

Growth Opportunities
for
Supervisors & Administrators

Who Manage
Residential Treatment Care & Educational
Programs

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First Edition

By Brenten T. Byrd, MS & David Lee Cummings
The Healing Embrace Network

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*This guide is dedicated to all the supervisors and clinical administrators
who have served as mentors and role models to us over the years.*

Your guidance has been invaluable.

*This guide is also dedicated to all the children whom we serve,
those "little angels" who are doing their best in spite of the difficulties
the world has unfairly imposed on them.*

They didn't ask for it.

***Disclaimer:** This guide is intended to help youth care supervisors and clinical administrators, especially those who are new in their positions, to be more effective in their work. It should compliment, but not replace, the training and policies your employer and licensing and accreditation agencies provide to you. If any of our suggestions conflict with what your employer or agencies require of you, or of what your own common sense tells you, then follow their guidelines or your own sensibilities, not ours.*

Additionally, although we have been careful to offer advice that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and other federal and state acts and regulations, we cannot guarantee that everything we say is in accordance with them. Please do your own research to ensure that you are in full compliance with any rules that apply to your organization and programs.

Furthermore understand that the advice we offer we have acquired from real world practice in our field as direct care workers and supervisors. We are not, however, licensed therapists, doctors, researchers, or clinicians. We are simply advocates on the front lines of residential treatment care with extensive, hard-earned experiential knowledge to share.

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Introduction

The Healing Embrace Network is here to share with you our many years of combined practical experience as direct-care workers, clinicians, and managers in the residential treatment care industry. We have been through it all. Some experiences have been very straightforward, while others have been what some may call *issues, problems, or dilemmas*, but what we call “*growth opportunities*”—opportunities for change that all organizations face on a daily basis.

Sometimes an organization sees the opportunity for change, seizes the opportunity, and as a result, achieves positive growth. Without proper leadership, however, opportunities can be squandered, and *issues* develop into larger problems down the line. Helping you to identify and capitalize on growth opportunities to improve your residential treatment care or educational programs is what this guidebook is all about.

This publication is meant as a reference guide to help you effectively manage those growth opportunities that administrators and frontline supervisors face on a daily basis with their employees who work on the units, in the classrooms, and in other areas of their agency. Addressing these opportunities in an expedient, professional manner will help to ensure a more productive and healthy organization.

To advance positively through growth opportunities, supervisors and administrators are, first and foremost, dependent on their frontline staff and must support them one hundred percent. Without a supportive supervisory team—and an administration that is motivated, visionary, and healthy—your organization will be unable to hire, train, motivate, support, and retain quality frontline staff. The bottom line will be poor service for your clients and poor results from your programs. This guidebook offers an abundance of advice on how to get the most out of your frontline staff and keep your programs healthy.

As supervisors and administrators, you are also charged running your organization in the black. Many of the suggestions we offer in this handbook should help you to add a modest boost to your program budget initially and, in the long run, save your organization tens of thousands of dollars or more annually by keeping staffing retention up and turnover down, saving on overtime expenditures, staying on top of training, and keeping program censuses at a maximum. But if you ignore the growth opportunities we spotlight, you could put your program at risk of failure, or even your entire organization. And when you fail, the children you serve, their families, and society also fail.

So, take hold of the opportunity before you right now. By taking our suggestions to heart, you can help your organization seize its own growth opportunities and achieve ample positive change. The children you serve, their families, and society will be the better for it.

Best of luck,

Brent & David

⌘ Foster Effective Communication

The success of a residential treatment care program depends in large part on effective communication. Few things frustrate staff more than when they have not been notified of a change in the program or the daily schedule. As you may have already experienced, a simple oversight such as not properly communicating a program change has the potential to change the entire environment of an agency by setting in motion a series of disgruntlements that can spread like cancer to every department and individual.

If your agency does not already have a concrete policy in its operations manual on how information is to be disseminated from the top down and from department to department, then it had better immediately establish a written protocol—that is, a *communication tree*. Without this protocol, your agency may eventually suffer from its departments working passive-aggressively with each other, to the detriment of the program and the agency at large.

Communication in action:

It is 7 p.m. in the evening, all administrative staff are gone for the day, and you have been notified that an intake of a new client will happen at 7:00 a.m. the following morning. Your intakes generally take 60 to 90 minutes to execute and require the help of an additional staff member. Do you wait until 7 a.m. to start coordinating the intake? The answer should be a resounding “No,” but do you have a protocol in place to ensure that systemic preparations for the intake can begin immediately?

Here’s the type of protocol you should have in place: Whoever got the word on the intake—likely the admissions director, unit coordinator, or social worker—immediately notifies the supervisor and the nurse on duty to prepare for the admission. They, in turn, notify everyone else down the chain.

