**THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR
THE
UTAH FIRE & RESCUE ACADEMY**

(STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE)

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ABSTRACT

In the past, when a new staff member was hire to work at the Utah Fire & Rescue Academy, they jump into their new job without any idea of the "big" picture of what the academy does, were it is going, and how the various programs all work together to train the fire service of Utah. Another problem is once a person joined the academy staff there was no program in place to help them continue to learn and grow. These two problems have caused us grief and have added unnecessary grief when a new person joins the staff.

The purpose of this project was to create a staff development program for the Utah Fire & Rescue Academy. The program was broken down into two area of focus. First step would be that all new employees would receive an orientation to the academy by a senior staff member to help the new hire to see the "big" picture. For members of the staff that are currently employed, this orientation would take place on an ongoing basis during staff meetings. The second area would be the ongoing training of all staff members to help in developing and refining skills to help us be better in accomplishing our respective jobs.

The action method of research was selected to be used in completing this project. This method was selected because what was accomplished can be placed in measurable objectives. These objectives can be laid out in an action plan and implemented and easily monitored.

The research questions were developed with direct input from the staff. These questions were, do we need a training program? What type of training is need and who will do it? What's in it for me? And, how will such a program benefit the academy and the end user, the fire service?

Answers to these questions were found by dividing the staff into three groups and have them answer the question based on their roles within the academy. The recommendations were gathered and an outline was created for this new program. A problem developed with one of the recommendation form within the college system of which we are a part of and this put hold on following through with this phase.

The results for the project were great. The staff supports the concept of a staff development program and wants to participate in it. The main issue of "when will I have time to do it" was brought up and needs to be addressed by management.

The main recommendation to the director is to move forward with the program once issues with human resources are satisfied that we will meet all E.E.O. requirements of the college. Several portions of the program can be begun at once and should be used.

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INTRODUCTION

The Utah Fire and Rescue Academy, located in Provo Utah, has the assignment to train the fire service at all levels for both career and volunteer departments. The Academy staff works extremely hard to meet the needs of these "customers" and provide outstanding training and quality service. However, during this process one very important customer has been neglected and left out of this training process. This very important customer is the internal administrators and staff of the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy itself. We have no program in place to train and improve, on a continuous bases, the skills of the academy staff.

The purpose of this applied research project is to develop a staff-training program to enhance the skills, knowledge and abilities for all staff members and to improve the level of service to the external customer while improving the internal one.

The research method used during this project was the **Action** method. This method was selected because what is being accomplished can be placed in measurable objectives. These objectives can be laid out in an action plan and implemented and easily monitored.

The research questions used to focus this project were determined after meeting with members of the staff. All of the academy staff was involved in this initial meeting from the director down to the part-time tech person in the logistics area. This meeting was held to gather information to help in addressing the needs of the staff and to create a viable project. These research questions were:

1-   Do we need a staff development program?

2-   What type of training is needed, who needs it and when should they receive it?

3-   How will a staff development program benefit me personally?

4-   How will a staff development program be a benefit to the academy?

BACKGROUND AND SINGNIFICANCE

The Utah Fire and Rescue Academy has been in existence since 1992 when it was established under House Bill 155 of the Utah State Legislature. The mission of the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy is to train, educate and offer certification to the fire service in Utah. This is accomplished through an extensive field training program that teaches over 200 field classes a year. A college program that offers an Associate degree in Fire Science and Fire/medic plus a recently added Bachelors program in Fire Service Administration. The certification system offers 17 levels of certification based on the N.F.P. A. standards and is dually accredited with the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Fire Service Professional Qualifications Board (NPQS).

When the Academy bill was passed in 1992, there were three full-time employees working at the academy, the director and two secretaries that shared office duties, plus 30+ adjuant instructors and support personal.

Since then the Academy has grown to a full-time staff of 24 persons, nine permanent part-time staff and 90+ adjunct instructors. During the current fiscal (98-99) year we will hire two more full-time and two permanent part-time staff members.

The staff comes to the academy with a wealth of experience and background to meet the mission we have. One the qualifications to work at the academy, as an administrator, is to have a prior background in the fire service. All directors and coordinators have come from the fire service. Of the 24 full-time staff, 15 of them have

retired from the fire service or come from an agency to work at the academy. The other nine are clerical staff and have no fire service knowledge, other than what they have learned while at the academy. All adjuant instructors are required to be working with an emergency response agency and be certified as a Fire Fighter I and Instructor I.

