

Implementing Effective Supervisor Training

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Abstract

As supervisory staff are onboarded, they are often put in place without receiving the training necessary for them to be effective in their new positions. This lack of training limits the number of effective supervisors in libraries and leads to inefficiencies in library direction, organization and lack of job satisfaction among employees. This paper will discuss how to implement appropriate training programs to better prepare these key staff members and to ensure cohesion in library functions. Our team conducted a survey of public library supervisors about the initial training they received as well as what their ongoing training needs are. In addition, our team interviewed librarians whose current jobs focus on staff training. Analysis of the survey results and the relevant literature have revealed best practices for organizations that will increase supervisor effectiveness, efficiency and job satisfaction. Many of these best practices can be implemented in cost effective ways for libraries with limited budgets. While not all libraries can afford to build training departments or keep a trainer on staff, it is important for all libraries to develop some training process for their supervisors.

Introduction

The saying “Great leaders are born, not made” has been greatly debated over the years. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that many individuals are hired as supervisors, each with various levels of experiences and competencies. The training they receive has the potential to assist them in becoming a great leader.

With any new position there is a learning curve that can be smooth or rough depending on the support the new supervisor receives from their hiring agency. As supervisory staff are brought on board, they are often put in place without receiving the training necessary for them to be effective in their new positions. This lack of training limits the number of effective supervisors in libraries and leads to inefficiencies in library direction and organization and lack of job satisfaction among employees. This paper will discuss how to implement appropriate training programs to better prepare these key staff members and to ensure cohesion in library functions.

A Closer Look: Supervisor Training Survey

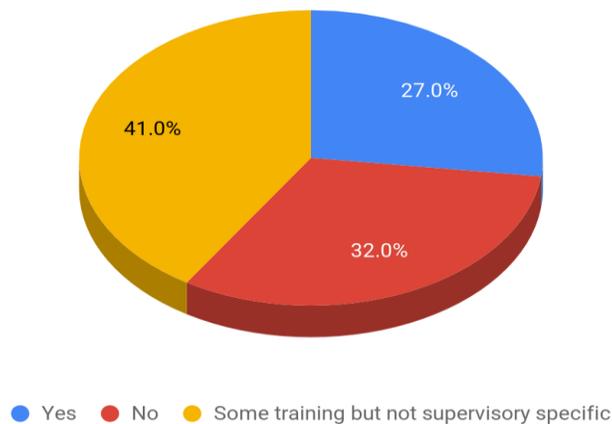
In May 2017, we posted a Supervisor Training Survey on the following listservs: PUBLIB (reaching public librarians and library staff), GLA-L (reaching members of the Georgia Library Association), CHLIB-L (reaching library workers serving children), ALA Think Tank Facebook page, and PLD-L (reaching Georgia public library directors). Among the questions we asked the participants were:

- job title
- level of job satisfaction
- number of employees supervised
- how long they have been a supervisor
- what type of training they received, if any

- their obstacles to receiving training
- what training would be valuable to their jobs
- the type of training they have sought out on their own
- their preferred training method
- additional comments

We received 197 responses from directors, assistant/associate directors, branch managers, department heads, youth service managers, supervising librarians, technical services supervisors and various other job titles.

When you became a supervisor, did you receive supervisory training?



When asked if they received supervisor training, 41% responded that they received some training, but not specifically supervisory training, 32% responded no and 27% responded yes. A library manager who received some training, but not specifically supervisory training, responded that they “would have benefited greatly from a formal, comprehensive, in-depth supervisory training program.”

Current Situation

Stephen Kight, Assistant Director for Public Services at the Forsyth County Public Library, summarized the challenges facing new supervisors by stating “a new supervisor has to

essentially be an expert at the job he or she is supervising...and on top of that has to absorb how to be an effective manager and a leader, while keeping up with changing technology and continually striving to provide the best possible service to patrons” (2017). In the best case scenario, when a new manager enters her or his position, they begin a comprehensive management training program. The time span would depend on the amount of material, time and the employee’s need for support.

Unfortunately, many libraries are using the “sink-or-swim approach” to management in lieu of a structured training program (Tyler, 2003, p. 78). The employee is left with the task of figuring out how to do their job effectively or flailing about making preventable mistakes. One survey respondent commented that their supervisory training “was very much an attitude of sink or swim while being thrown in the deep end and [they] learned a lot on the fly. Access to ANY kind of training for new managers/supervisors would [have been] very beneficial.” This haphazard method takes a toll on the employee, their direct reports, patrons and the library. It can send a signal to the supervisor and employees that the organization is unwilling to invest in the success of their employees.