The supervisor coordinates with available staff for coverage, notifies the kitchen and laundry staff, and contacts anyone else required when an intake occurs. Most importantly, the supervisor informs the staff on duty of the intake and provides a detailed list of instructions and assigned duties, in order for the intake to happen as smoothly as possible. The detailed list is entered directly into the unit shift log and the supervisor personally briefs the overnight staff so that they can relay the details directly to the first shift staff in the morning. Finally, the supervisor adjusts morning coverage to facilitate the intake.

If the program leaders are not proactive in handling this situation, then the morning routine for the entire unit may come to a stop when the unannounced admission shows up. There may not be enough manpower available to handle it, and current residents who have had their routine interrupted may exhibit behavioral outbursts. The direct-care staff then end up feeling unsupported and, in the future, may—passive-aggressively—neglect to promptly report vital information to the program leader who they feel let them down. The blame and repercussions may eventually reach other departments, and as a result, your program suffers from a tarnished reputation.

Some agencies' positions may be that the unit staff should be professional and deal with events as they arise. But the "professional" thing to do in the first place would be for the leaders to effectively communicate and coordinate their resources ahead of time in order to provide their direct-care workers with the support they deserve and require to do their jobs effectively. In the end, such support results in the highest quality services for the clients—which is the ultimate goal of every agency, right?

⌘ Meet with Your Staff Regularly

Supervisors should have as many meetings, both in groups and individually, with their staff as possible. Consistent meetings help to develop healthy relationships between everyone.

At these meetings, allow your staff, within reason, to vent their frustrations. Talk about upcoming changes, events, and trainings, and other departments. Foster investment in the meetings by assigning different people to take notes and to monitor the time. Be sure to vocally praise your staff for the things that they have been doing well. Address problems in general, but do not call anyone out individually for specific negative incidents or bad habits; instead, utilize one-on-one supervision time for that purpose. Furthermore, we recommend engaging in informal team building activities away from work.

Furthermore, top-level communications should be made in-person as much as possible. If your agency director has an issue he or she feels is important to discuss, then he or she should take the matter directly to the workers in both a verbal presentation and in a written document. If the director is unable to communicate directly, then he or she should provide a supervisor with a prepared report to share with everyone verbally and in a written document.

⌘ Mix and Mingle Your Staff at Meetings

We recommend that agencies encourage as many of their direct-care workers as possible to attend meetings where other representatives from the agency will be in attendance. At a minimum, rotate your direct care staff so at least some can attend these ancillary meetings. (Yes, we know there are always scheduling conflicts, but do your best.) Encourage your staff to actively participate and communicate with the people in attendance from the different departments.

Top-level managers should also frequent these meetings and participate, as well. Their attendance will give their subordinates the opportunity to offer and receive

feedback, and it will avert the “us versus them” mentality so pervasive in this field. If your leadership is sincere in its participation and communication, it will show that it really does care about the concerns of its low-level employees and will lead to a more harmonious organization.

⌘ Get Others on the Same Page with Your Staff

Direct-care staff have strict rules and guidelines that they must follow and implement. These policies are in place to ensure safety and program structure. Confusion and animosity, therefore, can set in when someone from a different department visits the unit during an active program time and that person has not been properly trained on the unit rules. Neglecting to train this person sets her or him up to be an unwitting accomplice in acts of rule breaking by the clients.

Example:

A new psychology intern visits the unit to spend some time with a client named “Mike” with whom she has been assigned to do individual therapy. The intern takes Mike over to a table away from the others so that they can talk and play a board game. Before long, they move over to another area and play video games; the staff also notice that Mike is chewing on something. So what’s the problem with this situation?

Well, when the intern entered the unit, she and the staff did not consult, and she failed to read the shift log. (Here’s that communication thing again.) Had the intern done either, she would have known that Mike was now on a restricted level for a display of physical violence that morning. His earlier behavior and residual disposition automatically places her at risk with him. In addition, since Mike is on restriction, he is not allowed to play video games—he knows this and has just manipulated the intern. As well, gum is prohibited on the unit, but Mike chews away smugly.

Seeing Mike get away with these things will anger the staff, but they may or may not say anything to the intern. Doing so at that point could provoke an outburst from Mike, and the staff may be reluctant to tell individuals from other departments what to do or how to do them. In any case, the staff will from that point on likely feel animosity toward the intern.

Solution:

Your agency should have all interns and other clinical staff attend a comprehensive training program prior to being allowed on the units. At the very least, any intern or clinical staff needing to enter a unit should meet beforehand with a unit supervisor to go over the rules and expectations. The supervisor should then accompany the individual to the unit and introduce her or him to the staff and assign a staff to provide guidance and answer any questions. Such a simple protocol will ensure a safer unit and healthier professional relationships among all employees.

