

Effective Training is Key to Managing the Risks of Staff Turnover

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Turnover is a recurring challenge for nonprofit organizations. Paid and volunteer staff may move on to new challenges or better paying positions. From time to time, a nonprofit may need to terminate the employment of a poor performer or lay off employees during an economic downturn. In all the cases except layoffs, the nonprofit faces the challenge of filling open positions plus the need to train new personnel to do their jobs effectively. In the case of layoffs, remaining staff may need to be trained to take on new duties. These scenarios can be extremely disruptive to your organization.

Turnover is also costly. The time and resources required for recruitment and conventional classroom and one-on-one training are substantial. Yet having staff and volunteers who are unequipped can be even more costly, when mistakes are made, rules broken, or even laws violated. Interestingly, surveys of the results of exit-interviews for departing employees reveal that complaints about inadequate training are common. Disagreements with a supervisor and dissatisfaction with pay, benefits or training top the list of complaints reported on exit interview forms.

Alternatively, having an effective training program reaps benefits for your nonprofit. As staff, directors, and volunteers participate in a thoughtful training program, they are better equipped to succeed in their roles as they acquire new skills and knowledge to put to work in your nonprofit.

Risk Management Strategies

What can your nonprofit do to manage the training-related risks associated with staff turnover?

- **Identify key training needs for all positions** — One place to start is identifying the training needs of each position at the nonprofit. What training and orientation will a new Director of Finance require? What training will the new Receptionist require in order to greet visitors appropriately and route callers to the staff person who can help them?
- **Institutionalize training** — Many nonprofits offer training on an ad-hoc basis. When a new employee arrives, someone in the organization is asked to “train” the newcomer. Will the person who drew the short straw remember to communicate key policies? Will they remember to discuss the nonprofit’s Code of Conduct in addition to how to use the organization’s phone system? Too often, ad-hoc training falls short. The “fallout” is a new employee who feels that he or she hasn’t been equipped to succeed. Training should be standardized or institutionalized, especially when it is likely that more than one employee will require the training, *or* the information being communicated must be followed precisely and is of a technical nature (e.g. how to disarm the nuclear reactor, or how to transfer calls from the main switchboard!). Creating a training program that can be viewed by many personnel in the nonprofit saves time in the long run and ensures that all personnel who “need to know” actually receive the same information.
- **Conduct exit interviews for all departing staff** — Use the opportunity presented by the departure of an employee to gauge whether your training system is adequate. In addition to alerting the nonprofit to issues that may create legal exposure for the organization, exit interviews often yield valuable

information about the reasons staff are heading for the want ads. Include the following questions in your exit interviews:

- Do you feel you were given adequate training to do your job effectively?
- What additional training would be helpful to a person holding your position?
- **Tap modern technology for staff training** — With the availability of webinars, downloadable audio files, and other technology-inspired delivery mechanisms, there is no need to rely solely on person to person training programs or briefings in the nonprofit's conference room. Today's new recruits are more likely to be comfortable watching a PowerPoint presentation while seated at their desk or listening to an audio file downloaded to their laptop or MP3 player. In addition, web-based programs offer the added benefit of the ability to track compliance with your training requirements. A thoughtful online training system should enable you to track who attended the training, how they fared, and when they completed the classes to which they were assigned. With so many technology-based options available, and the relatively low cost of creating or obtaining training programs, it's sound management practice to consider a high tech delivery system when designing the training your nonprofit staff require.

As always, don't hesitate to contact us to discuss your risk management program, including the challenges you are facing in the area of staff turnover. We can be reached at 703.777.3504 or via [e-mail](#).