

# ***The Social Worker as Manager***

## ***A Practical Guide to Success***

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# Promoting Professional Growth

In the previous chapter, we briefly introduced the topic of professional growth when we noted that one of the expectations of social work supervisors is that they provide educational supervision. In this chapter we will examine in some detail those other management responsibilities that are designed to help staff members to grow professionally.

## *Staff Performance Evaluations*

If managers supervise any other individuals within the organization they are required (often as specified in a policies, rules and procedures manual) to perform regular performance evaluations of their subordinates. This is a task that is frequently disliked by both social work managers and those whom they evaluate. However, if performed correctly, performance evaluations can be extremely beneficial to all parties.

### *Why Do Social Workers Dislike Performance Evaluations?*

Many social workers dread their annual performance evaluations. Naturally, if we know we have not been doing a good job or do not trust the person conducting a performance evaluation, we will dislike being evaluated. However, even when neither is the case—we anticipate a positive, fair evaluation—social workers still do not generally look forward to their evaluation conferences. Why? Part of our dislike of performance evaluations may have its origins in our past life experiences. They may reawaken all kinds of humiliating feelings associated with the powerlessness of childhood or other roles in which we were dependent on the approval of others. They may be a reminder that, once again, there exists a power differential between us and someone else, and guess who has the power!

Do we ever reach a point in life where our competence can just be assumed? Most likely, no. When will we ever stop being evaluated? Never. We all continue to be evaluated

by others, no matter how old we are or how competent we have become. Our evaluators are not just our bosses. Sometimes they are our peers, such as when we submit a proposal to present our work at a professional conference or submit a grant proposal to a funding organization. Our family members and friends evaluate us whenever they critique what we do and say (or even how we look). Evaluation is a fact of life; we never “outgrow” it.

What about the people who do performance evaluations? Surely they must feel more positive about them. No, managers’ dislike of conducting performance evaluations often can be seen in both their attitudes toward them and in their actions. Sometimes they communicate to others that they regard them as of little value, something that they personally view as unnecessary but are a requirement of the organization. We know of one supervisor who schedules evaluation conferences only after staff members repeatedly request them. Another avoids contact with staff members when they are due to avoid having to schedule them. Still another one dreads “evaluation time” so much that she does not sleep the night before conducting an evaluation conference.

Why do managers react so strongly to what should be a normal, productive interchange between people? After all, they are supposed to promote professional growth, something we all would agree is desirable. We appreciate the importance of evaluation in many other areas of our work. We evaluate the effectiveness of programs and of our individual interventions. We evaluate political climates or community strengths and resources. But when it comes to evaluating the work of a colleague with whom we work, managers have been known to do most anything to avoid the task. Perhaps it is because we have been socialized to be nonjudgmental of others. And a performance evaluation is a judgment of another human being, at least of his or her recent job performance. However, it is a judgment that is (1) meant to be helpful to that individual in promoting growth, and (2) designed to result in better services to our prime beneficiary—our clients.

If staff members resent having to be evaluated and those evaluating them dislike performing them, guess what? There is a negative mind-set on the part of both parties. Ultimately the result is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The evaluation probably will be of little value. The negative experience will then create a negative mind-set for the next evaluation. The vicious circle will continue on indefinitely, if not stopped. However, if both parties approach performance evaluations with a more positive mind-set—as an opportunity for and a means to professional growth—performance evaluations can be very positive experiences.

### ***The Benefits of Performance Evaluations***

The primary benefit of a performance evaluation for the person being evaluated is it provides feedback for professional growth. It answers the questions, “How well am I doing?” and “What are my greatest strengths and what weaknesses do I need to address, perhaps, with your help?” But more can be learned from an evaluation. It also tells a lot about the person doing the evaluation, the supervisor. No evaluation is ever perfect or 100 percent accurate. However, even its flaws can provide useful information. For example, it might reveal that the evaluator values performance in some areas more than in others, places a high value on cooperation with other staff members, notices appearance or dress, or values conformity more than initiative. In this way, evaluations can

expose the evaluator's values, priorities, and biases. These are important to know about, even if they represent the shortcomings of the evaluator as a manager. Based on the knowledge of them, a staff member can choose to either make changes to better accommodate them, attempt to change them to the degree possible, or, at the very least, know what to expect in the way of future evaluations.

A performance evaluation also can provide other benefits for the individual being evaluated. An "outstanding" or "exceeds expectations" evaluation (even one that is "inflated" because the evaluator is well known for avoiding conflict at all costs) can be an "insurance policy." It makes it difficult to be fired or of experiencing some other negative personnel action. Even if the overall evaluation is less positive, for example, "meets expectations," the evaluation may still provide some degree of job security. If the evaluation is negative overall and identifies various deficiencies, it should also contain specific information about what improvements must be made and what will constitute satisfactory work performance. If the staff member wants to keep his or her job, he or she has learned what must be done.

Performance evaluations also can perform several valuable functions for the evaluator. They provide a periodic vehicle to call attention to individual and organizational goals and objectives. Especially in large human service bureaucracies, there is a natural tendency toward means-end displacements (Chapter 3). Staff members can become immersed in keeping paperwork up-to-date or in compliance with the many rules and procedures that exist. A formal evaluation provides both the manager and the subordinate with the opportunity to stop, step back, and assess just how well daily activities contribute to client services and the organization's goals and objectives. If a means-end displacement seems to be developing, it can be identified early and steps to eliminate it can be initiated.

Of course, if the manager doing the evaluating has "lost sight of the forest for the trees" and has become preoccupied with a supervisee's performance of tasks that were intended to be a means to an end, an evaluation conference will benefit neither party nor the organization. Evaluation in this type of unfortunate situation only tends to reinforce a means-end displacement. The manager bears a heavy responsibility not to lose sight of goals and objectives, even if other staff may have lost sight of them. Evaluation conferences can help to refocus activities and priorities of both the evaluator and of the individual being evaluated.

In conducting a performance evaluation, the evaluator is required to apply certain criteria to judge the work of staff members. Adherence to these criteria may offer some new and valuable perspectives. For example, in the daily interaction that occurs among employees of an organization, personality traits can sometimes distort the manager's impressions of the abilities and achievements of staff. A personable, confident, outgoing, and articulate staff member may tend to leave a general impression of being knowledgeable and competent. Conversely, the quiet, withdrawn loner is more likely to elicit doubts about competence. In fact, the contributions of the loner to organizational goal achievement may be comparable to or even greater than those of the more socially adept individual. But this may not be revealed until a formal evaluation forces the manager to apply a yardstick that neither adds nor subtracts points for personality factors that may not be relevant to performance on the job. The gregarious individual

may, in fact, be using an attractive style as a smoke screen for deficiencies in job performance. Application of the evaluation criteria can reveal this, along with the true value of the more socially withdrawn individual. If a staff member's style or some personality characteristic is a verifiable asset or liability to the delivery of services or to promoting a productive work climate, it has relevance. Otherwise it does not, and it has no place in the evaluation process.

The use of a written evaluation instrument is helpful in reducing the potential for personality bias to occur. Both the business and the social work professional literature contain examples of evaluation forms that can be used, adapted for use by the manager.<sup>1</sup> Many others are available on the Internet. Specific recommendations for productive use of evaluation conferences are also available.<sup>2</sup> In many organizations (especially larger bureaucracies) the manager is required to use certain required instruments and procedures. In this way, everyone is evaluated using the same criteria. The practice can seriously detract from the value of an evaluation because standardized "one size fits all" forms and methods of this type are usually not totally appropriate for the unique requirements of any job. However, along with the evaluation form or checklist there is almost always a space for comments or a brief narrative. This part of the written evaluation can make an important contribution to fairness. It allows the evaluator to address relevant issues that may be specific to the supervisee's job.

In large organizations where work roles tend not to overlap—for example, where supervisors do nothing but supervise, only direct service staff see clients, etc.—the evaluation affords the manager (the supervisor) the opportunity to get to know staff members better and to better understand their jobs. Evaluation time may be the only time that a worker receives the undivided attention of a supervisor to focus on his or her job performance, career goals, and attitudes toward work. While this is beneficial to the individual being evaluated, it is also valuable to the person doing the evaluating. It provides the chance to, for example, consider the potential of the individual for promotion, to speculate on whether a transfer to another work unit might be beneficial, or just to compare his or her career goals with opportunities within the organization. The performance evaluation also helps the evaluator to predict the likelihood of subordinates fitting into long-range organizational plans or of their seeking employment elsewhere.

For those staff performing well and making valuable contributions to the organization and to its goals and objectives, evaluations also provide the manager with a way to reinforce desirable behavior. While staff may sense or even know that they are doing their jobs well, there is something about written and verbal kudos within the context of a periodic evaluation that are especially gratifying for the recipient. This is particularly important in smaller, closer organizations where role differentiation is likely to become somewhat blurred by the necessity for all staff to work closely together, frequently performing the same or comparable tasks. Very positive formal evaluations based on predetermined criteria provide powerful reinforcement for good work performance—more than the general sense of approval that gets conveyed on a daily basis.

On the less pleasant side, evaluations, when performed properly, lay the legal and ethical groundwork for reassignment, denial of merit-pay increases or promotions, demotions, or even termination of staff members who are not performing up to standards or who represent a liability to the organization, its clients, and/or its image within the

community. Optimistically, we hope that an evaluation of an individual who is not performing well will provide an impetus for change and improvement. Managers assume that staff want and are capable of improvement. They suggest specific areas where improvement is required, and provide support for improvement in the form of increased supervision or mentoring and/or continuing education. But there may come a time when it is clear that a staff member lacks either the ability or the desire to improve to the degree necessary and must be dismissed. At that point, written evaluations provide documentation of the individual's inadequate job performance and that the required warnings and all due process have been in place. A "paper trail" consisting of performance evaluations can be used to provide evidence that the decision to fire an individual is neither arbitrary, capricious, unfair, impulsive, nor in any way unanticipated by all parties involved. Thus, they protect the organization from legal problems.