Take note, also, that the BA, RN, MS, MSW, PhD, or MD after your name does not excuse you from enforcing the unit rules and guidelines. Everyone is on the same treatment team working for the same goals.

⌘ Document All of Your Communications

Whether you are conducting one-on-one biweekly supervisions with your subordinates or your own supervision with your boss, passing along information from the agency director, or disseminating information or policy changes from the board of directors, put all of your communications in writing. Doing so will prevent misunderstandings and quarrels over what was said, because a written account of the communication exists and can be referenced at will.

Supervisors who prefer to talk to their staff informally about issues without documenting their talks will eventually pay for this style of communication. The

first thing the human resources manager will ask a supervisor when an issue arises with an employee is, “Did you document the problem?”

With the age of informatics in full swing, communications are increasingly becoming paperless. E-mail messages, fortunately, leave behind an *electronic* paper trail, and so e-mail is a great tool for the exchange of information. But it does have a couple of drawbacks: It depersonalizes the communication process and it can foster embarrassing or problem situations. Employees can BCC everyone in the chain of command or people other departments in an effort to prove a point, broadcast discontent, or position themselves for a favorable self-serving outcome. Such e-mail misuse can do great harm to work relationships, particularly in small to medium-sized organization. So you must make sure you have detailed e-mail policies in place—and communicate those policies to your employees and make clear what the ramifications are for violating those policies.

⌘ “Why Do *They* Get to Do That?”

Over the years we have heard this question—“Why do *they* get to do that?”—from employees in different departments more than we can remember. One department gets certain perks that others do not, and it creates jealousy.

So the next time the nursing department has a special in-service on the psychotropic medication-of-the-month sponsored by pharmaceutical company XYZ, where nice logo pens and catered Thai food are provided, why not let a couple of your direct-care staff attend? Perhaps even use the opportunity to reward a couple of staff that have really stepped up their efforts lately.

Additionally, for the educational, psychology, human resources, maintenance, and other departments—why not invite them to attend an event that you host for your direct-care staff? Inviting them will greatly reduce the jealousy and complaining, and it could end up building better relationships between the different departments. Or maybe at the end of the day everyone will realize that every department has its own job to do and that job just isn’t that interesting. So

instead of worrying about the other departments, your staff will focus more on what it does best.

⌘ Squash Them Sour Grapes

Ye old grapevine—what organization doesn't have one? It can be especially bad on campuses and in residential treatment centers. There are surely many reasons why this is, but we suspect the primary reasons are these: the generally youthful age of the direct-care staff, the close proximity in which they work, and misunderstandings between direct-care workers and management.

What staff say on the units when they think no one is listening can come back to haunt the entire organization. Clients can overhear the inappropriate talk and pass it on to the next shift, to an individual who was the subject of the chatter, or even worse, to their family and caseworkers. As we all know, clients love to “split staff” and cause controversy on the units. It takes some of the pressure off of them to focus on their own treatment.

Without proper controls, the grapevine can foster excessive gossip that can soon develop into a hostile or disgruntled work environment. As supervisors and administrators, you must have a zero tolerance policy on slanderous—and scandalous—gossip that create a hostile work environment or amounts to harassment, and this policy better be clearly defined in your employee handbook under codes of conduct. In this policy, clearly define what terms and language cannot be used at work.

Have each of your employees sign a copy of this policy and stick it in their personnel file. Periodically review the policy with your staff and have them re-sign it. If you have an individual who violates it and demonstrates that he cannot stop, then terminate him immediately. Make an example out of him for all of the staff to witness.

Additionally, proactively maintain good communications with your direct-care staff. A lot of gossip starts because your staff doesn't understand management's actions or because management has neglected to seek input from its frontline troops. Keep your direct-care staff invested in the decisions and success of your programs, and you'll prevent a lot of negative chatter.

The bottom line: Gossip is unprofessional and wastes a lot of an organization's time and money. Don't wait until it hurts your organization; take steps to prevent it now.

⌘ Continuing Education & Training

Continuing education and other trainings are necessary for the development of your staff. A problem occurs, however, when an agency uses the same old training tapes year after year. The staff soon tire of these tapes and begin to ignore them whenever they watch them in the future.

In-services, on the other hand, are perhaps the best way to train your staff. Yes, they can be costly, but they allow for stimulating interaction and give your staff some actual hands-on experience. We also suggest that your agency start its own library of in-services on vide and possibly get permission to share these training tools with fellow agencies.

Starting your own updated library of new and interesting classes that your staff can access by computer is also a must. Interactive courses that they can be tested on and receive a score would increase the effort they put into it. Coordinating with local colleges and universities for online professional certificates and even associate's degrees is something that can greatly enhance the quality of staff you employ and retain. Also, a tuition reimbursement program is a major plus in retaining staff.

