Training Playbook:

Staff Development and Training

Introduction

In this playbook, we cover what staff training and development is, why you should care deeply about it, and how to implement a training and development style that can maximize your employees' contributions while making each one feel exactly what they are: a unique and valued part of the team.

Training is a short-term effort to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in their present jobs. Development is a long-term effort to build competencies for the future; most development occurs on the job. Effective training and development programs build the competencies that staff need to give the best standard of care to those they serve.

Animal shelters often place more emphasis on animal care than people care. Although it's probably not intentional, treating staff as a lower priority creates barriers for development. Providing staff with the resources and trainings they need not only helps increase efficiency in daily operations, it supports growth in the organization and the industry.

Studies have shown that placing staff training and development as a priority builds confidence, leads to increased retention, and provides staff with a meaningful connection to the organization and the mission.

Program Overview

Job descriptions

Be clear and up-front about job duties and requirements, be they immediate or future expectations. Job descriptions help create a clear and concise explanation of duties to be performed. They can help identify skills or abilities that are necessary for a position or the environmental pressures that apply to the position.

Onboarding

Recognize that the current "sink or swim" onboarding approach is not working for us in animal welfare. Studies have shown that the experiences of employees during their first 30, 60 and 90 days greatly inform an employee's life cycle with the organization and their overall engagement with and attitude toward the organization. Map out what new employees need to know about the organization, what other departments they will interface with the most and what their daily work consists of. This integration shouldn't go beyond the first 90 days, though, since you want to avoid overwhelming new staff with too much information.

Develop your onboarding as an interactive and engaging process, rather than a checklist. Consider pairing each new employee with a mentor to help new staff navigate your organization. Use onboarding as an opportunity to inform new staff about your

organization's culture. If you don't indoctrinate new staff into what the organization wants its culture to be defined as, they will begin to determine it on their own.

Training tools and continued education

Develop an organized and concise training program for new staff members to follow. Map out the initial key learning elements and build on the program as new staff members increase their knowledge of your organization and practices. Initially, you want staff to be aware of daily operations and SOPs, and how to use SOPs correctly. Remember to keep both new and old staff engaged with tools and trainings that focus on skill-building, leadership and career development. Use outside speakers, free webinars, conferences and even role play to help develop the toolbox that staff need to prepare themselves for their jobs. Keep in mind that not everyone learns or comprehends in the same manner. Provide visual and auditory aids when available.

Performance evaluations and tests

Measure a starting point and chart the training and skills learned. Performance evaluations can help ensure that goals and work standards are being met. Create simple tests or quizzes and build them into training sequences. These tests can also be helpful in measuring skills and identifying learning gaps.

Professional advancement

Promote employees who are champions of your organization's culture and values, and who demonstrate those values in their everyday interactions. Try to pivot away from equating "high performer" with someone who simply gets results. You want to integrate your organization's culture and values into your definition of high performance. Recognize, advance and promote staff based on this fuller definition. The makeup of your leadership and management team is essential to creating an environment for a thriving team, so promote wisely.

Assessment

Continuously assess your organization's areas of need and match them to your training programs. Your training programs should always be evolving to meet industry and organizational standards. Give staff the ability to assess as well through surveys and open discussions.

Management

Leadership must ensure that each staff member is given consistent, meaningful and clear trainings. Employees should have the opportunity to provide feedback about trainings and development to their managers, and managers should consider this feedback when evolving the training. Make sure new and current staff are aware that they can talk openly to management about their work-life balance and any issues that arise because of their work (e.g., compassion fatigue). Ensuring that management is

aware of staff as individuals and offering coping skills to these individuals will help staff thrive in their work.

"The key to development is to make it occur on a daily basis. Most development occurs on the job and in the context of work activities…. The manager's challenge is to build individual capabilities at the same time he or she encourages individuals to tackle new challenges that build their competencies in preparation for the future." – Dale Carnegie Training

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If you have questions regarding the topics of staff development and training, please reach out to your regional strategist, regional director, or the Best Friends national shelter support team at team2025@bestfriends.org.

Resources

Job descriptions

- How — and why — animal shelters should write job descriptions
- How to write a good job description

Onboarding

- 10 Ways To Successfully Introduce New Hires To Your Company's Core Values
- A Road Map to New Hire Orientation
- Effective Onboarding Should Last for Months

Training and continuing education

- Best Friends Animal Care Staff Training Guide
- 3 low-cost or free tips for training animal shelter staff
- ASPCA Online Courses
- Best Friends' E-Learnings
- HSUS Online Trainings
- Maddie's Fund Learning Opportunities
- Role-Playing: Preparing for Difficult Conversations and Situations
- Staff and Volunteer Training and Development Study: Caring for Animals, Caring for People
- What's Your Learning Style?

Performance evaluations and assessments

- [6 Tips for Writing an Effective Performance Review](#)
- [Assess your organization](#)
- [The Four Tendencies](#) (great book and quiz for leaders and their team members to take to better understand expectations)

Management

- [Managing Compassion Fatigue](#)
- [Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](#)
- [Daring Leadership Assessment](#)
- [Leadership Is a Practice: Why You Don't Need Authority to Lead](#)
- [Seven-Minute Seventh Level Checklist (for ensuring high engagement with a particular audience)](#)