Any task performed by the manager should also have the potential to benefit our prime beneficiary, our clients, either directly or indirectly. Staff evaluations are no exception. When managers provide positive reinforcement for good work they increase the likelihood that services to clients will continue to be good or will get even better. Staff members know where they stand in relation to their supervisors and the organization. They can devote more of their energies to client services and less to worrying about their own job security. Even when managers' evaluations of staff members are less positive, they usually suggest how job performance can be improved and often offer additional assistance for doing better work. Unless they are simply ignored, client services are likely to improve. Of course, if staff members show no improvement and continue to receive poor performance evaluations, clients may also ultimately benefit. The process for terminating them and replacing them with other, more competent individuals will have been initiated. In this way, performance evaluations help to protect clients from those who are either unqualified or unwilling to provide the help that they need.

### ***Characteristics of a Good Evaluation***

What constitutes a good performance evaluation? Like any other management task, a performance evaluation should be performed ethically. The *National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics* informs us that "Social workers who have responsibility for evaluating the performance of others should fulfill such responsibility in a fair and considerate manner on the basis of clearly stated criteria."<sup>3</sup> This one-sentence statement tells us a great deal, both in what it says and what it does not say. For example, it does not say that it is unethical to judge a subordinate's work performance or that a performance evaluation should never be critical of an individual's work.

***Fairness.*** Why is fairness so important in a performance evaluation? Not only is an unfair evaluation of a subordinate unethical, it is also poor management practice. A single unfair performance evaluation can destroy the trust and respect that a manager needs to be effective. How? The individual who receives it will feel anger and resentment. What's more, he or she is likely to share with other staff members those parts of the evaluation that he or she thought were unfair. The organizational climate can quickly change from one of mutual respect to one of fear and distrust.

A manager needs to build a reputation for fairness in conducting performance evaluations. But what are the characteristics of a fair performance evaluation? Here are the most important ones:

1. *Use of Previously Understood Criteria.* It is fair to evaluate an employee based on criteria that were clearly stated and understood by both parties and that were in place prior to the evaluation period. It is unfair to change the rules between evaluations. It is quickly perceived as unfair by staff if new standards for evaluation are introduced at the time of the evaluation.

Evaluation instruments and criteria should be presented and explained to workers as part of orientation when they are first employed. Frequently, they also are contained in a policies, rules and procedures manual. This is useful for both parties. The workers know the criteria on which the evaluation will be based and can use it for ongoing self-assessment of their work performance. Managers, with the criteria in place, are less likely to make some of the common errors that can occur in staff evaluations, such as evaluating the worker compared with their own quality and pace of work, making a general assessment of the worker first and then subconsciously evaluating all aspects of the worker's performance in a way consistent with that rating, or never giving an "outstanding" rating to a new employee in order to "leave room for improvement."

2. *Avoidance of Comparisons.* It is unfair to evaluate staff using other employees as reference points. While some comparison of staff by a manager is inevitable and even desirable in performing some functions (e.g., selecting an employee for promotion), comparison has no place in a performance evaluation of an individual. It amounts to "curving" evaluations, a practice that usually is statistically indefensible. Job performance is not normally distributed and, even if it were, the "sample" of subordinates that any manager supervises and evaluates is not a random one and is likely to be small. If evaluations are "curved," staff members and their evaluations are vulnerable to the strength or weakness of the group in which they find themselves. A very good worker in a group of exceptionally good coworkers would receive a low performance evaluation. Conversely, a weak staff member might be the best in a group of very weak coworkers and would thus receive a high performance evaluation. Of course, either performance evaluation would not be an accurate one.

There are other reasons why comparative staff evaluations are a bad idea: They also create an undesirable form of competition among staff that can inhibit cooperation and teamwork and promote an organizational climate of self-interest. While this competition may result in increased staff productivity in the short run, over time staff members will begin to see it as both manipulative and insulting. Adult professionals should not have to compete with their colleagues and coworkers in a kind of sibling rivalry for the manager's favor and the rewards that accompany it. Their work should be judged on its own merits.

One more reason why a manager should avoid comparative evaluation relates to issues of confidentiality. It is impossible for a manager to convince employees that they are being fairly compared with others without revealing too much about other staff members' evaluations. This practice is unethical. It can also discourage the productive and candid discussion of a worker's own performance that should be a part of any good evaluation.



A staff member may fear that what is discussed will be shared with peers. Useful performance valuations depend on honest communication, and their value is diminished when discussion becomes guarded.

3. *Staff Differentiation.* As managers, social workers often have difficulty rating some staff members lower than others. So, they simply give everyone the same high performance evaluation, despite the fact that staff members almost always reflect varying levels of competence. To do so is to renege on a management responsibility—performance evaluations have not really been performed at all.

The practice of simply giving everyone a high performance evaluation is unfair to all concerned, especially to those who earned the best evaluations. Students can easily relate to this inequity. A student who earns an A tends to resent another student who also gets an A but who did C work; that same student also resents the professor who awarded the undeserved A. Good workers react similarly when they learn through the grapevine that their “outstanding” evaluations by a supervisor reflect very little if any difference from those received by a peer universally known to be only marginally competent. Their own ratings communicated very little. They also underwent depreciation in their eyes and those of others if everyone was rated the same.

Staff members know that there are differences in the motivation, knowledge, skills, and sometimes even the professional values of members of their work group. They have a right to expect that a manager’s staff evaluations will reflect these differences. If they do not (and they almost always find out), they will resent the lack of differentiation and their respect for and trust in the manager will be diminished. No one benefits when all staff members are rated “outstanding” or are otherwise rated the same. Those who should have been rated lower may be initially pleased with the practice. However, they are deprived of the feedback they deserve—information that can help them to grow as professionals.

A manager can differentiate between staff members without resorting to direct comparison of them. The solution is simple: Evaluate all staff employing the predetermined criteria that are applicable to their jobs and provide a narrative description to address anything of importance that is not adequately addressed in them. The differences in staff performance will reveal themselves.

4. *Application of Realistic Expectations.* The goal of evaluations to be neither too severe nor to be too lenient (i.e., to be fair) can be accomplished only if managers introduce other considerations into the evaluation process. Evaluation must be based on an assessment of what is a realistic expectation for each worker. Such factors as the worker’s stage of career development, professional background, stated career objectives, and previous work experience are variables that should be considered. No one can fairly expect the same level of performance (in terms of quality or quantity) from, for example, a new graduate as that expected from a senior, experienced professional. A certain kind and number of mistakes are expected from the new graduate; the same mistakes might be indicative of apathy or motivational problems for the seasoned professional.

Another factor to consider is the nature of the job itself. The amount of cause-effect knowledge (best practices) available to help in performing tasks may be considered in evaluating performance. Was the job one in which our professional knowledge base is well developed (e.g., investigation of an allegation of child abuse or extended care facility

placement)? Or is the amount of cause–effect knowledge so sparse (e.g., intervention with people who are adjudicated sex-offenders or with certain types of youth gangs) that fairness would suggest a high tolerance for a lack of demonstrated success?

In assessing what performance standards are reasonable, still another variable must be considered. In evaluating the work of human service professionals, we frequently encounter situations where there is ambiguity as to what constitutes successful practice intervention. For example, how should an evaluator construe the fact that few of a social worker's clients return for a second treatment interview? Is it indicative of an inability to form treatment relationships or of the successful application of crisis intervention methods? Or is the dissolution of the marriages of three of a social worker's cases an indication that the staff member's role as marriage counselor was performed poorly? Perhaps, a divorce may have been the best solution. Fairness in evaluating a staff member's job performance requires listening to and considering any explanations that are offered. It is also helpful if the evaluator knows (either through having offered case consultation to the staff member and/or through his or her own practice knowledge and experience) what issues and obstacles to success are commonly encountered.

5. *Recognition of Problems in the Work Environment.* Often there were conditions or situations in the work setting that were beyond the control of the individual being evaluated, but yet they impacted on his or her ability to do a job effectively. For example, orientation and training may not have been adequate. Knowledgeable clerical support may not have been available. The supervisor may have been out on extended leave and thus was unavailable much of the time. Coworkers may not have been cooperative and helpful. There may have been technological breakdowns or inadequacies. A noisy workplace or a lack of privacy may have made the job more difficult.

If these or other similar situations existed within the work environment during the period of evaluation, fairness would suggest that the manager provide an accurate assessment of the level of job performance, but also include something in a narrative description of the performance evaluation that is a recognition that they might have at least contributed to any shortcomings of the individual being evaluated. For example, it might state that, "Rosalyn is behind in her case recording, a problem that may be at least partially attributable to the fact that she received eight additional cases when another employee resigned suddenly. Rosalyn is aware that this is a problem that must be corrected if she is to continue to receive a 'satisfactory' (or higher) rating at her next scheduled evaluation."

Another common situation that should be factored in relates to "inherited problems"—problems that may have been either caused by or left over from the previous occupant of the job. They might be, for example, a backlog of contacts to be made, a poorly functioning subordinate who was not given the "unsatisfactory" evaluation that should have been given, or a poor working relationship with certain individuals within the organization's task environment. When problems like these have been inherited, it would be unfair to evaluate the current occupant of the job as if he or she was responsible for them. However, when taking a job, a new employee does assume some responsibility for addressing old problems that are encountered. So what would be a fair way to evaluate a staff member who inherited a problem? Fairness suggests offering a "grace period"—a reasonable period of time that common sense would suggest as reasonable for solving the

problem. During that grace period, it is fair to evaluate the individual on his or her plans for solving the problem, efforts made toward solving it, and progress that has been made. Following the grace period, if the problem still exists the staff member must assume ownership of the problem and is now responsible for it. If it is still a problem, it would be fair to mention this as a deficiency in the staff member's performance evaluation.