With this background on the academy and its staff, it is necessary to clarify the problem that the project is focused on. The first issue, what training does a new staff member receives after they are hired to work at the academy? Second, what is the course of staff development after a member has been with the academy and what type of ongoing training and development does a staff member receive?

In the past, the staff was so small they learned as they went. All positions were new and the individuals hired to the position created the position and duties as they developed themselves. There were no procedure manuals to learn because they didn't exist and no one had time to do it.

At present, a new member joins the academy and still learns everything on the job. For example, a person would be hired to work in the training division and after a brief introduction at the college on the health benefits, they go to work. If they are taking over a job that had been previously been held by another person then they will receive some training from that person and then turned loose. They have no knowledge of the other aspects of the academy such as certification system or the degree program unless they had some sort of prior dealings with them. There is no "formal" introduction or briefing on the entire academy mission because there is usually no time.

The big problem with this method of introduction is that the new staff member misses the "big" picture of the academy mission. They become so myoptic in their view of

the academy that they hurt other programs. As they deal with customers they give out

misinformation or completely wrong information. The customer looks at each staff member

as the academy, not a certain division. One bad piece of information can hurt another

program and thus the customer has a bad experience with the academy.

If this method of bringing new staff members is continued the academy will suffer.

Up until now, the damage has been minimal but the time will come that this pattern will hurt

us. We need a formal process to train new staff and help them see what we do and how it

is all interwoven and interdependent.

The second area of concern is that of the ongoing training and development of each

staff member. All staff members need to receive training to help them improve their skills

plus to learn new ones. Areas such as phone skills, computer training, dealing with upset

customers and interoffice communication are all vital areas. On an individual bases,

supervisors need specialized training or administrative assistants need training on new

software specific for their jobs. These are all areas that need development so that were

can serve in the internal customer better and improve how we deal with the external

customers.

Failing to address both areas of staff training will impact the future of the Utah Fire

and Rescue Academy. Staff members must know what we do and have a vision of the

academy's mission. They must also be personally challenged to grow and learn. If we fail to

learn and grow as individuals then the entire program will suffer and in a political

environment that the academy exists, that could be very dangerous.

This project is directly related to the entire course of Strategic Management of

Change. The Utah Academy is struggling with rapid growth and monumental changes

associated with this growth. In module 3 we learned of planning to meet the future and taking control verses being controlled by events. One of the enabling objectives stated, explain the importance of proactive vs. reactive approaches to change management. This is the mode that this project took the academy, moving from the attitude of reacting to staff training to one of creating a program for staff development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The question of weather or not we need a staff development program is the first thing to be considered. Raphael of Workforce, said, "there are seven questions to ask before beginning a training program…if you answer yes to these questions then a program will work for your company" (Raphael, 1998, p. NA). These questions are, Does <u>anybody</u> really need this training? Does <u>everybody</u> really need this training? How much will this cost per person, and what are the economics of scale? How can I measure the success of this program quantitatively? How can I measure the success of this program qualitatively? How quickly will this training become outdated? How will this training affect the company's retention? Since this is where I began this project with asking some key questions I felt that I was on the right track by asking the right questions to the right people.

If it is beneficial to have a staff development program, then the motivation to pursue it must come from the top down. This usually means a change in culture in the work environment. "Educate from the top down" when making changes Morgan said. "Write it down, link it to the business and be able to measure it so that everyone can see the usefulness of a new program" (Morgan, 1998, v87 n10, p.13). This is a great idea about writing it down but how do you do it without making it competitive?

If we, as an academy, are the learning source for the fire service in Utah then we should be true to learning and developing ourselves. "To thine own self be true", said Frei the CEO of ONYX Software Corp. in Bellevue, Washington. "No matter how great the boom, things can and will go bust without a solid foundation on which to build" (Frei, 1998, p. 8). To that end, ONYX Corp. recruits and hires people not only on the basis of their job skills but also on how well their goals and personal characteristics match the companies. They expect employees to set worth while goals and to reach them and set new ones. This statement hits home, there is no question of weather we should have a staff development program.

When should a training begin for the new employee? The answer is beginning on the very first day. Weiss (1998) the first day on the job has a major impact on the new employee's future morale, security and productivity. Lasting impressions of the company, co-worker and workplace environment are normal by-products of the orientation period and are formed on the first day. New employees are enthusiastic and want to learn from the very start. If a new employee is given an orientation during the first day a company can "capture the initial enthusiasm and what you'll gain in the days ahead is a happier, more production employee" (p. 12). It is vital that we introduce and orient new staff members during the first few days on the job to start them off right.