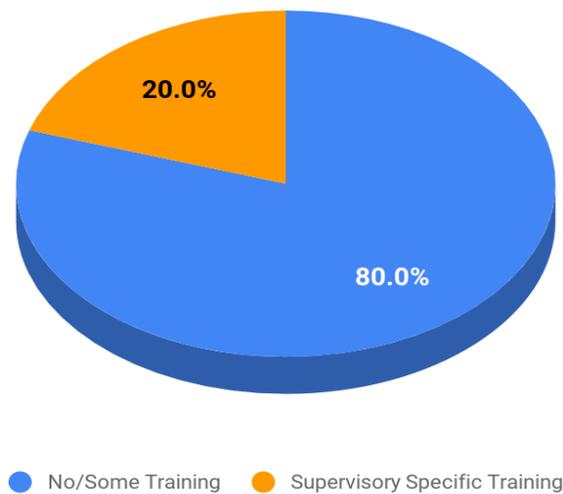
Survey Analysis

Why There is a Need for Training

It is important that library administrators understand that having ineffectual managers can jeopardize their library’s mission by causing “their best employees to jump ship or unengaged employees stifling the progress and productivity of the organization” (*HR Professionals Magazine*). Failing to develop a structured training program can lead to mishandling of personnel issues, human resources violations, employee burnout and high

turnover. These issues can disrupt daily operations and ultimately erode the organizational structure. In Kathryn Tyler's (2011, p. 53) article, *The Strongest Link*, she states that "managers are the key to employee engagement, retention, satisfaction and productivity."

Many librarians are hired or promoted because of their exceptional technical skills. They were a great reference librarian, had wonderful youth programs, were an outreach superstar, or successfully ran the circulation department. These librarians have proved themselves and are now considered to be ready for the next step. However, as stated by Dorcas Davis, the Director of Continuing Education & Training with Georgia Public Library Service, library supervisors "may not have had any training, education, or hands-on experience with supervising a library staff" (2017). This is where they need guidance as they leave behind their old roles to assume their new leadership positions. Our survey results indicated that of those who received little to no training, 80% rated their job satisfaction as a 2 or 3 on a 5-point scale.



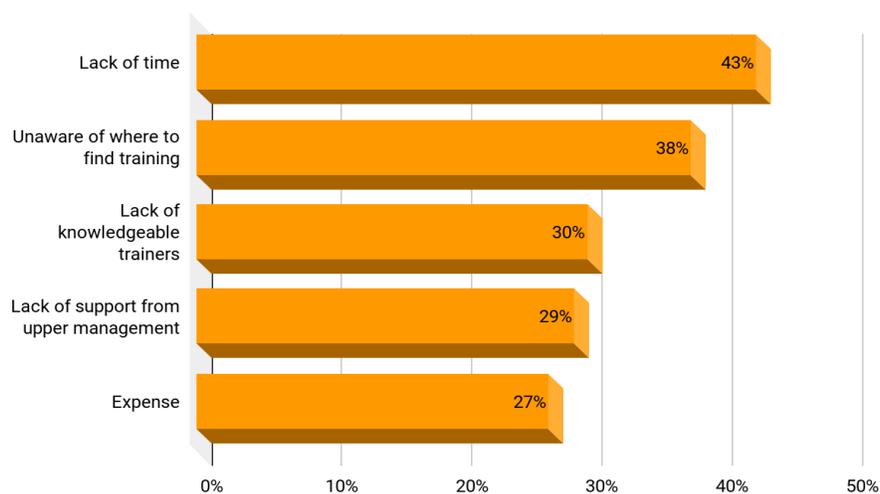
Whether the employee is new to the position, received a promotion, has years of experience or is coming straight from school, there is a need for learning the expectations and workings of the new position they are now occupying. At a minimum, supervisors need to know

their library's history, mission and vision along with policies and the relevant federal and state laws (Miles, 2016). In addition, more abstract skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication, time management and the ability to motivate others are vital for success (Gardner, 1980).