Sometimes a manager knows of extenuating circumstances within the work environment. But, not always. Many managers now ask their staff members to engage in self-evaluation prior to their evaluation conference. They may be asked to prepare a draft of their own evaluation. It generally contains (at a minimum) a description of their work during the period of evaluation and what they regard as their primary achievements and what they hope to accomplish in the future. If they are offering direct client services, it usually includes a listing of services offered and/or cases carried. However, staff members may also be asked to provide a written assessment of their work performance along with a description of other factors related to the work setting that they believe the manager should take into consideration. The self-evaluation is given to the manager one or more days before the evaluation conference as additional data for use in conducting the evaluation. Of course, it should be understood in advance that the manager is obligated only to consider the information provided. Thus the description of extenuating circumstances in the work environment may be discounted or even totally disregarded as irrelevant to the worker's performance.

6. *Use of "Hard" and "Soft" Criteria.* With an increase in lawsuits and employee grievances, many human service organizations now rely heavily on standardized evaluation instruments. But even these instruments (and they vary so widely that we were unable to include one in this book that could be described as "typical") tend to include criteria that sometimes are very difficult to measure. Invariably, the instruments reflect a mixture of "job performance, personal abilities, and personality."<sup>4</sup> Such standard factors as absenteeism, tardiness, initiative, conduct, job knowledge and quality, and timeliness of work often are balanced with much more subjective judgments of qualities such as attitude, cooperativeness, adaptability, use of supervision, and ability to work with peers.

In this age of litigation, there might be a tendency to want to evaluate staff performance using only those hard, verifiable criteria that do not leave the manager and the organization vulnerable to charges of subjectivity or bias. But an obsession with self-protection does not produce an evaluation that is accurate, useful, or fair. An evaluation that is limited to easily measured criteria tends to be sterile and of little value. For example, it may indicate that a worker is always on time, keeps up-to-date on paperwork, and complies with organizational policies. But it fails to identify the fact that the worker is not growing as a professional, the worker is not very committed to client service, or that the worker is not a team player, which are very critical problem areas that should be addressed. Unless an evaluation includes this type of feedback to the worker, steps to remedy the problems are not initiated. Should the manager ultimately conclude that the worker is more a liability than an asset to the organization, the legal and ethical groundwork for termination will not be in place.

A good evaluation employs some criteria that are easily measured. But, of necessity, it also includes criteria that are "softer" and thus more vulnerable to charges of subjectivity. Some attributes of staff (e.g., inability to work well with colleagues, lack of cultural

sensitivity, or a cynical attitude about certain clients) are difficult to measure and document, but they are detrimental to the organization and sometimes should not be ignored during evaluations. Certain other attributes that are highly desirable (e.g., a friendly, cooperative approach to coworkers or a good attitude when assigned additional work) sometimes should not be ignored at evaluation time either. They should be acknowledged and, whenever possible, rewarded. However, in some organizations where staff members need little interaction with others they may be irrelevant or at least less relevant than they once were. For example, if staff members are allowed to do most of their work at home or in another non-office setting, what really matters (and should be rewarded) is simply how well they did their job and how productive they were, no matter how they did it. This is the essence of the trend called **performance based evaluation**, which is in part a response to how technology (Chapter 12) often has changed or even replaced the traditional workplace.

There are other “soft” criteria (and they vary from organization to organization) that managers may want to build into a staff evaluation. One common one is “value to the organization.” It is very difficult to document, but important nevertheless. It is something that a manager feels and senses over time, rather than an assessment based on a simple observation of behavior. It is why the manager can say, “If we could only keep one staff member, she is the one we would want to keep.”

It is not the application of “soft” criteria for measuring performance of staff members that gets a manager and/or the organization into trouble. It is when they are used inappropriately (perhaps out of the manager’s own needs) or they are applied to some staff members but not to others who share the same job description. Researchers now recognize that both quantitative and qualitative methods are needed to truly understand some problem or life experience. The more objective methods are complemented by the more subjective ones. Similarly, most staff members now recognize that fairness is best achieved when performance evaluations are based on a combination of judgments and documentable facts. They recognize that no evaluation criterion can be 100 percent objective anyway. Thus they do not object to a package of criteria that contains a mixture of “hard” criteria and some that are inclined to be softer, so long as they know in advance just what those criteria refer to and are assured that they are applied to others as well. Of course, the use of softer criteria is always less threatening to a staff member if the manager already has a reputation for fairness and for good assessment skills.

If fairness requires a balance of hard and soft criteria, just what is the right balance? As always, it will depend on various factors. Some organizations, most often those operating in a relatively unfriendly or even hostile task environment (Chapter 2), may not be able to risk the use of many of the soft criteria. They may have to rely mostly on criteria that can be easily measured and documented, those that are less likely to result in embarrassing legal action or charges of discrimination by disgruntled employees or former employees. In contrast, an organization with a friendlier, supportive task environment can safely use a higher percentage of the soft criteria. If individual evaluators in either organization need to be on safer ground (perhaps because of past difficulties related to personnel actions) they may decide that it is best to use few if any of the soft criteria. However, in doing so, they may sacrifice a certain amount of fairness.

**Consideration.** The *NASW Code of Ethics* also stipulates that a performance evaluation should be considerate. What makes an evaluation considerate? A considerate evaluation provides plenty of opportunity for input and explanation by the individual being evaluated. It acknowledges achievements and identifies strengths as well as weaknesses. It offers support for improvement and professional growth.

The performance evaluation also recognizes and respects the dignity of the staff member. It is predicated on the assumption that the staff member can and wants to be as competent and productive as possible. Thus, it is designed to be constructive and not destructive. It identifies deficiencies, describing them clearly but in a tactful manner. For example, the evaluator should never be sarcastic or attempt to be “humorous” in a derogatory way, either in comments made verbally during an evaluation conference or in the written evaluation that goes in the personnel file.

In discussing fairness, we described how problems in the work environment that are beyond an individual’s control should be addressed—mention them but still rate the individual at a level consistent with actual job performance. But what if the problems are more of a personal nature, for example, clinical depression relating to the loss of a partner or an illness or a behavior problem in the family that may have negatively affected work performance during the evaluation period? Wouldn’t it be unfair and inconsiderate, if not downright cruel, to give someone experiencing such a personal problem a low performance rating, even if it accurately describes the quality or quantity of work performed recently? No. There is a place for consideration when the evaluator is aware of such a problem. However, knowledge of it cannot be allowed to affect the level of the evaluation that is given. An accurate assessment of recent job performance is needed, both by the evaluator and the person being evaluated. To provide an inflated, inaccurate evaluation, even out of sympathy or kindness, would be a disservice. The person being evaluated needs to know those areas where work performance has not been up to the standard in order to make improvements. It could also prove to be a problem for the evaluator and the organization if it later becomes apparent that, even without personal stressors, work performance does not improve. The presence of the inflated evaluation in the personnel file could make subsequent personnel action (reprimands, warnings, or termination) more difficult.

In the evaluation conference, the evaluator should not bring up the personal problem. To do so, even in a supportive way, could suggest that it interfered with the evaluator’s ability to provide an accurate evaluation, and could potentially cause legal problems at some later date. If the staff member brings it up, perhaps as an explanation for poor work performance, the evaluator should listen briefly but keep the discussion short. The purpose of the conference is business—to share an evaluation of the staff member’s recent job performance. It is not to engage in anything that even begins to look like a therapeutic relationship.

So, where does consideration enter in? Consideration requires that the evaluator treat the staff member politely and as we would wish to be treated. It offers assurances of support in bringing work performance up to an acceptable level. Perhaps a slightly longer than usual (but time-limited) grace period may be offered to enable him or her to reach that level before any corrective action is initiated.

If the staff member has not been functioning at the acceptable level, more often than not, he or she is aware of it. The evaluation should come as no surprise. However, the evaluator still needs to provide an accurate assessment of his or her recent work performance.

This should be done both verbally and in writing in a way that the evaluation process does not exacerbate feelings of frustration, anger, depression, helplessness, or rejection. Even if the evaluator has concluded that the recent level of performance is clearly unacceptable and that it cannot be allowed to continue much longer, this can be communicated in a clear but respectful way in the performance evaluation.

Finally, if the staff member is not receiving help for the problem and it appears that it might be beneficial, he or she should be given support for seeking it. If the organization has one, an employee assistance program is often very helpful in this regard, since the staff member's work schedule is usually taken into consideration in scheduling appointments for counseling or other assistance. However, if getting help requires time off from work, the manager can reflect consideration by adjusting his or her work hours to make it possible while still meeting job requirements.

### ***Conducting Performance Evaluations***

Most organizations have written policies, rules and/or procedures in place for conducting performance evaluations. They specify, for example, how often employees must be evaluated and the steps that must be followed. They must be adhered to. Despite recent efforts by organizations to ensure that they do not constitute a contract (new employees are often required to sign a statement to that effect), failure to comply continues to cause problems if legal action is brought against the organization for various personnel actions including "wrongful discharge."

Rules, procedures, and required paperwork tend to vary from organization to organization, but they also have much in common. For example, there are usually two major components of a performance evaluation: a written evaluation and an evaluation conference.

***The Written Evaluation.*** A typical written evaluation may consist of a description of the work undertaken during the evaluation period, a form such as a scale containing the evaluation criteria used along with the rating for each of them, and a narrative summary of job performance during the rating period.

If the individual being evaluated prepares a draft of the entire written evaluation, or even just part of it, the responsibility for it in its final form remains with the evaluator. And that is the way it should be. Evaluating one's self may produce a hypercritical evaluation or certain deficiencies or important issues may be avoided. Even if the draft was performed conscientiously and honestly, there will invariably be areas where the evaluator has a different perception of performance than the staff member. To simply "sign off" on what was written would be avoiding responsibility and would deprive the staff member of the feedback needed for professional development.

***The Evaluation Conference.*** The performance evaluation process is not complete without a person-to-person evaluation conference. Social work managers are most likely to dread conducting evaluation conferences if they know that the evaluation is not going to be a very favorable one. However, if they have been doing the job of manager all along, there is little to fear. The conference should merely be a confirmation of the messages they have been sending

through regular written, verbal, and nonverbal communication. Since the evaluation criteria should have been clarified before the evaluation period began, anything said or anything offered in writing at the evaluation conference should come as no surprise.