Another benefit for orienting new employees to the mission of the academy is the idea that it gives the new employee confidence about the future. A new employee has already worked hard to join the staff, now "show them the direction the company is heading. Employees want to believe in and have confidence about their company's future and have faith that all will be well for the future" (Stum, 1998, v 75, p. 59).

The need for ongoing training has many benefits for both the company and the employee. "People are looking for more that just a job", says Herman of the American Management Association. "Make the grass greener within the company by allowing them to change career paths into other divisions or pursue training that they want, but which the company will also benefit from" (Herman, 1998, p. 51). This idea is part of the ongoing training that the academy needs to keep staff up to date and fresh with new thoughts or ideas.

This follows the concept of the always-asked question of, "what's in it for me"? One way of achieving organizational goals is by helping employees define their personal goals and explaining to them the correlation between personal and organizational goals. Employees will have a vested interest in helping the company achieve its goals once they realize the connection of these goals. "The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man's foot long enough to put the other somewhat higher"(Huxley). Desire plus goals equal results. "We all desire to be successful. That positive desire must be channeled into specific goals. Individuals need goals. Organizations need goals," said Rohlander. "Management needs to be sure that there is a blending of these two groups of goals". He continues with "a great way to keep score in this game of achieving goals is to use charts that are updated personally by each player. Keep the charts simple and make it fun" (Rohlander, 1998, p. 40). This is the second time the idea of posting goals in the work place has been discussed.

In attempting to motivate employees to work harder a manager asked the question "we provide the workers with state-of-the art equipment but the workers are lazy and inefficient… what do we do?" Versi's response was "have you offered them a raise?"

(Versi, 1998, p. 7) If the employee feels that there is something in it for them, will they work harder? If pay is tied to productivity would the worker work harder? More importantly, ask the employee what they want the reward to be and they'll work harder to achieve it

There are two main benefits to the organization for having training programs in place for employees. Employee satisfaction and employee retention can be achieved with such programs. Being able "to plan my schedule and my career around the rest of my life has really made me happier", says Merrick of Battelle of Columbus, Ohio. "In industry, you usually stay in one place four or five years, then you go someplace else. I've been here nine years and I don't plan on going anywhere" because of such programs (1998, p. 53).

In developing a training program a company needs to let the employee have say in what the training will be. "Employees have gotten smarter, tougher, more aware, but loyal to the company". The new employee will be loyal in a different way. Performance will be defined by "quality not time, and (they) will seek to enhance performance in ways that are most meaningful to the worker not the company". If the employee has say in the creation of their own training program then they have say in how their performance is evaluated. "Take the term one size fits all out of your vocabulary" (Laabs, 1998, p.78).

This new attitude of the work force is a great benefit to the academy as well. The benefits of having a training program for the staff that is custom-built ties into employee evaluations. All company's have performance evaluations. "Performance evaluations are like seat belts, everyone agrees they're a good idea but lots of people find them awkward to use". (Grote, 1998, p. 52) If a staff development program is in place, then evaluation time can be more meaningful and painless. Supervisors can objectively evaluate if goals have been achieved by reviewing the program that was set-up by the employee themselves.

PROCEDURES

The process used to complete this project as done in a series of meetings held with the staff that currently works at the academy. The initial meeting was held on June 15th, 1998. During this meeting the project was discussed and the general project information was given to the staff. The agenda for this meeting was based on two questions; do we need a set training program for members of the staff and what training does the staff members feel that they need? During this first meeting many ideas were discussed and it turned into a great brainstorming session. It was during this first session that the research questions came into focus and the project took shape.

The process for this project was the following:

1- Create manageable and comfortable work groups.

2- Meet, as work groups, and discuss the questions as outlined.

3- Answer the questions honestly and make recommendations.

4- Meet in a final meeting to present the groups recommendation to the entire staff.

The following groups were created based on the duties that each person has and their program area at the academy. (Since this was my project, I worked with each group to keep them on task and to listen to suggestions and gather as much information as possible to help in completing this project). The following groups were created and given a title:

A - The **Red** group was made up of the receptionist, office manager, and three administrative assistants that meet the customers and generally run the office.

