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California Community Colleges

Unit 8 - Quality Assurance

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- Knowing the important role of concurrent and post intervention assessments
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- Realizing the importance of knowing how to leave problems at the workplace

Quality Assurance

Mark Twain said, "Good judgment comes from experience. Experience comes from making bad judgements." He was right. If we learn from our mistakes, they can hardly be called failure.

Quality assurance simply means staying in touch with clients during and after the training to see how things went, from the client's perspective. It also means having a process for fixing problems and to integrate whatever was learned into the next job and the next.

Concurrent Assessment: Quality Assurance During the Training

Even when you've done a good job on constructing a training, things can go wrong during the implementation. One way to mitigate the effects of this are to do a quality assurance check *during* the training. In a one-day training, this can be a quick check at lunch. On a longer training, it can be early in the first day or two. This small investment of your time shows you care and can help you head off disasters that result in costly refunds or unhappy clients.

Even small details can derail a training. Here are some things to check for in the first pass quality check:

- Are we on target with the curriculum? Do we need to make any modifications on the fly?
- Do the class and the instructor seem to have a good rapport?
- Are there any facility issues? (Heat, catering, parking, etc.)

- Anything else you'd like me to know?

Post Intervention Assessment: Quality Assurance after the Training

Once the training is done, it's good to get back to the client soon in a face-to-face quality check. Quality assurance interviews have three functions:

1. The quality assurance interview, or audit, lets the client know that you are committed to their satisfaction, even though the job is done and payment has been sent.

2. The quality assurance interview can provide you with important information about how you can serve clients better. Information about what worked and what needs work will provide realistic, immediately relevant feedback to your staff members about what they can do better.

3. A quality assurance audit ensures that you can get back into the client's office easily at least one time after the training or service. While a quality assurance audit is the end of one sales cycle, it is often also the beginning of the next opportunity to sell.

Here we have a two-page form that can serve as an example of what a quality assurance interview might cover:

> **Questions for a Quality Assurance Survey**
>
> Client:
>
> Date:
>
> Interviewer:
>
> 1. How responsive was our salesperson to your needs?
>
> 2. Were you aware of any special requirements we placed on you?
>
> 3. Did anyone call on you after the training to follow up?
>
> 4. Did the instructor know the content?
>
> 5. Was the instructor prepped?
>
> 6. Was the course delivery satisfactory?
>
> 7. Did the instructor call you beforehand to discuss details or course content?

8. Did the instructor understand your business?

9. Do you have suggestions on how the instructor might improve his or her services?

10. Did other staff meet your needs?

11. Were the facilities & equipment satisfactory?

12. Was there anything that you needed that we were not able to fulfill?

13. Were our contracts and other communication easy to understand?

14. Can you suggest improvements for next time?

The quality assurance process looks like this
1. Decide how you will track information from you quality assurance interviews. We recommend the use of a form, to promote consistency in reporting and tracking.

2. Have a salesperson call the client not too many days after the conclusion of a training and ask for a very brief interview to assess the quality of service they got. Promise to be very brief and keep the promise. A quality assurance interview generally need not exceed 20 minutes.

A face-to-face interview is by far the best option, since you're more likely to hear honest feedback face-to-face. When you do hear criticism, you can ask questions to learn more and you can make it clear how much you appreciate this chance to learn about how you and your team can improve. Send a hand-written note expressing your thanks and letting the client know how much you appreciate the use of their time. Summarize the key points you covered and if you promised to take actions, mention it.

Here's an example of how that letter might look:

Dear Julie –
Thanks so much for taking the time to visit with me last week. Your satisfaction with our executive management programs is important to us. Because you suggested that our contracts might be a bit confusing at times, I have convened a quality process improvement team. We're going to address the readability of our contracts, as well as our other documents to ensure they are "reader friendly." Thanks again for your suggestion, it's so appreciated. Please call me at (801) 294-3935 if you have any immediate questions.
Regards –

3. When there is a problem, implement a solution. Integrate the learning from quality assurance audits into regular staff meetings. Share what went wrong and encourage the staff to actively participate in the solution- building. Assign a staff member to follow-up and be sure to close the loop with the client.