While there is no “one best way” to conduct an evaluation conference, there are some methods to increase the likelihood that they will be both fair and considerate. For example, they should be scheduled well in advance and every effort should be made to not reschedule them. While rescheduling may not seem like much of a problem to the evaluator, we must remember that an annual or semi-annual performance evaluation is very important to and can be very stressful for the staff member. It is inconsiderate to postpone it after he or she has been anxiously waiting for it to occur.

The evaluator should plan the agenda for the conference and, perhaps, even rehearse what will be said. This reduces the likelihood that anything will be said or done impulsively that will later be regretted or, worse yet, may be the basis for a grievance.

Usually, the conference begins pleasantly, perhaps with some statement by the evaluator expressing appreciation for the contributions of the staff member. A review of the work accomplished may follow. At some point, a draft of the evaluator’s written evaluation is provided and the staff member is given time to read it. Then it is discussed. The evaluator should listen to any explanations given about any deficiencies noted in it, but should avoid getting into an argument over them. The conference may end with a “look ahead,” in which the staff member can talk about what goals he or she hopes to achieve during the next evaluation period and the evaluator can suggest ways that can be provided (such as training or staff development) to make it easier to achieve them. Overall, most evaluation conferences are pleasant, productive meetings in which valuable information is exchanged. Of course, if the evaluation is not a very favorable one, the interchange may be less pleasant, but still useful.

Following the evaluation conference, the evaluator revises the written evaluation where necessary and a second, brief meeting is scheduled for both parties to sign it. Signing one’s evaluation does not mean that a staff member necessarily agrees with everything contained in it, only that he or she has read and understands it. If there is still serious disagreement, usually the staff member is allowed to write an addendum to it stating where the areas of disagreement are and providing his or her side of it. After both parties have signed it, the written evaluation (including any addenda) is filed in the staff member’s personnel file along with a notation of when the evaluation conference took place.

### ***Problems that Sometimes Occur***

In human service organizations, managers are expected to provide timely written performance evaluations and to conduct evaluation conferences. If they do not provide them, both they and the organization can be in serious trouble. This is especially true in organizations where staff members are unionized. If, for example, a decision is made to terminate a permanent employee and the required annual or semiannual evaluations were not performed in a timely manner, there may be grounds for a lawsuit. Even if an employee has few legal protections—as is sometimes the case with temporary employees, people hired on “soft” money, or people in some “right to work” states—regular evaluations are a fair and considerate (i.e., ethical)

expectation of a manager. While it might be legally possible, for example, to summarily fire an employee in a grant-funded position with no explanation and without ever having conducted a performance evaluation during the years of his or her employment, an ethical social work manager would never agree to it.

The promise (or, perhaps, threat) of future performance reviews can exert a considerable amount of influence over staff members' behaviors. Knowing that there will be a regular, periodic day of accounting, they are less likely to engage in behaviors that they will not be able to justify or that will leave them vulnerable to poor evaluations. All of us (including those of us who are classroom teachers) tend (to a greater or lesser degree) to carry our evaluation instruments in the back of our minds. Their presence and the inevitability of their application are likely to curb those behaviors that we know are likely to result in critical reviews. Of course, an obsession with them also can be counterproductive. If preoccupied with getting good performance evaluations a staff member may tend to "play" to the evaluation instrument too much. This can, for example, result in behaviors such as shirking tasks that are not in his or her job description (since they will not result in "credit"), or choosing not to use certain effective intervention methods with clients (e.g., confrontation) that might result in client complaints. Sensitive managers are aware of the dangers that exist when the promise of staff evaluations becomes a specter to be feared or the major driving force behind decision making.

### *Trends in Performance Evaluations*

In the previous chapter we described some options to the traditional model for supervision. Some of the same developments that have produced them (use of participatory management, greater reliance on information technology, "flatter" organizations) have also resulted in some recent trends in staff performance evaluations. One of these is **peer evaluations**, in which one's peers (rather than a supervisor) conduct the evaluation. Total peer evaluations (in which only peers evaluate the staff member) make sense only when peer supervision is used. However, if other supervisory models are used, peers may still be asked for input by the supervisor. It is generally limited to those areas in which peers would be most knowledgeable, for example, cooperation, demonstration of mutual respect, attitudes toward clients, or other attributes that indicate the individual's ability to be a good team player and to act appropriately. When limited input from peers is requested, it should constitute only one component of the evaluation process—an insight that the supervisor might otherwise lack. It is the supervisor's job to put it in perspective and to acquire additional information about the staff member's job performance.

Evaluation by peers can work well when used for constructive feedback, but we believe strongly that it should not be given anonymously. Anonymity promotes irresponsibility; it encourages people to exaggerate or otherwise distort the truth. Besides, if a negative comment or rating from a peer is to have value, the person being evaluated should be able to go to the individual who offered it, ask for specifics, perhaps provide an explanation, and do what is necessary to correct the problem. Similarly, positive comments or ratings are most meaningful when one knows their source.

As we noted in Chapter 4, performance evaluations are not as "top down" as they once were in other ways too. Subordinates may be asked to evaluate their supervisor's or manager's job performance. When this occurs, it can provide useful feedback, for example,



## CASE EXAMPLE

Scott was a case supervisor in a large family service organization offering a variety of counseling services. He was previously employed as a psychiatric social worker at a mental health clinic for six years. He came highly recommended as a replacement for the previous case supervisor who had retired.

Overall, the social workers that Scott “inherited” were a dedicated and competent group. There was, however, one notable exception. Mildred was 57 years old when Scott took the job. In her first supervisory conference with him, Mildred pointedly but pleasantly reminded him that (1) she had grown children older than he and (2) she planned to work eight more years, doing essentially what she had been doing, and then retire.

Scott soon learned that Mildred had, in fact, been doing very little. She had been hired 27 years earlier along with Scott’s predecessor—her former supervisor—and continued to have regular contact with her. However, as he learned more about Mildred and got to know her better, Scott’s initial irritation at her approach to their first conference subsided. He found himself genuinely liking her. While he had hoped that she would become more productive, he soon concluded that she was probably incapable of doing more. When he assigned several new cases to her, she missed appointments and seemed to become overwhelmed. On those occasions when he needed to use her for work more appropriate to her job level, she generally proved herself to be totally incompetent. The other staff became concerned. They tactfully suggested that Scott just leave her alone and not ask her to do more than she had previously been doing. Her duties had consisted of carrying a few cases that she had had for many years, doing occasional intake histories, watering the plants in all offices, and keeping the waiting room tidy and uncluttered. She also kept the coffee pot filled.

According to policy, Scott was to conduct annual performance evaluations of all of his supervisees. After the first year, he seriously considered rating Mildred as unsatisfactory and confronting her with her shortcomings. Scott tore up the first written evaluation that he had prepared. He decided that Mildred would be devastated if he rated her

objectively, especially since she had always been rated “excellent” by her friend and previous supervisor. He envisioned a hurt, tearful evaluation conference, painful to both parties, and resentment from the rest of the staff for his insensitivity toward her. He couldn’t imagine how she could possibly make productive use of a critical evaluation for improvement anyway, given her sensitive nature and her pattern of performance developed over many years. He chose the road of least resistance with a slight effort at compromise—he rated Mildred “excellent” in eight performance categories and “needs improvement” in two. In their conference he quickly explained to her that everyone (even himself) “needs improvement” in the two areas, punctuality and attention to detail. They laughed together about this and, overall, the conference was a pleasant interchange.

Scott was relieved. Mildred’s reaction was far better than anticipated; it made him even fonder of her and seemed to confirm that he had chosen the right course of action. Scott decided not to assign her to any new duties. This would make Mildred happy and would allow him to continue to give her high evaluations on what she did, without grossly distorting reality. After all, she did make great coffee!

For the next two years, Mildred continued to do very little. Her coworkers continued to cover for her and Scott continued to give her very favorable evaluations. Then a new executive director was hired. Funding had declined drastically following the loss of a major EAP contract. The Board of Directors gave the new executive director a directive. He was to design and implement a reorganization of the organization, “flattening” the organizational structure by cutting out some midlevel management positions. The Board also denied him permission to replace two caseworkers who had recently resigned.

The director wasted little time. As part of his response to the Board’s instructions, he called his first-line supervisors together and explained the situation. He instructed each to develop a plan that would represent no reduction in client services while making full use of remaining staff. Scott

*(continued)*

CASE EXAMPLE *Continued*

considered all possible alternatives. None were ideal and all involved some change that Mildred would see as punitive and that would force her to have more client contact. He finally concluded that the best solution was to assign her full time to do intake histories, freeing up the other remaining social workers and himself to do more treatment. Predictably, Mildred reacted with incredulity, hurt, and even a little anger. She suggested that she might retire early, a thought that gave Scott no small amount of false hope. But before she could follow through on her threat (which most people doubted would occur anyway), another situation arose.

The reorganization resulted in reassignment and/or a heavier workload for eight other employees in addition to Mildred. Six of them were those most recently hired who were given a full caseload immediately. This was a departure from the usual organization practice of giving new social workers a 3/4 load for their first six months on the job. All six were women. One of the six convinced the others and, eventually, even Mildred, to lend their names to a gender discrimination suit against the

organization. The fact that the executive director, Scott, and most other supervisors were male lent even more credence to the complaint.

When he learned just how incompetent Mildred had been for years, the director grew optimistic. Scott told him that neither he nor his predecessor felt that they could trust her to handle higher-level professional duties and had used her for only routine tasks. The director asked for documentation. Scott had to respond that he had none. The director asked to see her annual employee evaluations; they were, of course, very favorable. The director was furious, refusing to accept the only explanations that Scott could offer.