Orientations are effective for familiarizing the new employee with the organization's policies and procedures, but more in-depth training and support is needed for supervisors. A study in *Management Skills for First-Time Supervisors* revealed, "26% of managers said they were not ready for the responsibilities of the job and 58% had no management training" (Metcalf). Lack of management training can lead to the real or imagined belief of the new manager that he was not adequately supported by his new boss or organization. If lacking, this crucial element of a leader's success can result in resentment or loss of confidence, or at the extreme level a lawsuit if personnel issues are mishandled.

Barriers to Supervisory Success

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between providing training and the success of a company (Goad, 1997). So why are some libraries not training their supervisors?



Results from our survey show that 43% of supervisors think there is a lack of time to attend training, 38% are unaware of where to find training, 30% cite lack of knowledgeable trainers, 29% believe there is a lack of support from upper management, and 27% saw the cost of training as the reason for not receiving management training.

In these days of limited resources, “lack of time” appears to be the primary concern. Casey Wallace, Training Manager with Gwinnett County Public Library, has observed that “new supervisors are often tossed into the mix of impending changes and have to get up to speed quickly so that they can support and encourage their teams effectively” (2017). There often does not seem to be enough time to accomplish daily tasks let alone pursue training in an already busy day. As Wallace stated, “Training truly is an investment, and taking time away from routine activities can seem extravagant, but it is essential to be in the habit of setting aside learning time regularly” (2017). When training is raised to the importance of other essential duties such as the schedule or monthly report, then the perception will change and time will be found.

Well-meaning libraries can find they face other barriers when considering implementing a training program. Stephen Kight discussed that in general, supervisors are hired infrequently, causing only one person to be trained at a time which means that there is less opportunity for peer interaction during training (2017). This also creates an additional barrier, as less time and money is generally spent on training one individual. Dorcas Davis also pointed out that “having the time to participate in a training program may leave his or her library short [of] staff” (2017).

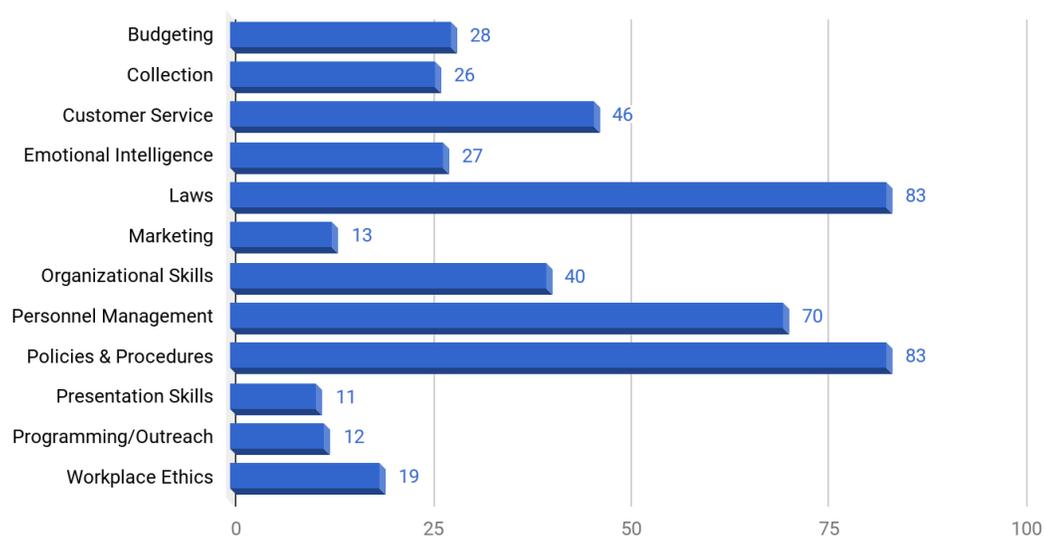
Alan Harkness, Director of the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries, discussed the lack of trained staff able to conduct programs for new staff (2017). “[Programs are] really only as good as the trainer who is delivering them” (Harkness, 2017). Many libraries do not have enough professional staff to allow one person to focus on training. This leads to problems with

consistency, buy-in and a general loss as to how to begin a training program. With so many issues to consider, it may be difficult to begin planning an effective supervisory training program.