When staff hear about problems outside of the quality assurance interview, be sure they have a way to respond to the client and to get the feedback into the right hands internally. Train your staff people to tell a frustrated client, "I'll take care of that," not "Someone will take care of this."

Frustrated clients will feel best when they think the first person they talk to can be of help. Ho you then integrate other staff into fixing the problem is an internal issue and something that will be transparent to the client unless you decide to share it.

The Process of Enacting a Solution to a Quality Issue

Prepare for the meeting
Be sure you understand the problem as much as possible. Re-read notes from the client interviews. Since people are generally not accustomed to talking in public about their mistakes, give people a little advance notice of the first few meetings.

Describe the problem
Let staff know that the purpose of this meeting is to learn something that will help you understand the problem better and will keep you from repeating it. Tell the team as much as you know about what happened. Remember, you have only the client's perspective to go on, so present that as one-sided information – since that's what it is. Resist any urge to blame anyone.

Ask for staff input
Listen to what staff have to say. When you first do quality reviews with a team, they may be defensive, so acknowledge the discomfort and express your appreciation for their willingness to be candid.

Listen carefully to what staff say. Make notes. Ask questions to make certain you understand what is said. Even if you hear things with which you disagree, hold them for now.

Discuss together
Give your opinion. Talk together to incorporate everyone's thinking and feelings and opinions.

Create a plan
Decide how you will fix the current problem and what you'll do to prevent it from happening again. Fill out a CAR (*corrective action request*) to track progress in solving the problem. (See sample below.)

Thank staff
Thank staff for making it possible to learn how to do business better.

Implement the plan of action
Implement the agreed upon plan and follow up with the client to let them know what was done. Update staff on progress on this Corrective Action Report (CAR) at the next staff meeting. File the CAR for later reference.

Corrective Action Request Report
    Person handling this request:
    Date:
    Client:
    Nature of the problem:
    Proposed solution:
    Steps needed to follow up:
    Actions taken:
    Debrief with staff/staff input:
    Prevention measures:

    Communicated with client to close feedback loop
    Date:
    Who called/wrote/etc.:

Quality Assurance on Long Projects

Tracking quality assurance on long projects is a little more challenging. It's important to have an evaluation early and often so you can ward off problems and integrate learning as you progress.

One way to track quality assurance on long projects is through the use of *progress reports*. While the construction of a progress report does take some time, it reinforces that the programmer is meeting commitments, making progress and rendering quality service – all of which send valuable messages to the client. Interim reports are especially useful when you don't have frequent contact with a client during the course of a long project.

As the name implies, these reports chronicle progress in achievement of the goals agreed upon at the outset of a project. Other good uses of these reports include:

- Use the reports as a milestone or write them into the contract as payment points. Reminding the client that they're getting results is skillful at the time you request to be paid. This simple strategy helps tie together the expense and the benefit in the client's mind.
- Reports can be used to point out problematic issues to the client, and to make suggestions for adjustments in the timeline or scope of work.

Pledging progress reports to the client also helps you set a schedule to help you feel motivated to do your own progress assessment and adjustments along the way. They help you avoid the all-too-easy trap of getting behind and out of sync with your negotiated timelines and scope of work.

What to include in a progress report
Reports can be short, long or in-between, depending on their frequency and the complexity of the project. Usually they are submitted at the completion of a given phase of a project, or at regularly scheduled intervals (quarterly or monthly, for example).

A report should generally contain:

- The work completed to date.
- The benefits to the client derived from the completed work.
- How what has occurred sets the framework for the next project phases.
- Any problems that have occurred and what was done or needs to be done about them.
- Any recommendations to be made or decisions that need to be made to enhance the overall success of the project.

Reports should also document any decisions made to date that shape or alter the next phases of the project. And they should document any substantial deviations from the original scope of the work, including the rationale for the departures.

