vision to others. Following hire, new supervisors are given a thorough orientation to the mission and our vision of “Creating Healthier Communities”, using the dynamic FISH! philosophy. Supervisors spend time watching videos on the how to integrate FISH! principals into the daily functioning of their team. Each supervisor is given a mission statement to hang in their office and is asked to incorporate discussion of our mission and vision into their staff meetings. Supervisors are expected not only to role model our vision and values, but to ask their staff to also role model the mission and vision to each other and clients on a daily basis. This approach vests each individual, from the CEO to a part-time secretary, with the same responsibility to see that our vision of “Creating Healthier Communities” becomes a reality. And with staff working together on the vision, we have found that we have become a “healthier community” as an agency.

Monthly Supervisory Trainings

The second approach was the creation of a meeting that all supervisors attended. Monthly, all supervisors in the agency gather for a supervisory training. The purpose of these meetings is to provide an opportunity for supervisors to discuss personnel management practices, provide training and education on specific topics, and assist supervisors with the complicated task of developing a sound leadership style and enhancing their personnel management skills. To make these trainings effective, each person receives a Supervisor Training Notebook in which to keep handouts, minutes, personnel forms and their own notes. These trainings are designed to teach both

the technical aspect of supervision, as well as the more practical skills needed to negotiate the various roles a supervisor must adopt.

To determine what types of trainings were needed, a training survey was sent out. Based on the results, a series of trainings was designed to help both the new and seasoned supervisor. Additional subjects were added to address inconsistencies in personnel management practices. These monthly trainings began in May of 2000 and covered such topics as:

1. Agency Culture and Values
2. The Supervisor's Role in Incorporating and Maintaining the Mission and Vision
3. Role of a Supervisor and Leadership Skills
4. Basic Supervision and Risk Management
5. Different Leadership Styles and Risk Attitudes
6. Time Sheets, Travel Reimbursement, Developing a Job Description and Other Forms
7. The Hiring Process: Legal Questions, Interviewing Tips and Reference Checks
8. The Evaluation Process and Action Plans For Improvement
9. The Discipline Process, Counseling/Coaching Employees and Employee Assistance Program

10. Sick Time, Absentee and Driver Guidelines

11. Family Medical Leave Act and Sexual Harassment Training

Individual Supervisor Trainings and Orientation

The third approach was to improve the orientation process for new supervisors. We began by having each new supervisor participate in a group orientation for new employees, followed by an individual orientation with their supervisor and a supervisor training with the Director of Human Resources. These orientations cover everything from policies and procedures, to incident reporting and safety. The supervisor training component covers internal personnel management practices, an overview of our union contract and their role in balancing union rights while ensuring staff perform responsibly, the legal aspects of supervision, effective supervision techniques, and the importance of accountability. Each supervisor training is geared to the experience level of the new supervisor being trained.

Improving Communication And Aligning Agency Policies To The New Expectations

The fourth and final approach was to work on internal communication, and overhaul policies and forms to re-align our internal culture and provide a supportive working environment guided by a clear set of expectations for all staff. This initiative was kicked off by two supervisor training meetings where all the internal organizational issues were put up on newsprint and discussed. From these meetings, a series of issues and priorities were developed that formed the basis of a shift in the agency's culture and expectations for supervisors and their staff. These priorities resulted in a number of important changes in the agency:

1. An expectation that supervision with employees occurs at least every two weeks, instead of the previous quarterly expectation.

2. The development of a new staff evaluation process, training of supervisors in the process, the development of optional employee feedback forms for evaluating supervisors, and creation of new forms, all to establish the process of evaluating staff as an ongoing, participatory process designed to provide concrete feedback on all aspects of performance.
3. An overhaul of our discipline policies and process that includes oversight by the Human Resources Director and expectations for clear documentation and communication.
4. Establishment of new guidelines for staff who drive as a part of their job, as well as new guidelines for sick time, travel, and completion of time sheets.
5. A requirement that some forms and procedures be signed off by a supervisor's next level supervisor, and in some instances the Human Resources Director, to build in increased communication and accountability in the discipline, evaluation and hiring process.
6. An overhaul of the hiring process and new employee orientation process, including new expectations for interviewing, reference checks, and employee orientations.
7. An expectation that personnel management and safety issues be discussed with senior managers so that pro-active problem resolution can occur, and to help unionized supervisors to understand their role as a front-line supervisor and manage the conflicts that can occur between their role as a supervisor and their status as a union employee.
8. Implemented an employee recognition system that consists of "FISH! Thank You Tickets". Staff can "thank" anyone for something he/she did by filling out one half of a ticket and handing it to that person. The other half goes into a monthly recognition drawing for a gift certificate. These

“tickets” builds in the concept that recognition and support is an essential team and agency expectation, not just an expectation of supervisors.

9. Re-vamped the agency newsletter to include recognition of staff, highlight program accomplishments, illustrate the vision/mission/FISH! philosophy in action, alert all staff to changes, and to help improve communication and establish a sense of community.
10. Reorganized the management structure to put all service divisions under one position. This allowed the development of consistent supervision and training expectations, and consistent application of policies between divisions and for all service staff.
11. Established a Multicultural Committee to promote diversity and help educate all staff on the importance of recognizing and celebrating differences.
12. Created new expectations for many meetings, where supervisory staff can ask questions, talk about issues, and where cross education and support can happen.

TANGIBLE RESULTS FROM UNITED SERVICES' BEST PRACTICES

Many positive results have become evident since instituting the above “best practices”. These include:

1. Consistent, fair staff evaluations, regular supervision and a 75% reduction in union grievances.
2. The termination of eight non-performing long-term employees, whose performance issues weren't previously being attended to.

3. The development of new safety procedures that include front-desk risk alerts and training of all staff on emergency procedures.
4. Increased morale and a decrease in staff turnover due to job dissatisfaction by 16%.
5. The hiring of more competent staff for position openings, a 6% decrease in probationary employee terminations, and more well trained staff after six months of employment.
6. A significant drop in agency liability due to the instituting personnel practices consistent with labor law and sound management practices.

SUMMARY

Employees are our greatest asset and our most valued resource. Supervisors are our safeguard, ensuring that the agency's evaluates staff and manages risk responsibility. We believe our "best practices" accomplish this.

United Services is a Behavioral Health and Family Service private, not-for-profit, serving the 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We provide an array of clinical, rehabilitation, counseling, case management, residential, crisis, family reunification, parenting and youth programs. United Services employs over 250 staff, including three psychiatrists and over twenty clinicians, who provide services to over 1,500 clients annually. Located in a rural area of the state, United Services maintains 13 different sites scattered throughout the 21 towns, to increase easy access to services for rural residents.