⌘ Tokens of Appreciation & Incentives

Every person wants to feel needed and appreciated by his or her employer. Yet, feeling underappreciated has got to be one of the biggest complaints among direct care staff working in residential treatment centers. Working for a nonprofit organization, however, does not mean that one has to go without the tokens of appreciation and incentives for-profit companies provide to *their* employees.

Your nonprofit facility can do the same. It can offer rewards that promote healthy competition among your hourly staff, such as through rating and bonus systems. And although your budget may not allow for large cash bonuses, you can work around that limitation through various other non-cash rewards.

Here are some examples of excellent incentives and rewards:

Attendance: Say your normal benefit package allows for 8 sick and 2 personal days off per year. If an employee does not use them, why not automatically add 4 days to his or her vacation time that can even be rolled over to the next year? Also give your employee a certificate of achievement to put in his or her file, and highlight his or her name in the employee lounge.

Fast-Track Promotions: Instead of simply allowing some staff to do the minimum work required long enough to reach a predetermined time for promotion, establish standards to encourage your staff to continually work hard, seek training, and move up the company ladder quickly. Create a level system—such as direct-care worker 1, 2, 3, and so on—that motivates your workers to do their best and achieve promotions sooner than the standard.

Point Rating System: Design a rating system based on each staff's job, shift, and location in the organization and rate him or her based on performance relative to others in the same position. Then, assign annual bonuses accordingly.

In our experience, we have seen staff who consistently exhibited the bare minimum of effort receive the same bonuses and raises as individuals that added significant value to the organization. This type of indifference over employee performance has got to stop. In the business world, nonperformance usually doesn't get rewarded; why should it be rewarded in nonprofit work? Your staff should be motivated to be top rated employees. Stop enabling them to be "on the dole"!

Raffles & Give-A-Ways: Hold raffles with nice donated prizes for your staff. Set out some criteria that you want your staff to achieve for the quarter or a set period of time. The ones who do so will be allowed to participate. Simple.

Agency Parties & Events: Make sure you hold employee appreciation parties that include your employees' family members. You may need to hold several of these to accommodate all shifts, or make sure that there is adequate relief staff for individuals who may want to attend during their scheduled shift.

Employee of the Month: We all know how employee-of-the-month awards are usually perceived: as meaningless, patronizing pats on the back. Why not spice up the award by giving the winner his or her own golden key to a private restroom? Plus a \$100 gift certificate to his or her favorite restaurant? And, of course, the cheesy picture and parking spot.

Employee of the Year: For the employee of the year, add an extra week of paid time off.

Get Rid of Them (GROT): And for those employees who don't buy into the organization and its efforts for optimal performance, and who consistently achieve low ratings, and have lousy attitudes and poor performance in general: get rid of them. It shouldn't take an organization three years to find cause to fire an individual who is not doing his or her job. Just GROT!

⌘ “Why, Exactly, Do You Want to Work Here?”

As a supervisor, you may be placed in the position of hiring your own staff. This is a very difficult task, and the health of the organization depends largely on the decisions you make, which are based essentially on brief meetings with strangers. Over time, you should develop a feel for people, an intuitive sense about whether they are right for your program and if they will last a while on the job or not. You should also develop the ability to identify the red flags that tell you to halt the hiring process immediately.

Each of us has our own reasons for working with children in residential treatment care, and some of us possess a natural aptitude and are great at it from the start. Others burn out very quickly and leave the field for other opportunities. Others, still, stick it out even if it takes them awhile to develop the appropriate skills for success.

There is yet another class of individual that tries to work in this field but is doing so for the wrong reasons. You really need be wary of hiring these individuals and on alert if they are already on the job. Individuals that suffer from psychological disorders or are adult survivors of some form of abuse may enter this field in order to “fix” themselves, whether they realize that this is their motivation or not. Working with abused children is probably not a clinically sound treatment option for this employee and may be detrimental to the agency and its clients. Moreover, a conflict of interest occurs when our clients’ treatment is compromised because of the staffs’ own personal problems.

Please note, however, that just because a person has a psychological disorder or is an adult survivor, it doesn’t mean that he or she can’t be effective in this field. But if the person is in this line of work to meet his or her own therapeutic needs, it can create a number of serious problems. We have had our own direct experiences with these types of employees: some have had breakdowns on the job, some became too involved with the clients and couldn’t engage them

professionally, and at least one lashed out at the clients because they couldn't adhere to her standards of obsessive-compulsive cleanliness.

