



Community Radio Show

"I'm Not a Training Expert"

Community Radio Show Text

Recorded: 23 April 2008

Host: Todd Wellman (Todd)

Guest: David Tisdale (David)

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TODD: Welcome to "I'm Not a Training Expert! *Train Your Interns to Meet Your Organization Goals without Being a Training Expert,*" brought to you by Public Allies Leadership Practice. My name is Todd Wellman and I am the Director of Training & Learning at the Public Allies National Office.

Our guest David Tisdale of Texas returns to us after presenting "Activating Community Members to Influence Institutions" in December. I'll be interviewing David for the first half today and then we'll open up the lines to questions.

David Tisdale works for the Texas Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters or HIPPY program in Dallas, Texas. As the Program Specialist, David develops and implements the training and personal/career development for the AmeriCorps Members as well as general program development/management and website design. With several years of experience in community programs, including those working with AmeriCorps, David is committed to the empowerment of communities through those who live in the community.

David, welcome to the show.

DAVID: Thanks for having me here.

TODD: I understand that your AmeriCorps program was having trouble acclimating your members to make the best use of their limited time with you. Would you say that's accurate?

DAVID: Yeah. The issue that we were having was the continuous bringing on of new members and that each member comes in at his or her own level with different skills sets. Having a structure of training and orientation in place that can bring everyone up to speed as far the basics of the program and then continue them with continued training, especially for those who are two year members.

TODD: So it's not just the orientation of your members, it's also the continuous development of them as related to what HIPPY is trying to accomplish. I imagine, too, that it's about the future careers of those members after their AmeriCorps experience.

DAVID: Definitely. At the core of our program and what we implement for our version of AmeriCorps is a parent-child relationship in which the parent garners the ability to help the child succeed in life that continues after their relationship with us. We felt we should be modeling this for everyone involved,



Community Radio Show

including our members. We want to promote the member development about our program and about their future career plans.

TODD: Now, from what I understand, you don't consider yourself someone with a lot of standardized education in how to implement member development programs.

DAVID: Right. I don't consider myself as a school intellect in the theories of training.

TODD: But, you do think of yourself as someone is capable of establishing a good training program.

DAVID: Yeah. Especially as it relates to AmeriCorps workers, I think that stepping back and looking at our service to the community and how the workers implement that, I could establish the measure of impact that we want to accomplish and what skills and empowerment it takes to accomplish those things.

I think it's also a strength of our program that we utilize the various Site Supervisors in the training process - both as a person receiving the training and delivering the training. As training recipients, we're facilitating trainings with them that will help them as leaders/mentors of the Members. As trainers, they have expertise in various areas and train other coordinators as well as Members. The key is that I don't have to be the expert on all topics. By listening to the feedback of all supervisors and Members, we can put together a solid training program that supports our objectives and the tasks related to them.

TODD: This sounds like it provides a base for the topics for fulfilling their duties at HIPPY. How do you make sure there are topics that are about their futures, regardless of HIPPY?

DAVID: There are plenty of exercises that allow us to frame discussions around interests, such as the "Life after AmeriCorps" exercises. This allows the sessions to be open enough for each person to identify individual future plans. The very nature of their position requires development of transferable skills, such as leadership, organization, computer skills, and so forth.

TODD: So, how did you divvy up, on a high level, what training programs you were going to offer your members?

DAVID: We decided that we would have three sections: orienting everyone, offering courses on topics that would help our members do their current jobs better, and then offering bonus attention for star performers on topics that aren't necessarily about our program but about their future careers.

TODD: Let's talk about orientation. How long is your orientation process?

DAVID: There's a two week orientation for members, including the State AmeriCorps orientation meeting.

TODD: How you decide what topics are in this orientation?

DAVID: Whatever the components of the program that they have to be hands-on with right away determines the orientation. For example, "What it means to be serving as a member," "How to accomplish the required paperwork," and "Safety in working during home visits."

Community Radio Show

In addition, we surveyed our Site Supervisors on the skills that new Members need to perform well and what areas most new comers struggle with. So in addition to HIPHY 101 topics, we start focusing in on those necessary sills to get them to feel solid in the "basics."

TODD: Do you do skills assessments of your members prior to orientation?

DAVID: No.

TODD: It sounds like you're building yourself an unforeseen challenge then of skill gaps that might arise, such as how to use a computer, much less how to use a specific program you require. Some groups train more specifically on broad skills that people can apply to a multitude of methods. It sounds like you focus much more on how to implement proprietary processes. Without skills assessment, how do you require the people you hire to be at a certain skill level, which would help to necessarily limit your intern applicant pool?