Recommended Best Practices

When planning a training program, it is important to remember that different methods are effective for different learning styles. One survey respondent said, “Supervisory training isn’t one type fits all; it has to be created to the individual. I utilize and recommend a combination of webinars, in-person training, and having trusted peers or mentors to collaborate with or contact when needed.” Developing a training program also needs to take into account the size and resources of your organization.

When asked what training would have been most valuable as a new supervisor, 83 of 132 respondents who had not received supervisory training (63%) ranked both laws and policies & procedures as the two areas of greatest need. Other areas that were indicated as areas of need were personnel management (53%) and customer service (35%).



It is clear that supervisors are seeking training in technical skills as well as soft-skills.

Sixty-three percent of survey respondents reported they received training in policies and procedures and human resource laws. Starting a supervisory training with sessions on the library's policies and procedures and HR laws creates a solid foundation for supervisors to execute the library's missions and goals. In addition, "[t]raining supervisors in HR policy and procedure lessens exposure to lawsuits" (Haberman, 2013).

Step 1: Establish a List of Core Competencies

While not everyone is born with instinctive leadership skills, anyone can develop the core characteristics of competent leaders and become effective in their positions as supervisors (Tulsiani, 2015). For employers seeking guidance to develop a new program and direct the develop of these characteristics, there are publications available providing leadership competencies. The Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA), a division of the American Library Association, published *LLAMA'S 14 Foundational Competencies for Library Leadership and Management* in May 2017. The competencies range from communication skills to marketing and advocacy. These 14 skills were chosen from a survey sent out to LLAMA members. In addition to defining each skill, additional reading is provided for those wanting to develop their proficiency in that area (LLAMA, 2017).

Another resource is the *Competency Index for the Library Field* compiled by WebJunction (2014). It includes a detailed section on Library Management Competencies. This guide details eleven competencies which include the following: budget & funding, community relations, facilities, laws, policies & procedures, marketing, organizational leadership, personnel management, staff training & development, strategic planning and trustees & Friends.

Step 2: Training Options

Our survey asked for the respondents' preferred method of training: 61% preferred in-person training, 32% opted for webinars and online classes, while 6% preferred one-on-one instruction. While there are a number of training methods available, it is important to remember that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Employees require different supervisory training methods to fit their learning styles and experience (Rockwood, 2017). In addition, a inexperienced supervisor will need basic training versus a seasoned professional who is ready for more advanced skills and knowledge. So where to start?

Human Resources/Training Department

Libraries can utilize the human resources departments of their counties, municipalities or other funding agencies in developing a constructive HR policy and procedure training. Explore these training departments for course offerings. Identify relevant training topics and include them in your training plan. If your HR or training department does not currently offer classes that fit the needs of your employees' professional development, work with them to develop classes.

Depending on your budget, libraries can work together with neighboring systems to hire a trainer or consultant once or twice a year and conduct a joint new supervisor training or to offer a more advanced training for seasoned supervisors. In September, 2017, the Uncle Remus Regional Library System, teamed up with six nearby systems to host a supervisor training with National Seminars Training. The program was customized for a mixed group of new and seasoned supervisors and focused on communication and team building. By joining with nearby systems, the program was affordable and provided a networking opportunity. Other companies

that host similar training include The Carl Vinson Institute, Fred Pryor Seminars, and Dale Carnegie Training.

Supervisor Survival Guide

Since many supervisors come onboard at various times, training may not be immediately available. Library administrators can address this issue by facilitating the creation of a new supervisor checklist or survival guide that a new manager can review with their supervisor. This guide may assist a new supervisor to avoid making “early mistakes and los[ing] credibility (Tyler, 2003, p. 81). The checklist or guide should include a contact list, instructions for timekeeping and required reports, how to access available resources, copies of security and disciplinary documents and other relevant information.

Online Learning

There are a myriad of free and fee-based webinars and online classes available via the internet. The wide variety of choices provides the chance to tailor training to each new supervisor’s unique needs. Online learning has the advantages of consistent delivery of uniform content, convenience, and the ability to revisit topics. It also allows an individual to learn at his or her own pace (Arthur, 2012). Those responsible for overseeing the training should not only encourage new supervisors to utilize webinars but should take the extra step of highlighting courses relevant to managers and encouraging participation.