Here is a rundown of potential problems with unstable employees:

There is a risk of the staff member immersing him or herself into the group therapy sessions or program to focus on his or her own issues and not the clients'. As well, the particular staff may be retraumatized by the program or from the behaviors or recalled experiences of the clients. The staff person may not be able to separate him or herself situationally, compromising professional boundaries. An individual seeking personal therapeutic benefits from this line of work probably does not need to be working in this environment.

A more difficult issue for your organization is an individual in a leadership position who suffers from unresolved mental health issues and likewise seeks personal therapeutic benefits from the workplace. A person who has these problems and is in charge of a program or oversees multiple programs can tear an organization apart quickly.

Protocols must be set up in your organization that protect all parties regarding a mentally unstable employee. A staff member who has a valid concern regarding the behaviors and actions of his coworker must be protected when he or she voices those concerns. The agency also has an obligation to help those suffering from any issue or disorder. If an individual cannot work with a special population because of psychological or other problems, then the organization should make every attempt to place them in another role and continue to support them. Some organizations have programs, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), that provide confidential psychological, counseling, and other support to its employees. Furthermore, don't forget about the clients you serve and what is best for them.

Over the years we have heard my people praise us for being in this line of work and in the same breath state that they could never do it or ask, “How do you do it?” The bottom line is that some of us shouldn’t be doing it.

Just remember that whatever actions you take with someone suffering from a psychological disorder, make sure those actions are in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and other laws, regulations, and internal policies that protect your employees.

⌘ Walk a Mile in My Shoes, Brother

One of the biggest complaints among staff in residential and hospital settings is that the supervisors and administration don’t know how “tough” it is on the front lines of the programs. Whether this assertion is true or not, it can become a serious problem in your organization if not addressed appropriately and periodically.

For example: Your executive director sends out a memo highlighting several concerns that he or she may have, based on “loose” information acquired from someone in the chain of command. In this memo, several changes are made to the morning routine on one of the residential units to ensure that residents get to school on time.

The reasoning behind this change is because, in the prior weeks, the residents have been late to school several times. Instead of investigating the problem more thoroughly and consulting directly with the unit staff, the administration decided to move the schedule up 15 minutes to add time for the residents to get to school promptly.

What the administration failed to find out prior to the changes in the schedule was that the reason why the residents got to school late was because of a rash of call-offs by staff. The people complaining about the tardiness to school do not

even work on the units to begin with, so they were not aware of the reasons for the tardiness. The new schedule will actually make it more difficult for the staff to get the residents through the morning routine because of the lack of adequate staffing numbers at that time of the morning.

The result: Instead of solving a problem, the administration has just created more problems. The residents are thrown off of their normal schedule and consequently end up acting out more, taxing the staff and making it more difficult for them to execute the morning routine. Supervisors respond by bringing staff in earlier to provide support, which results in more overtime being paid out. Moreover, the unit staff feel unsupported because the administration imposed yet another uniformed decision on them—the employees who intimately know the dynamics and realities of their program—and the “us versus them” mentality is perpetuated.

The solution: This problem could have easily been avoided by opening up the communication between the educational staff, the residential staff, and the administration. The teachers and agency administrators should have attended a direct-care staff meeting and discussed their concerns. They would have found out that when the agency has multiple call-offs on the residential units in one day, it can cause a delay in getting the residents to school.

A back-up plan can then be established for such occurrences, such as the education or administrative staff being called and expected to assist in getting the residents down to school. The supervisor on duty may have to work with the first shift getting the morning routine done, and so on. In any case, the front-line staff and residents would be better supported if this type of resolution happened.

Our final thoughts and observations on this topic boil down to this: If your supervisors, clinical, educational, and administration staff all worked a shift or three on the units directly with the residential staff, they would gain a realistic understanding of how the program works. The unit staff not only would be pleasantly shocked, but they would have much greater respect for those

individuals and the agency. (They also would probably be glad when the “guest staff” left.) And complaints would drop considerably. Everyone wins this way!

⌘ All Staff Are Created Equal

A major point of contention among residential staff is often what shift is the best or works hardest. This dispute happens in other organizations and is a normal human impulse. Supervisors and administrators should promote healthy competition among their employees, but it is also their responsibility to ensure that all of their direct-care staff feel equal to one another. The organization must have clearly defined roles for each shift and help all staff to see the “big picture” as it pertains to meeting the needs of the clients and the mission and goals of the organization.

No shift does everything for the clients—it would take a 24-hour shift for that to be the case. One way to ensure that all of your staff understand this fact, and appreciate the duties and issues of the other shifts, is to have staff from all shifts attend mandatory cross-shift meetings. These meetings may occur only quarterly, but they will enable greater direct communication among the different shifts and provide more opportunities for questions and issues to be resolved.