The board, not wanting to risk the public reaction to a lawsuit charging gender discrimination in a human service organization, agreed to a substantial financial settlement for participants in the lawsuit. The resignation of Mildred and all but one of the staff involved in the suit left several new vacancies, most of which could not be filled because of new budget deficits. Another painful reorganization had to be implemented.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How did Scott attempt to justify his decision to give Mildred high evaluations and to assign her little work to do?
2. How did the fact that Scott had continued to rate her highly help to put the organization in legal jeopardy when the reorganization took place?
3. Who else may have been harmed by Scott's actions? How?
4. How could Scott have conducted Mildred's performance evaluations in a way that was both fair and considerate but still reflective of her true level of functioning?
5. Why was Scott likely to receive a poor performance evaluation from his own boss even though Mildred was an "inherited problem"?

a supervisor who perceives herself as readily available and approachable may learn that several staff members perceive her as aloof and rarely accessible. Or a supervisor may learn that he is perceived as showing favoritism in making work assignments. However, evaluations by subordinates should constitute just one component of the supervisor's or manager's own performance evaluation by his or her boss. They should not be allowed to take on too much importance, since there are many reasons why subordinates may rate their supervisor the way they do, some valid and some not so valid.

Still another option reflects an "anyone can evaluate anyone" attitude. It is the **360/multirater review** (sometimes just called a *360-degree evaluation*). It entails allowing

many different people (e.g., peers, subordinates, managers, or people outside the organization with whom a staff member interacts on a regular basis) to evaluate an individual. The major benefit to this type of evaluation is that it provides many different perspectives on a staff member's performance and, thus additional insights into it. However, who is allowed to have input into the evaluation process can greatly affect the results. For example, a few members of a board of directors can easily select only people who they know to be critical of a director's performance (not those who know her to be doing a good job) and then use the evaluation as justification to fire her.

### ***Professional Growth through Continuing Education***

The background of formal education and experience that staff members bring to a human service organization is not enough for them to become "good workers" in their new work environment immediately. They need to learn, for example, the "right" way to perform certain required tasks within the organization. Later, once they master basic job requirements, they will require assistance to continue to grow professionally and to learn how to adapt to the inevitable changes that occur. Orientation sessions and supervision can help them with these tasks, but they also require other learning opportunities. It is the manager's job to provide them.

The *NASW Code of Ethics* states:

#### 3.08 Continuing Education and Staff Development

Social work administrators and supervisors should take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for continuing education and staff development for all staff for whom they are responsible. Continuing education and staff development should address current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics.<sup>4</sup>

Learning within organizations is inevitable. People learn every day. They learn from coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, clients, clerical staff, and anyone else with whom they have contact. The issue for the manager is this: What do they learn, and is what they learn desirable for promoting professional growth? Sometimes it is, and sometimes it most definitely is not. Informal learning from a coworker, for example, may suggest a shortcut in record keeping that will result in more time for client service. The "savings" may have no negative effects or it may result in a disastrous loss of federal reimbursement, if detected. Other informal "orientation" of a new employee by a senior worker may result in a lack of respect for a manager who might otherwise have been respected without the biasing input from the "old hand." If a manager fails to provide for formal learning, other learning will fill the void. But it could just be learning that is undesirable.

Just simply providing learning will not guarantee that it will "take," at least not in the way intended. For example, a training session designed to ensure that employees follow appropriate procedures for reimbursement of professional travel expenses can inadvertently suggest ways to use professional travel to conduct personal business. Just what is communicated in programs of formalized learning should be verified and reinforced by the manager, to be certain that it does not produce unintended results.

### *Types of Continuing Education*

Staff members have a wide variety of learning needs. They range from technical skills to theoretical knowledge to reinforcement of appropriate values. Certain forms of continuing education are appropriate for some learning needs, but less appropriate for others. Three terms—*training*, *education*, and *staff development*—are often used rather freely and even interchangeably to describe the varieties of continuing education methods that exist. Understanding how they differ in purpose, content, and process is very helpful to the manager in identifying what response might be needed by staff for continued growth.

1. *Training*. Unlike the other two types of continuing education, training is designed to provoke a standardized, “correct” behavior from staff. Like a rule (discussed in Chapter 6), it is designed to prohibit the exercise of professional discretion. People can be trained to respond in a prescribed way to a predictable and recurring situation. It is possible and desirable to train in those situations where we know in advance that a situation will occur, that there is one acceptable way to respond to it, and that we can be reasonably certain that the way will be effective. Training is appropriate when we know what must be done and wish to make sure that there is no deviation in the way it is done. Training usually involves hands-on practice in performing a task in the approved way. We can and should, for example, train staff to answer the phone or respond to e-mails in a professional manner, to use nonsexist language, to fill out a form correctly, to enter information into an organization’s computer database, or to comply with requirements for reimbursement from a health insurance organization.

Training is a form of socialization. It helps employees to achieve a basic role competency and to do their work in the acceptable way. It imparts knowledge and provides experience in use of skills that are of immediate value on the job. Thus, it helps employees meet role expectations, that is to “grow into” and learn to function competently in their current job.

Training can be a very cost-efficient and valuable form of continuing education. With training, new staff members come on line quickly and make fewer mistakes. This, in turn, produces less embarrassment for them and for the organization and makes staff members feel better about their work performance. They are then less likely to engage in absenteeism, complain less, and are less likely to look for other work.

Well-trained staff members need less supervision. Once correct methods of responding to situations that can be specified in advance have been learned, staff members can function with more autonomy and feel certain that their handling of a situation is correct. The supervisor, in turn, may be able to devote more time to supervising other workers or performing other tasks.

If staff members are well trained, they will provide better services. As behaviors for which they have been trained become “second nature,” the behaviors become more habitual. This allows them to devote more time and energy to addressing those situations and decisions for which training could not prepare them. Unfortunately, in a time of fiscal cutbacks, training sometimes may be viewed as a luxury. It is often one of the first activities to be reduced or cut out. This is ironic. At a time when there are reorganizations because of funding cuts or non-replacement or “ripping” of staff, it is more imperative than ever that all remaining staff members are well trained.

Professional staff members may complain about having to go to training. But if performed effectively, they almost always appreciate it when it is later put into practice. While in some situations it is desirable for the manager to promote initiative and creative solutions among professional staff members, other situations suggest the need for standardization. For example, there are certain right and wrong ways (legally and professionally) for a child-protection worker to handle a report of suspected child abuse or to complete a form for third-party reimbursement for services. Creativity and initiative are not desirable. Discretion simply cannot be tolerated. The purpose of training is to standardize staff behaviors and to get them to think and to act in a way that is correct. "Indoctrination" often is required since they are expected to possess the same values, to operate on the same premises and priorities, and to absorb these to the point where they are, for all intents and purposes, their own.

Training is usually time-limited and relatively formal while supervision is ongoing and less formal. Yet they are closely related. For one thing, they are mutually supportive. Training supports administrative supervision and vice versa. Like good supervision and rules, training also allows managers to exercise influence over staff behaviors when he or she cannot be physically present to supervise. For example, if a staff member has internalized the correct protocol for scheduling a home visit, it will just seem natural, correct, and an extension of one's own work habits and style. Managers often use training to standardize staff behaviors so that they need to provide less direct supervision. Training can allow staff to feel less controlled. It provides "alternatives to the exercise of authority or advice as a means of control over the subordinate's decision."<sup>5</sup>

Confident, well-trained, and well-supervised employees have a tendency to feel better about their jobs. What's more, training is efficient. The cost of not training is often much greater for both staff members and the organization (in errors and embarrassment) than is the cost of training.

**2. Education.** In many ways, education is designed for learning needs that are almost directly opposite to those addressed through training. Education is the communication of a body of general knowledge. It is designed to equip the learner to be able to act competently in some future situation, the specifics of which cannot be clearly envisioned. Education is the only preparation possible for the one-time-only, not totally predictable situations that professionals often encounter. If we knew exactly what the situation would be and what it would require, we could do more than educate—we could train for it.

There is often confusion regarding the respective purpose and meaning of the terms *training* and *education*. Social work students and educators are familiar with the confusion generated by their respective meanings and the problems that arise. Faculty perceive themselves as educators, preparing their students by providing them with generalized knowledge designed to assist them in functioning in some future, unspecified practice situation. While social work education may have some training components (most commonly within field agencies and, sometimes, in practice courses where more skill-building takes place), the preponderance of curricula is designed to educate, not to train. There is a compelling logic for this emphasis. We cannot anticipate the precise needs of a client or client group in some future situation or the correct decision or response of a social worker. Furthermore, no two practice situations and no two social work practitioners are identical. The social worker needs to be able to assess the situation, to draw on experience and generalized knowledge acquired

through education, and to apply professional discretion in a unique, one-time-only manner. If social workers were trained and not educated, those who received their professional preparation before knowledge had accumulated would not have been prepared to work with people with HIV/AIDS or their families, or to provide services for new categories of people who are homeless. Or, social workers who attended social work programs prior to the twenty-first century would not have been prepared to offer assistance to people who are victims of new forms of domestic acts of terrorism or unprecedented disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or the earthquake that devastated Haiti the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Nevertheless, many social work students often enter a program of professional education expecting an amount of training that, most faculty would argue, cannot be offered. Just how much training is appropriate within social work curricula remains open to debate, even among educators.

Staff members often rely on education to promote their professional growth. They enroll in individual academic courses, a package of courses leading to an advanced certificate in some specialized area such as gerontology or substance abuse, or in advanced degree programs. If resources are available, released time and even tuition subsidies from their employer are much appreciated.

As staff members acquire more education and particularly if they are awarded advanced degrees, they are likely to expect increased work responsibilities, higher salaries, and continued career advancement. For the staff member, it would be demoralizing to invest the time, effort, and expense to go back to school and then return to one's old job with the same responsibilities, perhaps even with a loss of seniority for time spent in getting an advanced degree or certificate. Unless employees are rewarded for their educational achievements, they are likely to quit their jobs to go elsewhere where they will be "more appreciated."

