



The Return on Investment for Winning the Workplace Training for Community Support Services (CSS) of Arapahoe County Colorado

Background and Problem Statement

Community Support Services (CSS) of Arapahoe County Colorado is a division within the Arapahoe County's Department of Human Services. CSS helps to connect citizens to federal and state assistance programs, such as Food Assistance, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Child Care Assistance, Low-Income Energy Assistance and Old Age Pension. In August of 2012, when the current Deputy Director of Arapahoe County's Department of Human Services, Bob Prevost, came on board, 33% of the 168 employees had started at CSS within the last year. Since most training at CSS consisted of on-the-job training, a one-third turnover rate also meant that another third of the workforce was not fully productive in providing service to their clients while they were busy training their new colleagues. That meant that for a portion of the year, one-third of the workforce was fully functional while two-thirds were engaged in training or being trained. Furthermore, Mr. Prevost found that morale was low and existence of cliques within the workforce was high.

Three-Pronged Solution

Bob Prevost looked at what could be done about hiring, training and supporting his workforce to change the climate and culture of CSS, and thus stem the tide of turnover.

Hiring. First, CSS worked on postings to ensure a more accurate job description was listed to attract the most qualified people to fill positions. Second, CSS worked on interview questions to more accurately assess a candidate's skill level and perhaps more importantly their personality. By asking the right interview questions, CSS found that it could more accurately predict an applicant's dependability and customer service orientation, and avoid hiring employees who engage in toxic behaviors. Finally, by working with HR to decrease the time needed to replace departing employees from 64 to 36 days, not only were 28 days of job vacancy avoided, but it also meant that CSS was better able to make a job offer to their first choice candidates.

Training. Recognizing that there was a morale issue that resulted in and was perpetuated by the formation of cliques within the workplace, the entire workforce was offered the opportunity to receive training called "Winning the Workplace," a course taught by The Center for Relationship Education (CRE) which seeks to impart the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for individuals to:

- Learn to replace communication danger signs with proactive strategies for respectful talking and listening.
- Assess their personality and how that impacts their work relationships and communication.
- Learn and reinforce an effective model of communication - the Speaker Listener Technique.
- Explore their own hidden issues in order to help manage emotional responses more effectively.
- Make important decisions about actions to take to improve professional relationships.



Bob Prevost said that, “CRE was instrumental in assisting us, through their training, in eliminating the small negative group dynamic. This was a huge win for us as having staff feel comfortable at work and be in a positive environment leads to better learning and relationship building. By having the supervisors trained, it promoted an environment where every voice is heard, kudos are given freely. Supervisors understand that if they produce several staff who also become supervisors, they are themselves ready for the next level.”

Bob relayed that supervisor training is an ongoing effort with building staff morale – focusing on the positives and assisting with the negatives. He developed a review process to promote this type of behavior. Understanding and valuing the role of training in maintaining a highly effective workforce, Bob added a third trainer in one division and developed a brand new trainer position in the other division to assist with onboarding and ongoing training needs.

Support.

CSS deployed a new workflow management system that images, tracks and disseminates work in a manner that the most pressing issues are addressed first. This system has reduced CSS’s need to require overtime from mandating 20 hours per week to only allowing overtime for special projects. CSS’s timeliness and accuracy of work are both among the best in the state, while reducing overtime and temporary staff assistance.

CSS also created an employee committee that enables ideas and thoughts to be communicated throughout the department. It also enables staffing needs to be addressed from the director position all the way down to our newest employees. This is another instance where effective communication skills taught by CRE impact the entire workforce.

We began managing on behavior instead of numbers. The theory is that if we increase a staff member’s willingness to participate while at the same time increasing their ability (I call it the willing/able model or participation paradigm), we can effectively get new staff’s abilities increased quickly while keeping tenured staff’s willingness to continue to participate at a level that ensures they are valued.

Value of Lower Turnover Rate

The annual turnover among managers was at 10% prior to these changes and has decreased to 5.5% per year in the three years since the operational and workforce development changes were put into effect. Applying these rates to the 30 managers under Mr. Prevost’s span of supervision means that 1 less manager leaves CSS each year. The cost of turnover can vary widely, but has been generally estimated to be equal to 20% of a worker’s annual salary¹. This

¹ There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees; By Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn November 16, 2012; Center for American Progress



cost consists of the cost to discharge an out-going employee, plus productivity losses due to downtime while on the job, plus vacancy time losses, plus less than fully productive time of the new employee, plus advertising, interviewing and training a new employee.

The turnover rate among managers was low and is roughly equivalent before and after these interventions, but perhaps for different reasons. Mr. Prevost explains, for instance, that “all four of the previous administrators were given opportunities of advancement such as the new TANF - Federal director for Colorado, Denver County’s director of training, HCPF’s call center director and my new division manager.” Therefore, the savings calculation will focus on line staff.

Previously, the turnover rate among line staff had been 33% and has dropped to 4% in the three years post interventions. The following table shows the components of the estimated savings calculation.

Track	Annual Salary	Cost to Replace %	Cost to Replace in 2013 Dollars	Old Turnover Rate	New Turnover Rate	Increased Percentage of Retention	Number of Employees in Labor Category	Positive Retention #	Annual Dollar Savings
Line Staff	\$39,600	20%	\$7,920	33%	4%	29%	193	56	\$443,282

The increase in salaries of 3% per year in 2014 and 2015 is marginally higher than the inflation rate and leads to a three-year cumulative savings of over \$1,350,000 in 2016 dollars. As Mr. Prevost explained, the “Winning the Workplace” training was an important component that led to these savings, but cannot account for the entire savings. If we ascribe one-sixth of these savings to the CRE training (half of one of three major thrusts) then the results of that training would be valued at \$225,000 (one-sixth of \$1,350,000). Compared that against the \$8,266 cost² to provide the CRE training, then we see a tremendous 27-fold return on investment. In other words, for every dollar spent on CRE’s “Winning the Workplace” training, \$27 dollars in reduced turnover savings has accrued.

² Five classes x \$1,250 per class and \$12 per booklet x 168 booklets = \$8,266