Another suggestion is to make every staff work all of the shifts to get a sense of the duties performed. We recommend that this strategy be done only occasionally, to keep the set routines running smoothly. Your organization may already run on a swing shift anyway, and no special intervention is necessary.

⌘ Emphasize Appropriate Staff-Client Interactions

All interactions that staff have with clients should be as professional as possible. One of the last things any agency needs on its hands is an allegation of abuse or neglect to one of its clients. It takes only one incident to hurt a client and your agency’s reputation.

Each staff should already have an employee handbook from the human resources department that specifically outlines behaviors that are expected and ones that will not be tolerated. If your agency's handbook, however, does not go into great detail about conduct and relationships with clients, your agency has a great opportunity for growth. Addressing staff-client interactions in detail will not only foster more professional interactions, it will reduce the number of inappropriate interactions that have the potential to harm clients and provoke investigations by the agency or the state.

Regular trainings with concrete examples of dos and don'ts is another excellent way to improve staff-client interactions. Role playing takes a bit of preparation and time, but it can be a more effective tool than simply telling staff what to do.

⌘ Proper Placement of Staff & Clients

In addition to fostering proper relationships with its clients, an organization should closely monitor all staff and residents in its residential settings. Sometimes a simple criminal background check of employees isn't enough, and extensive psychological, emotional, and social testing should be done as a pre-screening for these jobs. The very last thing your organization needs is a pedophile or an individual suffering from a severe psychological problem working so intimately with such a young population.

Perhaps you have a strong candidate for your organization that suffers from personal issues stemming from being victimized himself. A crisis unit may not be the best fit for him. Voluntary extensive testing would be necessary to help determine this, but it is definitely worth the initial expenditures to ensure a safer environment for your clients and staff.

Also, you must consider gender and race when placing new staff and residents into each residential setting. If the client population on a certain unit is 80 percent Caucasian and female, is it appropriate to schedule three males and only one female employee on the unit? You should aim to have your staffing

demographics mirror the client population. Are the staff you assemble to work on the same shift from similar socioeconomic, gender, or racial backgrounds as the clients? Or are they even representative of the clients they serve? Your staff must be able to complement each other and work together as a well-run team, as well as be able to respond with appreciation of the backgrounds of each client. There are also local, state, and federal guidelines to consider, as well, that regulate client-to-staff ratios and the gender makeup of the staff.

On the flip side to this equation is who to admit into your programs. To whom is your organization best equipped to provide services? Would you place a 15-year-old sexual offender in the same unit as several younger victims? How would you handle this referral? This is exactly why it is important to have as much information on each client prior to admission: in order to make the best recommendation for treatment.

We know that your organization may have written agreements with certain placement agencies obligating you to admit every referral that they send to you. This policy makes it more difficult to prescreen those individuals who need more acute or different care. For instance, is it wise to admit an aggressive 17-year-old male when you know in advance that you don't have the manpower, environmental conditions, or rules set in place to keep him, other residents, or your own staff safe? Think about it.

⌘ Employee & Client Rights

The previous section leads us right into the next important issue that all organizations face: The obligation to support both your clients and your staff members. Many organizations focus heavily on what its employees can't do. Why not focus on what the organization can do for its employees?

Wouldn't it be nice to go to your next shift meeting and tell your staff about all of the rights that they have as employees and what you and your organization can do for them? How about creating a questionnaire that your staff can

anonymously fill out to voice their concerns? That way, you can find out the real concerns of your employees and address them better, without generating fear of repercussions by the individuals who speak up.

Your employees will feel much more supported if action taken on their concerns. Even if the organization ends up not making a change to its policies or program, there will be an open dialogue and your staff may end up having a better understanding of the issues they had in the first place.

Here is an example of an unhealthy organization reacting to change by not supporting its hourly employees:

A member of The Healing Embrace Network several years ago formed a team at a local university to conduct a study for an organization on its identity, culture, and areas of needed improvements. The organization initially supported this idea, reviewed it with its members, and agreed to participate in the study. A questionnaire was developed and passed out to all of its members.

When initial results came back indicating a negative response from employees, with a particular emphasis on the executive director as a key concern, then the study was immediately terminated—by the executive director. This early end, in turn, made the employees feel even more disenfranchised with their jobs and the administration running the organization.

The staff working there knew little about their rights as employees of the state. Such rights as free legal representation and the right to join a union were not discussed or were discouraged. It could be said that the staff were treated with little respect or support.

Regarding your clients, it should be an agency objective to make their rights clear and readily available. Upon admission they should automatically receive a copy of their rights in writing. Also go over all rights with each client and make sure that he or she completely understands them. Also allow each client to have his or

her own copy of these rights on hand, and post them in common areas for all to view. And if you are providing treatment to a younger, developmentally challenged population, make sure to phrase or present these rights in a way that the clients will understand.