**3. Staff Development.** The third form of continuing education, staff development, can be especially useful to the manager in addressing problem situations or in providing staff with the new or updated learning required to function effectively in a changing work environment. Staff development is a kind of hybrid—it contains some elements of both training and education.

What distinguishes staff development is its specific problem focus. Changing knowledge, changing service needs, and changing standards for their delivery are likely to create practice knowledge gaps and stress among staff. In past years, certain problems have created timely and appropriate topics for staff development. In the early 1980s, it was often burnout or detection of child abuse. In the 1990s it was various topics related to the changing needs of people with HIV/AIDS, managed care and, in the public sector, block grants and welfare reform. More recently it has been a variety of problems related to the widespread growth in the use of newly developed illegal substances, the problem of cyber-bullying, or the adjustment problems faced by veterans of recent wars and their families. Generally, staff development tends to address the needs of practitioners for current knowledge relating to a recently identified (or at least recently spotlighted) problem in the field. It usually employs a short-term intensive format with a fairly narrow focus. State-of-the-art knowledge is presented and discussed along with practical suggestions for addressing the problem. Sometimes, experiential learning is a part of staff development. Overall, it provides the manager

with a useful and well-received vehicle for influencing employee growth. Staff members tend to like spending time acquiring new and emerging knowledge and in addressing topics that are widely discussed in both professional and lay circles.

### ***Providers of Continuing Education***

Many different individuals and groups can provide continuing education. Ideally, education is the domain of college or university educators. Training is conducted by staff within the organization, at least within the larger bureaucracies that have staff whose job description includes continuing education. Staff development is a contested area that is claimed by those possessing various professional affiliations.<sup>6</sup> However, these boundaries have become blurred. Schools of social work and other academic units have hired more and more people who are not full-time educators to teach courses as “adjunct faculty.” Concurrently, fiscal necessity and opportunity increasingly have resulted in academicians performing training and staff development for human service organizations. Professional organizations and private, for-profit contractors have seized upon opportunities to offer training and staff development. The current environment can be a confusing one for social work managers who are unclear as to just what they want in the way of staff development and what they are able to pay in the way of monetary and non-monetary costs. We will explore some of the costs and benefits of available options.

***Staff Members.*** Certain obvious advantages exist for managers who select in-house providers of continuing education. They are already on the payroll and are committed to the organization; a certain level of loyalty can usually be assumed. They also understand the organization and its unique needs, political constraints, and clientele.

Using in-house staff members requires only simple arrangements and agreements, and a minimum of paperwork and red tape. Contracts involving complicated budgeting and time-consuming approvals at several levels are largely unnecessary. However, the extensive use of one’s own employees and the short-circuiting of multilevel review and approval procedures can be costly. With no written agreements and contracts, monitoring and quality control are difficult.

Too heavy a reliance on one’s own employees can also result in a shortage of new ideas or creative approaches to situations. An employee may lack familiarity with and access to the theoretical knowledge that is readily available to the academician.

Ironically, the greatest strength of employees as providers of continuing education is also their greatest liability. They are clearly identified with the organization and all the advantages that this entails. But this identification also threatens their credibility and, therefore, the effectiveness of their teaching. Will employees accept their expertise as they would that of an outside “expert” who may hold high academic credentials? Will their employee status make them suspect as continuing education providers? Will trainees seek hidden meaning in what they say or do because they are viewed as agents of the organization? They may bear the dual liability of being perceived as both “prophet without honor” and “spy.” Even the most accepted fellow employee may not experience a productive candor from participants. The usefulness of employees as providers of continuing education may be limited to activities where suspicion and doubts about competence and loyalties are least likely to exist.

Generally, when we think of organization staff members as potential providers of continuing education, we tend to think of persons employed as trainers or of experienced senior-level staff. But social work managers may have another valuable resource at their disposal. As providers of one type of continuing education—orientation training—an employee's peers may be the option of choice. Peer training is "the use of a more experienced fellow employee to teach specific knowledge and skills to a new employee of the same level and job description."<sup>7</sup> It can occur in a classroom setting or, more frequently, in a one-on-one situation. Peers are often assigned on a time-limited basis under the direction of a permanent organization training staff member or the manager. Several potential advantages exist. These include:

- *Accessibility.* Local peer trainers are more accessible to assist the newly hired worker than are permanent continuing education personnel or the local supervisor, whose time is consumed by program management and the many needs of other employees.
- *Individualized attention.* Peer trainers who may have recently experienced the same anxieties and learning needs as the new employee may be able to identify with and relate to their learning difficulties.
- *Choice of trainer.* From among a variety of persons, trainees and their supervisor can help to select the individual who is the best match of personality and teaching/learning styles.
- *Trust.* New employees may find it easier to trust and to be candid with a peer. They will be less inhibited about asking what they fear may be "dumb" questions of a peer trainer than they might be in questioning a more senior-level staff person or a full-time trainer.

Disadvantages of using peer trainers lie primarily in the way in which they can threaten the role and authority of the supervisor. They should only be employed in a way that it is clear to all concerned that ultimate responsibility for the socialization, job preparation, and performance evaluation of a staff member remains with the supervisor.

***Private Contractors and Established Continuing Education Programs.*** Some large organizations (whether private for-profit or relatively freestanding programs within universities) are deep into the business of continuing education. The manager who seeks continuing education from private contractors or continuing education programs within universities is buying economic motivation and experience. They both want and need the work; continued employment of their personnel depends on it. Providers generally have many years of experience in offering continuing education and understand what organizations want and what works. They often have developed attractive, copyrighted packages and know how to develop new or modified ones. These packages include such learning supports as workbooks, PowerPoint presentations, CDs, and other aids that are both well liked by participants and have a record of effectiveness.

Established continuing education programs generally will allow the consumer to specify what is needed, but will take the responsibility for the more specific development and packaging phases. Since continuing education is a business to them and subject to the rules of the marketplace, they must deliver on time and satisfactorily. Dependence on future contracts—and the threat of possible legal action—guarantees it.



Agreements with established social work continuing education programs tend to be expensive. There are overhead and administrative costs to absorb, materials must be developed and purchased, people who deliver the training or staff development must be paid, their travel expenses reimbursed, and so forth. These programs also have their priorities. Since continuing education is a business and they make a profit, they are most interested in those agreements involving the greatest compensation. They actively seek big dollar, long-term contracts that offer the greatest job security for their staff members. Managers looking for a single half-day workshop or other low-cost continuing education program may need to either seek other providers. The response may be "not interested," or they may have to wait until the organization can find a time to offer them in-between other, more lucrative commitments.

***Individual Social Work Educators.*** The faculty of some social work academic programs in colleges and universities that lack freestanding continuing education units often are a good source of some types of continuing education, usually at low or even no cost. College and university faculty members usually are expected to provide some service to the community (along with teaching and research), preferably *pro bono*. They also need to remain current with social work practice. The opportunity to offer one-day workshops or brief training sessions meets both of these requirements. Thus, a request to offer them is often welcomed, especially by those who aspire to promotion and/or tenure.

Continuing education agreements with individual faculty members have a benefit in the form of the aura of the educator who, at least among some people, may have "instant credibility." Academicians are presumed to have knowledge and expertise in their field. Of course, this is not always true. Educators' credibility can be rapidly destroyed by a few comments that indicate that they are out of touch with the real world of professional practice. And, sometimes, educators are simply assumed to be out of touch, whether this is the case or not.

There are other potential problems in using people whose primary responsibility is not continuing education. Certain errors may be made that people within established continuing education programs would not make. Unless they are quite experienced at it (and more senior faculty members often are less interested in conducting continuing education than their more junior colleagues) there is less probability of a smooth, well-implemented product when using individual social work educators. For example, educators may be tempted to use shortcuts to the development of continuing education curricula by trying to adapt content from their existing course materials. This can result in overly theoretical, esoteric presentations that may have little pertinence to the needs of employees. Educators also are accustomed to vigorously guarding principles of academic freedom. They may resent and resist organization efforts to influence the content and/or format of delivery. The manager may have little control over what is actually presented when purchasing continuing education from academicians who are accustomed to exercising a good ideal of autonomy in what and how they teach.

Although the motivation of individual providers is an important variable among all provider groups, it is a special concern in continuing education agreements with people who perceive themselves primarily as academicians. Some faculty members perceive that they have less to gain from providing first-rate continuing education activities than others. Identifying those who are most highly motivated to do so is an important task. Those who perceive little personal reward for themselves other than, perhaps, a small salary supplement are best avoided.

**Other College/University Units.** Some of the specialized knowledge and expertise needed within human service organizations is only minimally taught in social work programs. It may be desirable to seek continuing education that is delivered by people who are acknowledged to be “experts” in other related fields such as public health, nursing, psychology, or law.

Staff members may find it refreshing to be taught by those from another discipline. They may have previously experienced frustration with in-house staff or with social work academicians. Of course, being from another discipline can also work against providers if they are perceived as unaware of the unique characteristics of human service delivery systems.

A lack of identification with social work values and ethics also can be a major problem when using providers from other academic disciplines. Before choosing them, a manager should ascertain whether individuals who will deliver continuing education are likely to perceive clients and services in a way consistent with social work values. The best continuing education methods can be of little value when delivered by a provider who, for example, clearly believes all single-parent families are dysfunctional or that corporal punishment is the right and responsibility of parents and cannot relate to anyone who believes differently.

### ***Agreements for Providing Continuing Education***

Three basic types of agreements are used for the delivery of continuing education services by persons outside the organization. They are consultation agreements, grants, and contracts. Confusion regarding the meaning and implications of each of them can result in problems and a great deal of resentment on the part of those involved. Whether in negotiating with providers of continuing education or in monitoring agreements made, a manager should be careful to avoid using the three terms as if they are somehow interchangeable. They are not.

**Consultation Agreements.** A consultation agreement is designed to bring a person or persons into the organization because of some specific expertise that is needed. Consultants also are hired because they are believed to possess objectivity. They should have no allegiance to any staff (at any level) and no preconceived biases as to the rightness or wrongness of anyone’s position.

