

Fort Wayne State Developmental Center is home to 700 disabled people who live, learn, work, and relax there. A staff of 1,200 provides sophisticated, 24-hour-per-day medical and psychological services, organized work and recreation activities, and plain old family-style TLC. The staff constantly seeks ways to build training and continuing education into the routines of supervisors and administrators.

Monitoring by external accrediting and certifying agencies revealed limitations in the amount of continuing education available to employees and in the accuracy of our system for documenting on-the-job learning. To remedy the situation, the organizational development staff identified and developed systemwide, in-service training programs.

A Round-the-Clock Conference

By Robert H. Hess

We determined that the problem-solving process would involve all line administrators and the executive responsible for each of eight departments. Several criteria for developing a new structure were deemed important:

- ensure relevant teaching for all line operations by requiring input from each department head;
- make consistently high-quality instruction despite diverse input from many people;
- free line managers and supervisors who do most of the training from other responsibilities during training sessions;
- schedule training sessions so that work is not disrupted;
- organize periodic events to update all employees on major organizational initiatives they should apply in their own work areas.

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To initiate the new in-service programming, we decided to conduct a 24-hour training conference using a traditional conference model. A general session would involve all employees in developing new initiatives, and concurrent sessions would offer relevant skill-development activities for each administrative unit.

The planning process

Our primary challenge in planning the conference was scheduling activities for three shifts of workers with rotating schedules. Centrally imposed training schedules constantly disrupted work assignments, yet the start of a new work shift interrupted training. Plus, arranging training sessions for 1,200 employees while continuing round-the-clock, seven-day-a-week client care required some creative maneuvering. We decided on the following limitations:

- All employees with less than a year of tenure would be exempt from the first in-service training conference because most had recently undergone some type of orientation training. Also, because they work in a different job class during their first year, their impact on overall work team productivity is relatively limited.
- All other employees would be scheduled to work their regular shift during the 24-hour period so that client care would not be disrupted.

Our second planning concern was space. Like most organizations, we have no ballroom that seats 1,200 people. Even repeating the program several times would not solve the problem. The solution was to use a closed-circuit television system to broadcast the general session live to four other sites.

All departmental staff were assigned a viewing site in small rooms in the central building where the concurrent sessions were to be held. Members of the line staff attended the live session in the auditorium. Our intention was to highlight the key role of line employees in a service organization and to bring them out of their regular work areas for a change of setting.

The program design

The conference began at 3:00 on a Tuesday afternoon and concluded 24 hours later. The program was presented four times during that period. A humorous, attention-getting, "Satur-

day Night Live" feature kicked off the 45-minute general session. A short "pep rally" by the CEO followed, focusing on new goals for the year. A key organizational leader addressed issues affecting the quality of work at the center.

The general session went very smoothly. Coordinating the video broadcasting of each live performance was new to us, but our video technicians were superb. Having the individual video sites in the same building as the concurrent sessions facilitated a smooth flow of traffic between sessions. Offering refreshments in each of the break-out rooms after the concurrent sessions encouraged people to move out of the rooms quickly.

Planning the concurrent sessions required the most time and attention. The accrediting agencies determined much of the content for the sessions, requiring us to address specific training areas in which we were weak. Beyond that, the organizational development

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staff worked directly with each department to design training sessions. Several department heads also hired professional content experts to help in the design and presentation process. While some instructors called on outside expertise, others developed their own video products to support their presentations. All focused on outcome objectives set by the respective profes-

sional department. See the figure for the entire schedule.

The OD staff provided consulting and train-the-trainer assistance as well as feedback for follow-up programs. They also helped get line administrators, to whom department heads report, more fully involved in the conference. Line administrators took responsibility for managing the concurrent sessions, keeping attendance records, and facilitating the question-and-answer portion of each presentation. To reinforce further the administrators' influence, the OD staff helped them plan a 45-minute segment addressing the issue of greatest importance to the success of their respective units. In most cases, this session expanded directly on the CEO's current agenda or covered specific concerns in each administrator's area.

Results and continuing challenges

Perhaps the most noteworthy result

Schedule of in-house training conference

Tuesday	Content	Presenter	Wednesday
Cycle #1	General Session		Cycle #3
3:00 3:15 3:45	"News and Views" "Individual Rights"	Video staff / CEO Bill Williams, ACSW	7:00 7:15 7:45
	Refreshments—move to break-out rooms		
	Groups by Complex (Unit)		
4:00 4:05 4:45 5:15 5:45 6:30	"Communicating with DD Persons" (video) "Detecting Medical Problems" "Oral Hygiene/Feeding Techniques" (video) "Complex Agenda"	Speech therapists (8) Nurses (8) Dietitians (4)/OTs (4) Complex directors/QMRPs (8)	8:00 4:05 8:45 9:15 9:45 10:30
	Off duty or report to work area		
Cycle #2	General Session		Cycle #4
8:00 8:15 8:45	"News and Views" "Individual Rights"	Video staff/CEO Bill Williams, ACSW	12:00 Noon 12:15 12:45
	Refreshments—move to break-out rooms		
	Groups by Complex (Unit)		
9:00 9:05 9:45 10:15 10:45 11:30	"Communicating with DD Persons" (video) "Detecting Medical Problems" "Nutrition/Feeding Techniques" (video) "Complex Agenda"	Speech therapists (8) Nurses (8) Dietitians (4)/OTs (4) Complex directors/QMRPs (8)	1:00 1:05 1:45 2:15 2:18 2:45 3:30
	Off duty or report to work area		

of the conference was the astounding support from the organization. More than 93 percent of the eligible staff—those with at least a year of employment—attended, far exceeding our goal of 75 percent. While the accreditors' mandate to offer more extensive continuing education obviously was a motivator, follow-up comments from leaders and participants indicated that fundamental organizational restructuring was overdue and that our round-the-clock conference model was a workable—and perhaps ideal—solution. A continuing challenge will be to maintain high-quality programming that teaches relevant skills and addresses organizational problems—not just responds to external demands.

Another positive outcome was the involvement of approximately 50 people in visible leadership and instructor roles. It was also a rare opportunity for administrators to meet staff from the three shifts. The challenge now will be to improve the quality of ongoing instruction.

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Our evaluation instrument was designed to give specific feedback to each instructor so that the less effective instructors might be more receptive to future assistance.

Given less-than-ideal instructional techniques, participant response was positive. Our evaluation data from 987 people averaged 4.0 on a scale of 5. Without question, there is room for improvement; but we believe that even mediocre instruction by the line-assigned people had greater impact on overall work behaviors than a more polished presentation from an OD staff member or an outside source might have. Both written and verbal com-

ments from employees and administrators stressed the value of offering similar instruction to everyone during the same 24-hour period.

Finally, record keeping was easy to control. Forms coded to our computer data system were designed specifically for the conference, thus all documentation was available on demand. Accurate and verifiable records of this event ensured our external critics that our methods complied with their expectations.

Continuous learning is still one of the most effective means of keeping an organization viable. At the Fort Wayne State Development Center we will continue to foster that process. We have planned future conferences on a trimester schedule, believing that this model has potential for significant and measurable organizational development that will keep this agency on its road to excellence.



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