You may need to have short workshops with your staff on client rights. Once everyone is on the same page regarding rights, then you can focus on treatment.

⌘ Foster Consistency with a Memo Binder

Maintaining consistency in how your staff applies the rules, policies, and procedures of your program is always a challenge. Every time there is a change in something, some staff don't seem to get the memo; and down the road, some forget the details of the changes and revert back to the old policy or create their own hybrid policy.

A good way to improve consistency is to maintain a binder of memos on changes, clarifications, and other information related to rules, policies, and procedures. Keep this binder on the unit along with the general program manual, and encourage your staff to reference both of these resources often. That way, whenever there is a question on something, you as well as your staff can immediately access the correct answer.

⌘ Maintain Consistency of Staff

Although it is always a challenge, ensuring that the staff on each shift remain consistently the same will go a long way toward creating positive program outcomes. When the same staff work everyday, the clients will feel more secure. Also, the staff will trust each other better, as they know what to expect from one another and how best to support each other.

Conversely, when the staff are constantly mixed and matched on the unit, the outcomes are usually not good. The clients become insecure, the staff can be

unsure and passive because they don't know the clients or their coworkers well enough, everyone becomes anxious, and the likelihood of client outbursts increases.

So, if you desire a stable program, maintaining a consistency of staff is critical.

⌘ Trust Your Staff

Do you trust your staff? You should. The staffing situation in every program, of course, is unique. But the less you trust your staff, the more headaches you'll have and the more you'll create for yourself.

One of the worst things you can do to your program is to micromanage your staff. When they feel like you're always looking over their shoulder and scrutinizing everything they do, they won't trust you, they'll resent you, and they'll soon transfer into another department or quit the agency outright. And your program will suffer from a perpetual exodus of experienced, competent staff and an influx of new, inexperienced staff.

Trust us, we have personally witnessed this exact phenomenon occur with a top supervisor who simply could not understand why her experienced staff kept fleeing the programs she managed. She simply couldn't see that her overbearing and abrasive management style was a main cause of these mass departures, according to the fleeing staff themselves.

If you demonstrate genuine trust of your staff, on the other hand, they will feel empowered and will grow into leaders. They will learn to manage situations on their own, and they will become more effective all around. Always be there to support them, and provide guidance and mentoring as needed, but do be mindful to trust them as much as possible.

⌘ Public Displays of Appreciation

One of the persistent themes in many organizations is the perception among direct-care staff that the organization considers them dispensable. Yet, direct-care staff are arguably the most important component of any organization. They have the most direct contact with the clients, and the way they implement the program directly affects its outcomes. So as a supervisor, you surely cherish your best employees.

One of the frustrations, however, of being a supervisor is retention of your best employees. It often seems that once a direct-care staff becomes good at his or her job, that person transfers to another department or moves on to another employer. Although you may feel like throwing up your hand and saying, "That's just the nature of this field," things don't have to be that way. You can take steps to retain more of your best workers.

Public displays of appreciation are an excellent way to hang on to your quality staff. All that is necessary are simple tokens of thanks, such as employee-of-the-month awards and public acknowledgments of specific jobs well done. But take care to not be too liberal or patronizing in these acknowledgements, for if you do they will lose their significance and become mockeries instead.

Also, get your administrative leaders to take note of the "little people." We have seen numerous examples of administrators extending superfluous kudos in agency-wide e-mails and newsletters to employees who work in administrative-support positions while never once mentioning a single direct-care worker by name. While the office workers received praise for accomplishing some task while sitting at a computer in a comfy office chair, the employees who daily got hit, spit on, cussed out, and called racial slurs were simply ignored for their unimaginably hard work.

As well, we've seen donations of tickets to the games of a local major league baseball team get offered to agency employees via the inter-office e-mail system.

Here's the problem with this: only the employees sitting at computers were able to reserve tickets, meaning that direct-care staff busy interacting with the clients usually had no chance to get any tickets before they were gone. It's not hard to imagine how the direct-care staff felt every time this happened.

When it comes to showing appreciation of your staff, it's not at all difficult to do. Simply lavish them with a number of little tokens of thanks: pizzas, ice cream, candies, gift certificates, mentions in e-mails and newsletters, and even simple pats on the back. Be creative with your thanks, and be their advocates. When your staff feel supported, they will work harder for you and be more loyal.

⌘ Does the Environment Encourage an Effective Program?

Do you like going to your job? We are not talking about the actual work itself—although that plays a major role in your job satisfaction—but your work surroundings. Do you work in a small cubicle, a lavish private office with executive mahogany furniture, or a institutionally decorated unit? Whatever the case may be, your physical environment plays a significant role on how you view yourself and your place of employment.