DAVID: While we don't have official assessments, what we do is ensure that our interview process includes scenarios that show if the potential AmeriCorps members have necessary skills. For example, it is important that our members know how to read to children well. We will have them practice a reading during the interview process. We don't want to limit who can be successful in our program, so we don't require an abundance of skills to present for someone to work with us. For example, if someone revealed during a computer program training that she has never touched a computer, we make sure we set up individualized workshops for that person, specifically with a peer if at possible. This is part of the risk we are taking that we approve of—that we want our workers to know they can come as they are and have the support to grow in ways that they may not be encouraged to otherwise.

TODD: So, you list all the things your members will be doing in the first couple of months and then you write trainings on these topics. How do you ensure that people are learning during these trainings?

DAVID: We design interactive trainings that appeal to multiple learning styles and we utilize various levels of evaluation. We ask people what they thought, yes, but we also look at the success of the tasks being carried out. For example, if someone was provided a training session on Safety and within two months we have interviewed everyone and found out that Safety is really high, then we can correlate that things are going well and the training worked.

TODD: Do you ever measure if someone has changed between the start and end of a training session?

DAVID: Yes. We'll have someone do a specific task, then I'll provide feedback, and then we'll have them do the task again. Change in the quality of the performance of the task allows us to know if someone is learning. No change indicates that someone needs further guidance.

TODD: How do you address those who go through the orientation but are not able to learn as much as expected?

DAVID: We utilize peer interaction. In this day and age we know that not everyone learns in the classroom—some people learn from coaching, some from reading, some from mentors, and so on. Connecting peers rewards those who have performed and provides support to those who require more.

Community Radio Show

TODD: After orientation then you have people attend a series of classes on how to do the current jobs better—and you continue the peer interactions.

DAVID: Yes. There's a continuous feedback provided by the peer interactions to see where people are at and we are able to offer new topics as the year progresses. We build the topics for the rest of the year in the same way as the orientation—we look at the processes that members need to know to do their jobs well. For example, when an AmeriCorps member's duty arises to encourage parents to be more involved in schools, we will provide a training session for the members on how to speak to school principals successfully and how to encourage parents to be involved.

In the development of the training, we outlined assignments that moved us in the direction of completing our performance measures. We then couple each assignment with training to support it. In other words, not all the training happens in the classroom. Some of it is individual homework.

TODD: Can you tell me about the bonus attention you provide to your star performers?

DAVID: The “Life After AmeriCorps” lesson plans are part of the exiting of our members and we'll spend more specific time in follow-up coaching about what was discovered from these plans with those we consider our star performers.

And those that have been serving in mentor roles will receive specific trainings to help their development as leaders. And we pay special attention to their ability to start maneuvering through the college systems since they'll have 1 or 2 education awards.

TODD: There is always more someone can do to make an advanced program, but for someone who doesn't have a training program at all—or one that is fledgling—what are the essential things to do?

DAVID: I think there are seven things to ensure:

1. Make your interview process interactive so that you know what your potentials are capable of; in this way you can build in scenarios that if everyone quote-unquote passes the interview, you can feel confident that everyone who ends up in your program is competent in a certain primary job skill
2. List the actions that your members have to do successfully in the first two months of the program and then build an orientation week or two based on the hard and soft skills members need to know to do these things well
3. Follow a tennis-match approach to training; by this I mean that in a tennis game, if one player always had the ball, the match would be boring. It's the same for training: if the speaker is always presenting or talking, the training is boring
4. Do pre-post tests for each training session that show change is or is not occurring
5. Connect star performers with those who are struggling; this provides extra support to laggards and highlights those doing well with leadership roles
6. List the actions that your members have to do successfully in the remainder of the program and then build the rest of your trainings based on the hard and soft skills members need to know to do these things well
7. Utilize the “Life After AmeriCorps” guides and set aside bonus time for star performers



Community Radio Show

TODD: Thank you, David. I can hear that these seven things will provide a great basic skeleton to be working with into the future and also building in important peer support the whole time. Now we're going to go to audience questions. Because we have limited time, please focus on asking David questions about today's topic rather than sharing best practice and stories. Remember, if you have a question for David state your name, organization, and location.

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This text serves as a summarized reference for the Community Radio Show.

It does not serve as an official transcript of the recording.