In human service organizations, it is sometimes stated that we hire “consultants” to provide regular ongoing services (e.g., case supervision) if no one on staff possesses the necessary credentials or expertise. But this is really a misuse of the term. These persons are really just part-time employees. True consultants are involved with an organization on a very time-limited, often problem or need-focused basis. They might, for example, be brought in to help to redesign an organization’s personnel benefits, to computerize its client record system, to design a needs assessment for a proposed program, to teach board members how to conduct strategic planning, or to help the organization retain its accreditation. Less frequently, they are used for professional development, but it does occur. For example, a consultant might be hired to help professional staff members to learn how and when to use a new form of intervention with clients who have some problem.

Actual written agreements for consultation can be quite formal (e.g., the Veteran’s Administration requires extensive paperwork and higher-level security clearances), but they frequently involve little more than a letter of agreement outlining the general purpose, duties, and compensation involved. Usually, a certain number of hours or days

of the consultant's time are purchased. Some of the time may be used in preparing for a consultation visit if that is part of the agreement. The consultant may request documents from the organization to help prepare for the visit or even assign staff members to perform certain tasks like compiling records or keeping journals prior to actually meeting them. Because the consultant is assumed to be the expert, the specific nature of what will be offered during the visit may not be specified in advance. This is often left to the judgment of the consultant, who should be in the best position to know how to do the job.

It is in the best interest of consultants to keep agreements as vague as possible. That gives them the maximum amount of autonomy. However, a manager who hires a consultant may wish to make the agreement as specific as the consultant will allow in order to ensure that the organization gets exactly what is needed.

**Grants.** Grants are most accurately understood as a sum of money given to individuals or organizations to perform work in their areas of expertise. The most common of these is research grants, which are awarded because applicants are believed to possess the necessary experience, skills, and knowledge to successfully undertake research in some area. Frequently, research grants are awarded to researchers and academicians to enable them to continue their research agenda or to allow them to pursue some existing area of inquiry on a larger scale. Common sources of grants are federal agencies (e.g., the National Institute of Mental Health, the Department of Education, and the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health).

University faculty like and actively seek research grants. They can provide a significant salary supplement in the form of summer pay and/or result in a reduced teaching load. There are other attractive benefits too, such as budgets for employing research assistants, professional travel, or purchase of computer hardware and software. As long as faculty demonstrate a reasonable degree of accountability in the expenditure of funds, the grantor will allow them to use discretion in specifically how, for example, they will design their research or how they will analyze their research data.

Social workers are also familiar with **program grants**, sums of money awarded competitively to agencies to initiate, expand, or help to support a social program. Common sources of program grants are federal agencies but also private philanthropic foundations such as the Duke Foundation or organizations such as United Way. Organization administrators seek and often depend on program grants for their survival, especially in the non-profit sector.

In fact, grants for conducting continuing education are relatively rare. So why even mention them in this discussion? Unfortunately, federal agencies sometimes use the term *training grant* to describe an agreement to develop and to deliver what we would define as training, but also education and staff development. However, when this term is used, it is really a misnomer. Whereas the word *grant* connotes a fair degree of trust in the provider to develop and deliver a quality product, the requirements of a federal training grant are often very specific and rigid. Little autonomy is given.

Social workers who, in their role as manager, are involved in seeking outside continuing education services should be wary of using the word *grant* to describe such an agreement. Despite the fact that grants frequently involve long written agreements and notarized

signatures, use of the term *grant* suggests that the organization awarding it will defer to the superior knowledge and experience of the grantee. And, in seeking outside assistance with continuing education, this can be dangerous. In most instances, a contract better serves the needs of the organization and its staff members.

**Contracts.** Because of the freedom implicit in the use of consultation agreements and grants, persons in organizations who are seeking outside continuing education services prefer to use contracts. Contracts simply are more enforceable, holding the provider of continuing education directly responsible for delivering what has been promised in a manner acceptable to the organization. Contracts are legally binding; if continuing education is not delivered as specified in the contract, the recipient may not be paid or part of the agreed-upon fee may be held back. In contrast, dissatisfaction with services based on a consultation agreement or grant probably will result in a tarnished professional reputation and the provider not receiving future agreements. There is rarely any other penalty.

Like a grant, a contract generally is awarded on a competitive basis—that is, several organizations or individuals usually “bid” for it by submitting a proposal in response to the organization’s request for proposals (RFP). A “sole source” (no competitive bidding) situation is permitted only if it can be demonstrated that only one organization or individual is qualified to deliver the desired continuing education service.

A contract for continuing education services is best understood as being virtually comparable to, for example, a contract a homeowner might sign to have new carpeting installed in the home. Material quality, time of delivery, and quality of work must be that which was agreed upon and must be approved by the homeowner or the homeowner is legally not bound to pay; full or partial payment may be withheld. If, however, all conditions are met, the homeowner is required to pay in full. The contract is designed to protect both parties. They are protected if events unfold in a way that one or the other did not envision or if it is later learned that their perceptions of what the job entailed were not in agreement.

Contracts tend to be negotiated and written out in legal jargon and in great detail. Authorized signatures are required. Unlike consultation agreements or grants, little is left to the discretion of the provider or the purchaser, at least it should not be.

Unfortunately, even the use of contracts sometimes does not preclude problems if the provider of continuing education does not understand the difference between a contract and a grant or consultation agreement. Professional providers of continuing education in private, for-profit organizations are well aware of the differences. However, individual educators are especially notorious for confusing the three types of agreements. The mind-set of many educators is toward grants or consultation agreements, since those are the agreements that they see most frequently. They may mistakenly believe that any agreement for continuing education services provides for similar autonomy and exercise of their professional discretion. When they learn that they are wrong, a strained relationship can occur.

Another frequent source of trouble is the belated realization on the part of educators that a contract usually grants ownership of materials and teaching aids developed under the contract to the purchaser (organization). Professors using treasured course materials developed over the years may be shocked to learn that they no longer own “their” material after being paid for their part in delivery of continuing education. In fact, under agreements

contained in most contracts, the educator need not be invited to return to deliver the continuing education if it is offered again. An agency staff member can take notes while sitting in on the professor's instruction or take the educator's PowerPoint slides and use them to teach subsequent sessions on the same topic.

While contracts with universities for continuing education are generally an organization-to-organization agreement, it would be naive not to understand contracts as an arrangement also made at the human level. Such agreements can vary widely in their desirability for providers of continuing education. Individual attitudes toward doing the work are likely to be affected by ego needs, financial considerations, career status, and other factors that can either enhance the quality of learning offered or detract from it. For this reason, the manager should, whenever possible, specify the choice of the person or persons who will deliver the continuing education when an organization is awarded a contract.

Overall, when a manager knows what staff members need for their professional development, contracts provide the best assurance that they will receive it. However, until there is greater understanding of the differences among the three types of continuing education that have been described, some problems and resentment probably are inevitable even when contracts are used. Because of this, managers have a heavy communication responsibility on the front end of any contractual agreement. If agreements for continuing education services are allowed to produce bitterness on the part of providers, it is the potential beneficiaries (staff members) who will suffer a loss. They will not receive the quality learning required to enhance their professional growth.

## ***Promotions***

Staff evaluations form the basis for the manager's assessment of staff members' competence. Along with day-to-day observations, they help to form impressions of, among other things, who is using continuing education effectively for professional growth, and who may be interested in and capable of assuming different or greater responsibilities. These impressions, in turn, help a manager to make recommendations or unilateral decisions as to who should be promoted as vacancies occur.

When a staff member is offered a promotion, it generally conveys a message of "job well done!" and the manager's belief that he or she has demonstrated professional growth and can continue to perform well in a job with different (usually greater) responsibilities. But selecting one individual when one or more others may have wanted the job can also cause resentment among those not promoted. Recommending one employee over others (who may also be competent) for a promotion can leave a manager in what feels like a "no-win" situation. Unless it is handled skillfully and diplomatically, the manager's carefully cultivated reputation for fairness can be jeopardized.

## ***Common Issues***

In determining who is the best person for the job, managers need to consider a number of key issues. Some of them are the same issues that we discussed in relation to hiring new employees in Chapter 8.

**Constraints.** In unionized organizations, managers may not have the freedom simply to pick the person they deem to be best for the job. In order to maintain good labor relations, they may need to adhere to union guidelines. Affirmative action requirements and the organization's rules and policies may also affect who may be chosen.

It is not unusual to be caught between labor unions with seniority-based requirements on the one hand and federal nondiscrimination and affirmative action requirements on the other. Women and particularly people of color or people with disabilities may possess the least seniority, having been recently hired within many organizations. By union standards, they are not likely to be in line for what would be considered an "early" promotion. Yet efforts to eliminate discrimination (as well as our professional values as social workers) would suggest that, in the interest of achieving diversity, we should promote them. Sometimes there is no perfect candidate for a promotion or a perfect solution to the opposing forces that can influence the choice of a candidate for promotion.

**Past Performance.** The past is a good indicator of the future, but it is far from perfect. We cannot be certain how an employee will perform if promoted, but past and present behaviors and attitudes give us some good hints.

An individual selected for promotion (in the manager's perception) at the very least ought to have been doing a good job in his or her present position. While it is conceivable that a staff member who is just functioning marginally would rise to new heights if promoted, it is highly unlikely. The concept of "promotion to motivate" has little validity. In addition to the fact that it is unlikely to be successful, it sends the wrong message to other staff, namely do an outstanding job and we will overlook you; do a marginal job, and we may promote you. This same message is conveyed when the outstanding staff member is passed over in favor of one less competent because the outstanding one is viewed as too valuable to the organization in his or her current job. Some managers have received a less-than-grateful response when they have paid staff members this kind of "compliment" after denying them a promotion.

Consider the issue of promotion among social work professionals. Traditionally, the best direct practitioners have been picked to be supervisors. The assumption is that a good practitioner will necessarily be a good supervisor. However, this is not always the case. Successful one-on-one intervention, the ability to lead a group, and other skills that are important in direct practice roles can serve a social worker well in the role of supervisor. However, a promotion to supervisor means taking on additional management responsibilities. In addition, while the basic activities of management are the same at all administrative levels, many of the specific tasks are not. They require different knowledge, technical skills, and perspectives.