Do you take pride in your job and organization? Or are you embarrassed to walk through the door everyday? You might be surprised at how a change in your physical environment can positively your perception of your organization and your work attitude, as well.

One way to keep your staff happy and motivated is by making sure that the building or campus you work in is clean, organized, well decorated, and updated with newer creature comforts. Few people would surely want to work in an environment that has not been updated since the 1970s or uses technology that is completely outdated.

Your clients can feel the same way. They don't want to live in an old, outdated, and deteriorating environment. They want a place that they can feel comfortable

living in for 30 to 120 days or longer. You also don't want them to be in a sterile "white washed" environment in which they are climbing the walls only after a few days. The milieu must be warm and inviting to communicate a level of concern for your clients' comfort. And you want the milieu to be representative of clients of various backgrounds through symbols of diversity, such as works of art that are inclusive of assorted races, cultures, and genders. If you are a private organization and have religious displays, you may want to make sure all major religions are represented and make special religious accommodations from time to time.

Another area of concern in your environment is safety. You want both your staff and residents to be as safe as possible while on the campus and on the units. Every little nook and cranny must be scrutinized for sharp corners, edges, screws, and other potential dangers. Can your windows be broken or taken out? Can your walls be kicked in? Do the tables get knocked over easily? Do your curtains easily come down or can a resident make a noose out of them?

Obviously, every unit is built differently, but that doesn't change the need for safety, personal space, and aesthetics. One way to keep your residents and staff safe is to have video monitors throughout your facility. Your residential staff will probably complain about the cameras to a certain extent, and the initial startup costs can be \$25,000 or more. But whenever one of your clients make an allegation of abuse against a staff member, you can review the claim on video and have usually unequivocal evidence to support or refute the claim. Video footage can also be used as a great learning tool when certain issues and incidents arise and you want to review them with your staff.

Protocols and procedures on the operations and maintenance of the video monitoring system should already be established. They should detail how to store the video recordings, for how long, and so on. Also, every employee and client should be made to sign a waiver acknowledging the presence of the

system. And finally, there should be fairly strict guidelines on where residents and staff can and cannot be recorded on video.

⌘ Institutional Baggage

What happens when an organization lets a particular issue fester? It adds to what we call your “institutional baggage.” This term includes all of the problem employees, policies, and program deficits that are allowed to fester in your organization and negatively affect its ability to offer the best possible services to its clients and employees.

Do you have that problem employee who has been there for years and who constantly creates trouble but is allowed to continue to work there? These staff constantly stir things up and look for loopholes in the rules and regulations. They take little responsibility for their behaviors and actions. And they constantly complain about the organization and its members.

The temperament of a particular problem employee could have been created by problems in the system itself. For example, she could have had concerns that were ignored or addressed through patronizing lip service. After awhile, the employee learns that the only way to truly be heard is to become a nuisance. The solution to preventing this type of institutional baggage should be obvious. But in case you don't see the solution, here it is: Listen to your staff, take their concerns seriously, and address them when appropriate.

In another example, a seasoned staff may become so good at his job that he becomes complacent, or even lazy, at his duties. The quality of this person's work decreases and the program suffers. And then suffers even more as coworkers begin to mimic his behavior and attitude, as they witness that there are no consequences for his actions. New staff will think that his work ethic is par for the course, and even good veteran staff will take on his work ethic in protest of being expected to pick up the slack for his complacency.

One way to deal with this type of institutional baggage is to occasionally rotate your staff to different units, programs, departments, or shifts. They will be constantly challenged and on their toes. In the process, they will become better trained and able to be utilized more efficiently. They will no longer be able to “pass the buck” and blame another shift or department when work doesn’t get done. They will have more ownership in all of the programs, and hence will necessarily have to be more involved and proactive on the job.

Old and outdated policies may also hinder your program and agency’s abilities to function in the most efficient and effective manner. Thus, it is imperative to constantly review and update your existing policies. Continued training is also a must.

⌘ Organizational Identity & Culture

All of the growth opportunities that we have explored help to shape and form your organization’s identity and culture. And organizations that take these growth opportunities to heart will enhance their wellbeing.

Healthy organizations are usually pillars of light in the community. They are always reaching out to those in need with a clear mission and an excellent reputation. These organizations can boast of documented progress and positive outcomes for their clients. Also, these organizations have strong bonds and relationships with other agencies that provide continued wrap-around services for their clients.

Members of these organizations love their jobs and feel supported by the agency they work for. A constant flow of effective communication exists throughout the organization. Hourly employees feel empowered and not disregarded, and far fewer cries of “us against them” are heard. When a crisis does occur, there are no attempts to cover things up because everyone feels that they are part of a supportive team. And finally, when mistakes happen they are dealt with in a swift and professional manner according to the rules set forth by the agency.