B - The **Blue** group was made up of the various program coordinators that work with the fire departments and set up classes.

C - The **Green** group was made up of the director, associate director, and assistant directors over each of the main programs.

One of the limitations that came to light very early in working with these groups was the demand placed on time. It was difficult to get everyone to meet like I wanted and so upper management had to "strongly" recommend to all groups to help in giving the valuable input that was needed. Once this was done, the information was gathered quickly and given back to me.

These groups met several times and had some great discussions. I attended all of them and took notes to keep track of the meetings and the recommendations as they came forth. At first I thought that by my presence the discussions might be slanted towards what the group thought "I" wanted to hear but this was not the case. Everyone had an opinion and was willing to share it and this lead to accurate feedback to the research questions.

A final meeting was held on July 21st, 1998, during which the chairperson of each group gave the groups recommendations.

RESULTS

After these three different groups held several meetings, the responses and recommendations to the original research questions were given. Each group made a brief presentation of their meetings and the results were placed on flip chart. Each group determined several common items and this helped prove that we all think along the same lines and feel the same about problem areas of the academy. The group's responses to the research questions are summarized below.

Research question #1. Do we need a staff development program?

The answer to this question was a strong YES. Since most of the staff has been hired during the past two to three year period, memorizes are still fresh to the emotions and frustrations of starting to work here. It was felt that to much pressure was on the new employee from day one to learn a new job plus what the academy does and no one to help them out directly.

Research question # 2. What type of training is needed, who needs it and when should they receive it?

The recommendations of the various groups were combined in to the following list. I broke the recommendations down based on what a NEW staff member should receive. The other category would be for CURRENT staff members.

TRAINING FOR NEW STAFF MEMBERS

- During the first week of employment with the academy a new member have an overview of the big picture of what the academy's mission and purpose is. A senior director would accomplish this training.

- During this orientation period the new staff member spend at least a half day but ideally a full day working with the director of each program. The director of each program area would accomplish this training.

- The new staff member work with the person they are replacing and see first hand how the program works.

- The human resources department of the college already completes benefits orientation.

- The new staff member would attend various meetings with senior staff members to meet key individuals within the state that they will be working with. The

purpose for this is to let the new person met these key people in person not over the phone.

This initial orientation should be completed within the first month of employment with the academy. This training would be documented and placed in the employees training record with the academy.

TRAINING FOR CURRENT STAFF MEMBERS

- During regular staff meetings, each division gives a presentation to the staff. During this presentation each program can outline what there goals are and how they will meet them. This will help everyone learn what each program does and how we are all interrelated.

- Staff members cross train with other programs. This would help accomplish two objectives. Employees would learn what the other programs do plus provide backup support to each other if the need were to arise. This training would be accomplished by work sharing with each other and each other would do the training.

- Topics on various work related subjects should be scheduled on an ongoing basis. Area such as communication, sexual harassment, computer systems, and other relevant subjects would benefit all members of the staff. Subject matter experts that are available at the college or could be found in the local business community could provide this training.

- As part of the employee's own personal development, staff would be able to select courses they could attend to improve skills that they select. These courses are available in the business community on an ongoing basis. These courses

would be approved by the immediate supervisor and should fit within the

employee's personal goals that are set during the annual employee evaluation.

- For members of the staff that are or were fire fighters and emergency medical

   technicians, there are requirements to maintain certifications. Training to

   maintain these certifications are needed and are approved as part of the

   benefits package of the academy. Attendance at FDIC, Fire/Rescue-West and

   other national conferences are approved but should also be set as a goal during

   the evaluation process.

Training for the current staff would be on an ongoing basis. Attending conferences

and training to maintain certifications are already in place within the academy. The other

ideas could be put into place with little effort.

Research question # 3. How will a staff development program benefit me

personally?

The groups identified three ways that a set training program would be beneficial to

the academy.

- First, all employees would be on the "same page" or "sheet of music". To often

   because of the way new staff members were trained, they have misconceptions

   about the academy and what we do. By having set process of orienting new

   members this problem could be eliminated.

- Second, a program like this would make evaluations more objective, focused,

   and fair.

- Third, the academy would come together as a team because everyone would understand what each other is doing. Each person would follow the same process and everyone would know that.

Research question # 4. How will a staff development program be a benefit to the academy?

There are many benefits to the customer by having a program like this in use. Staff members are current on the latest trends and innovations used in all areas of the fire service. By attending conferences on a national level, the staff gains new insights and brings this knowledge back to the program.