In the past, the most successful supervisors or midlevel managers have been promoted higher in the organizational hierarchy, and the best of these have been chosen to be the top-level administrator. While this can work well, it also can result in problems. By the time an individual is employed long enough to become the director, he or she may have lost touch with "life in the trenches." Also, an unfortunate phenomenon can occur whereby staff members leave positions where they function well and continue to be promoted until they reach a level where they can no longer function effectively, something referred to as "the Peter principle."<sup>7</sup> Then they remain there, often at great cost to the organization.

**Personal Attributes and Demographic Characteristics.** What about personal attributes? How important are they in selecting an individual for promotion? They are less important than we might initially think. Certain attributes such as initiative, intelligence, conceptual abilities, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, integrity, communication skills, and commitment to organizational goals tend to be frequently mentioned as indications that an individual is capable of “moving up.” These are all good attributes to possess, but they and most of the others suggested in the literature are desirable among professionals and other staff members at any level in the organization. Besides, how much of them is desirable? For example, how much intelligence is necessary to be a good supervisor? We know that it is helpful to be as intelligent or maybe a little more intelligent than those you supervise, but at what point does a disparity in intelligence between a supervisor and a staff member become a problem? We can also identify persons who are excellent managers but who, nevertheless, seem to lack one or more of those attributes often suggested as prerequisites for successfully assuming higher-level positions.

Should demographic characteristics be considered? In selecting a staff member for a promotion, managers have been known to favor a staff member who has the demographic characteristics of its previous occupant or even someone who is most like themselves. This can lead to problems. Suppose the previous occupant was a white male and very successful in the job. That does not mean that the next occupant should be a white male. The job could be done differently and, perhaps, even better by a woman, a person who is African American, or a person with a disability. Of course, denying a promotion to a qualified individual based on any demographic characteristic that the manager deems inappropriate for the position is dangerous in another way. It might be the basis for charges of discrimination. And, we should remember, selecting someone for promotion primarily because he or she has certain demographic characteristics can lead to the same charges.

One attribute that is essential for someone being considered for promotion is the desire to perform more of the activities of a manager (See Chapter 14.). A useful question to ask is, “Does this person really want the job or just the perks that go with it?” If, in fact, we are not convinced that an individual wants to spend more time managing and would be good at it, he or she might not be a good candidate for promotion.

**Needs of the Organization.** The formal job description of a position may give only a limited hint as to the best person to assume the job. If, for example, it is a supervisor’s job that involves overseeing a productive, cooperative, self-motivated group of professionals, one type of supervisor may be appropriate. Another position, though identical on paper, may require a supervisor who can exert the control necessary to bring to productivity an apathetic or passive-aggressive group who appears to have retired on the job. Especially in the task of selecting a supervisor, the matching of potential supervisory style and attributes with subordinate needs becomes extremely important.

Should a manager consider only those individuals currently within the work unit (or, perhaps, only those currently employed within the organization) when a higher-level vacancy occurs or are persons from outside an alternative? Sometimes policies and, occasionally, even rules (such as the requirement that a position be advertised in the media for a certain number of days) make this decision an easy one for the manager. But if a policy invites consideration of both alternatives or if no organizational guidance is

available, it can be helpful to assess both the costs and benefits of the available options for the organization and its work environment.

Consider the selection of a replacement for a case supervisor who has resigned. On first blush, a promotion from within the work unit appears to be the logical option to choose. A pattern of continued looking beyond current staff when opportunities for advancement arise can have a demoralizing effect on staff attitudes. But if the usual practice is to promote from within, employees not only feel that they have a chance to get ahead but they also feel that their employee status gives them a better opportunity for advancement. What's more, managers considering their own employees for promotion are much more likely to make a knowledgeable decision (they are more likely to know candidates' strengths and weaknesses) than if they were to consider persons outside the unit or outside the organization about whom less is known. Why not tap the management potential of one's own organization?

While a practice of promotion from within has a compelling logic to it and several distinct advantages, a number of cautions regarding its use are in order. Generally, staff members tend to favor the idea of promotion from within and its implicit potential for upward mobility. But jealousies and rivalries can develop within organizations that have a policy of promotion from within. Competition for a position that may become available some time in the future can be a stimulus for productivity. But it can also promote an attitude that, for example, discourages sharing of essential information with colleagues (potential rivals for a job) or other forms of noncooperation. Staff members may tend to engage in largely self-serving behaviors.

It should also be remembered that a promotion of a competent and proven staff member may weaken the ranks from which that person was drawn. Can an adequate replacement be found within the organization (a double disruption) or hired from outside? Sometimes not.

Arguments for filling higher-level vacancies from outside the unit or the organization relate primarily to how this practice can help to avoid the problems related to promoting from within, which were discussed. While hiring from outside does not directly deplete the work unit, if it happens too frequently staff may begin to feel career-blocked and decide to leave. On the positive side, it may be less personally embarrassing for a staff member to have someone outside get the job that he or she had sought than it is to have a coworker be given the promotion. While staff may disagree with the principle of filling higher-level vacancies from among those outside the organization, it usually does not produce the same level of bitterness among staff members who might have wanted the job.

Open competition for a position among both current employees and outside applicants would seem like a good compromise. It allows a manager to select from among a larger pool of applicants. However, it puts a heavy burden on managers to demonstrate that the competition is indeed open in order to maintain a reputation for fairness. Despite the existence of such a policy, employees who sought and did not get the job often seem to want to rationalize that a job was "wired" from the start. So, even open competition can leave some staff angry and resentful. When it comes to promotions, managers sometimes feel like they just cannot win!

### ***Other Issues that May Be Relevant***

There is an almost limitless number of other factors that can influence the decision as to who is the best choice for promotion. They include, for example, whether the organization



is in a period of relative stability or change, the political visibility of the specific position, the conditions under which the previous occupant left the position, the type of mentoring available to assist the newly promoted employee, and the likely reaction of subordinates and coworkers. It is virtually impossible to think of everything that should be considered. Sometimes a consultation with a peer can be helpful. It may suggest a factor or issue he or she previously encountered that may otherwise be overlooked.

## *Transfers*

A **job transfer**, moving a staff member to another position at the same or comparable level elsewhere in the organization, can sometimes work to the advantage of both the individual and the organization. Often as a result of a series of performance evaluations, and extended observation a manager concludes that a staff member's abilities and/or interests lie elsewhere in the organization and that he or she might perform better and/or be happier there.

If the organization can accommodate it, which individuals are good candidates for transfer? They usually have one or more of the following interrelated characteristics:

- They have a commitment to the mission and goals of the organization and want to make a different contribution to it.
- Their career goals are not consistent with their current job.
- They are performing their duties adequately, but don't really enjoy their work.
- They are "burned out" from the stresses inherent in their current job.
- They have greater or different abilities than the current job requires.
- They describe their current job as not very challenging.
- They have not seemed to grow professionally in their current job.
- Any problems in their current job performance are situational and not their own fault (e.g., a personality conflict or job demands inconsistent with their qualifications).
- They represent a potential asset to the organization that has not been tapped as much as it should have been.
- They are enthusiastic about the possibility of starting over in the new job.

None of the descriptions that we have just offered suggests that the staff member is performing poorly in his or her current job. As with promotions, transferring a low-performing staff member to another position within the organization is generally not a good idea for several reasons. First, an individual with a bad attitude, limited skills and knowledge, and/or a history of poor work performance is not likely to be any more successful in the new position than in the old one. All we will have done is get rid of our problem and give it to another manager—not exactly something that promotes good feeling between us and our colleague, especially if we were less than honest about the staff member's previous work performance at the time of the transfer. The transfer also is unlikely to be received well by the staff member's coworkers, past and present. Even to previous coworkers who may be pleased that the staff member is gone, it sends the message that the only consequence for poor work is to be allowed to just start again somewhere else, perhaps in a more desirable job. Unless the staff member is somehow successful in the new position, new coworkers will soon resent the

fact that a “weak link” has been added to their team. In short, of the possible consequences of transferring a poorly performed staff member, most are negative. There are better ways to deal with a staff member who cannot or will not meet current job expectations. They will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Summary

In this chapter we examined some important tasks of managers that are designed to promote growth among staff members. We discussed why staff evaluations often are unpleasant for both the manager and the subordinate and why they need not be so. They provide numerous benefits to all concerned. We also emphasized the importance of fairness and consideration in conducting them. We warned that evaluations that rely too heavily on only easily measured evaluation criteria tend to be of limited value. Some of the most important attributes of valuable workers are difficult to measure. However, some use of soft criteria is both inevitable and desirable in promoting fairness.

In examining the role of continuing education in staff growth, several important distinctions were made. First, we emphasized the important differences in purpose, content, and process of training; education; and staff development. The task of selecting a provider for delivery of continuing education was given thorough consideration. The advantages and disadvantages of the various options were noted. The formal agreement options for acquiring continuing education also were examined. Consultation agreements, grants, and contracts were compared with special emphasis on common misunderstandings and problems that the manager may encounter.

Both performance evaluations and continuing education can lead to promotions and, less frequently, to transfers. These are two personnel actions in which the manager is likely to become involved. We looked at the major issues to be considered when making or recommending them.

## Endnotes

1. Walter Christian and Gerald Hannah, *Effective Management in the Human Services* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 213–241; Eileen Gambrill and Theodore Stein, *Supervision: A Decision-Making Approach* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), pp. 39–106.
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3. National Association of Social Workers (Revised 2008) Code of Ethics (Washington DC: NASW Press, 2006), Standard 3.03.

4. *Ibid.*, Standard 3.08.
5. Robert Weinbach and Karen Kuehner, “Trainer or Academician—Who Shall Provide?” *Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 1(3) (Summer 1981): 4–5.
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