Libraries can also develop their own online training that is tailor-made to fit their needs and that is available on-demand. At the Gwinnett County Public Library, webinar trainings through Google Hangouts are commonplace (Wallace, 2017). They have found “Google classroom [to be] a very useful tool for asynchronous learning because our department can assign

tasks, reading and quizzes-- and any other topical content” (Wallace, 2017). In addition, emails and short videos serve as bite-sized lessons to highlight topics on a regular basis.

Step 3: Ongoing Activities

It is also important to provide a new supervisor with ongoing activities and training. Continuous learning helps individuals to be successful and remain competitive (Goad, 1997). It shows that the organization is invested in its staff, which leads to higher job satisfaction and less turnover.

Peer Networking

Managing can often be a lonely and isolating experience. Supervisors deal with challenging situations and confidential information. They often cannot share their problems with those who work most closely with them, their direct reports. Peer networking can provide informal training and professional support. In our survey, one library director stated that “In addition to training... I think it is important to bring supervisory staff together a few times a year to discuss concerns, provide feedback [regarding] system issues, and to simply be heard by upper level [management].” Tyler puts forth the assertion that peer networking “is one of the most effective outcomes of training—and it is inexpensive. Middle managers crave the empathy, camaraderie and ‘been there’ solutions offered by their peers” (2011). These peer networking opportunities can range from informal “brown bag lunches with rotating topics or as sophisticated as catered question- and-answer lunches with formal ... panels” (Tyler, 2011, p. 53).

Mentorship

Mentoring was cited as an effective training method from 51 of the respondents to our survey. The only thing mentoring costs you is time, which would be time well spent. The mentoring program must be well thought-out, structured in a manner that is beneficial to both mentor and mentee, and can realistically be carried out by all parties. “I am a big fan of informal coaching and dialogue one-on-one. It's time well spent and worth the investment,” says Alan Harkness (2017).

Library administration should pair high-performing managers with new supervisors. The mentor and mentee relationship can be beneficial to both parties. The mentee is offered additional support and the mentor has a chance to share their knowledge and skills. Mentorships allow the mentor and mentee to “share stories of success or failure, share what they have learned from the experience, and be a support system” (Gentry, 2015, p. 14).

Leadership Skills

As new managers start to learn their jobs and begin to master their newly acquired technical skills, “training should shift to leadership development” (Tyler, 2003, p. 83). This new training should concentrate on developing soft skills such as communication, time management, problem solving, conflict management and delegation.

Step 4: Evaluating the Training

Senior management needs to continually evaluate and update training programs. Laws and policies change over time, necessitating updates and additional activities. Evaluation of training programs is an important step in the design process, as it provides an opportunity for the training team to assess the effectiveness of the training opportunities offered.

One effective evaluation tool is the pre- and post-test. This method allows the trainer to evaluate what amount of knowledge was gained and retained. The post-test will also highlight if the trainee needs additional information. In order to truly test the effectiveness of the training, evaluations ought to take place “a minimum of six weeks” afterward (Tyler, 2003, p. 86). This will allow the trainee time to implement the skills learned. The evaluation should be given to the trainee and their supervisor to measure effectiveness.

Conclusions

Casey Wallace stated it best by saying, “Supervisory development gives back to the organization and to the profession in general. It gives administration the opportunity to indirectly mentor their own staff by introducing talented professionals to resources that they may not have considered for themselves (2017). It also gives the opportunity for administration to more clearly communicate their vision and goals for supervisors in the context of their own library” (Wallace, 2017). By taking the time to implement some means of effective supervisory training, organizations ensure that their new supervisors are ready to lead and motivate staff, to appropriately handle customer service and personnel issues and to clearly understand the legal and ethical expectations of their positions.

Additionally, training is not just for new managers. Supervisors of all levels and experiences benefit from ongoing training. New technologies, ideas, and trends are ever-present in our profession. Our communities are changing and expect us to meet their needs. We need skilled supervisors who can grow and become innovative leaders of our libraries. As supervisors spend less time on the technical side of their jobs, they can move beyond the day-to-day operations and develop goals and encourage ideas and innovation from their direct reports.

As indicated in the survey, both new and experienced supervisors indicate that they continue to need training specifically teaching supervisory skills. While not all libraries may have the means of creating a permanent training department or hiring personnel to oversee staff training, each library can implement a few sensible training strategies to offer some support to their supervisors. Failing to create this support structure can lead to uninformed, apathetic, ineffectual supervisors. Building in these training strategies will increase job knowledge, job satisfaction and employee engagement.

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