Customer service improves because misinformation is not given out. Staff members know what all other area of the academy is doing so we don't accidentally give out bad information.

The academy retains the great employees that we have hire and developed. By having a dynamic program that allows the individual to create their own training, they control their own destiny. By doing this we should maintain or retain the individuals that help make the academy what it is. As we maintain skilled and knowledgeable employees the customer learns who we are and this builds trust.

A program such as this could make work a more enjoyable environment to be in and hopefully less stressful. By building a team culture and building trust with each other, the customer again benefits by having a higher quality person to deal with when they call in wanting to attend a class.

Having a staff that enjoys its work, knows what it is doing and has been involved with the fire service enhances the image of the academy.

As mentioned early, a problem arose in getting the groups together and that was the element of time. The issue of "when are we suppose to do all this training" came up again and again. Time is a limited commodity to all members of the staff. Everyone agrees with the overall idea of training but the question always comes up, when do we have time to do it! This was an unexpectant problem that I encountered and its hard to say you have to do it and in the process have poor customer service as a result of doing are own training.

As of this date, there is no formal staff development program to be shown or presented in the appendix. The groups gave the results as mentioned in this section and as a finial draft was being developed the colleges human resources department entered the picture. There is an ongoing discussion about the possible conflict with college policy and this type of program in regards to Equal Employment Opportunities issues.

DISCUSSION

In beginning this project I asked two basic questions and this helped in directing the research questions. As mentioned by Raphael in his article about asking the right questions, I should have focused on the very first one, "does anybody really need this training?" (1998) Everyone agrees that the training is needed but no one seems to have time to do it.

This brings into focus the idea that employees need the right motivation to want to find time to participate in a program such as this. (Versi, 1998) Letting the employee have a say in what the reward will be is a great idea but working in a college environment with a human resources department that sets policy can frustrate even the best ideas.

The idea of writing down and posting employee's goals or training was an idea that was mention by Morgan (1998) in an article dealing with the organizational culture. It is a

good idea but one that would not work in my organization. The people within the academy are very competitive and it was felt this could be counter productive. It's not just with the fire fighters in the organization, but also with some of the administrative assistants that are very aggressive and this could be harmful. When the idea was discussed in the final presentations meeting, the Red and Blue groups were strongly against the idea but the Green group thought it to be a good idea. Even if the idea comes from "the top down" as mention by Morgan could work in other work environment but not in this culture.

One of the ideas that came out of this project was that of having an orientation period for new employees. I agree with Weiss (1998) statement that "the orientation is an important management responsibility" and one that human resources can't have too much says. By using a successful orientation that is given by management "the new employee will feel more comfortable in asking questions and discussing problems with you". This will also boost morale, which will impact what the customer sees or hears when they deal with the academy.

By having training as part of the ongoing program for the staff will help the staff in developing a sense of loyalty to the academy, because the academy is investing in the them. Stum (1998) identified Five Ingredients for an Employee Retention Formula and employee loyalty is high on the list of traits that all employers want. Number three on the list was opportunities for personal growth. I found this to be true with members in all three groups. All members felt that growing, as an individual was a high priority and a strong motivator in retaining an employee.

There was nothing that really surprised me other than what developed from human resources. I was very happy with the support that I received from the staff in assisting me

with this project. What I read matched with what I learned from the staff. The staff of the academy is very intelligent and bright and painfully honest. The information that was gathered was the true feelings of the staff and in some ways I am disappointed in what has happened, I should not be too surprised.

When we are allowed to implement the program as it was recommended, it will have a long and lasting impact on the organization. Communication will improve within the academy, both internal and external customer services will improve and the overall image of the program will be enhanced. This type of program will make us stronger and once it begins will make us more productive. The staff will have to make time to focus on themselves and learn to grow.

REOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been suggested and have been passed on to the director of the Utah Fire & Rescue Academy.

1- Begin the new employee orientation program with the next person hired by the academy. This should happen in March of 1999.

2- Employee evaluations will be held in March. Allow supervisors to make goals with employees that will help the employee to grow, but won't cost any money to achieve. (This should keep the folks in HR happy.)

3- Begin the presentations about each program in staff meeting as soon as possible.

4- Work with the staff in human resources to allow us to develop our own training and rewards program that will meet E.E.O. requirements and satisfy our own staff.

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