Progress reports have benefits to both you and your clients. Benefits to the client include:

- Appreciation for being kept informed, particularly in long projects or when there is limited face-to-face contact with project stakeholders. Reports can give the client a sense of control over the project. These documents and the project can be shared with others, include supervisors, and so provide valuable reporting information.

- Regular communication with clients tends to increase their investment in the project, acceptance of the service providers and appreciation of the work being performed. In the event of a dispute, progress reports provide a record of what was said and what was done.

Benefits to you include:

- Reports support you to discipline yourself during the course of a project.
- Reports require you to stop at predetermined junctures, assess progress and adjust if necessary.
- Reports provide the same proof for you as they do for a client in the event of a dispute.
- Reports provide justifiable billing points along the course of a project.

For both you and your clients, progress reports are a support for consistent quality. Well-done reports will help you scope and price future similar contracts, as well.

15 Steps for taking Responsibility When Dealing with Customer Complaints

#1. Tell them you understand how they feel.
#2. Empathize.
#3. Listen. Make sure you got it all. Question your assumptions.
#4. Agree with what can be agreed with.
#5. Take notes.
#6. Be an ambassador. Tell them you will personally handle it.
#7. Don't blame others. Accept responsibility.
#8. Don't pass the buck.
#9. Respond immediately.
#10. Find common ground on some other issue.
#11. Use humor if appropriate.
#12. Agree upon a solution. DO it.
#13. Make a follow-up call.
#14. Ask yourself and your team what you learned.
#15. Do you need to make changes? DO so.

Return on Investment (ROI)

There is a great debate in the HR community about whether or not ROI on training can be calculated, and, if so, whether it can be calculated with any convincing degree of accuracy.

Many factors play into the difficulty in pinning down ROI, which relies heavily on showing a cause-and-effect relationship between the training and any change in bottom-line related performance.

According to Kirkpatrick and Phillips, there are five levels to evaluation:

Level		Description
I	Reaction and Planned Action	Measures participants' reactions to the training and tells specific plans for implementation
II	Learning	Measures changes in skills, knowledge and attitude
III	Job Applications	Measures specific applications of the material to the job and changes in job-related performance
IV	Business Results	Measures the business impact of the change in performance
V	Return on Investment	Compares the costs of the training with the dollar values of the results of the training

Jack J. Phillips, Return on Investment in Training and Performance Improvement Programs, Butterworth Heinemann: 1997, page 9.

The basic ROI formulas are:

First, the Benefit/Cost Ratio

BCR = Net Training Benefits/Training Costs

The second formula is the ROI formula (expressed as a percentage)

ROI% = Net Training Benefits/Training Costs X 100

The BCR formula divides the total dollar value of the change in performance attributable to the training by the total cost of running the training.

For example, a training in clerical skills cost $40,0000 and created $120,000 in annualized benefits for ABC Company. Therefore, the benefit to cost ratio is:

BCR = $80,000 ($120,000-$40,000)/$40,000 = 2:1

So, the Return on Investment expressed as a percentage is:

$$ROI\% = \$80,000 \ (\$120,000\text{-}\$40,000)/\$40,000 \ X \ 100 = 200\%$$

Barriers to ROI implementation
There are several common barriers to the implementation of ROI: The most common include:

- Cost of collecting data
- Time to collect and analyze data
- A lack of skills to manage ROI project
- Poor needs assessment or none at all
- Fear of a low ROI
- Lack of good planning
- Idea that managers do not want to need to hold client accountable for the results of the training

The benefits of performing an ROI analysis
Though there are many barriers to successfully completing an ROI analysis, there are also many benefits. These benefits include:

- Helping the client in its efforts to focus on results;

- Helping the client set priorities;

- Help the client measure the contribution that a training makes to the bottom line; and

- The gradual building of a case to management that training is useful and adds value.

Learning to Love the Problems at Work

Client problems are a source of such riches! But you have to do some work with staff to help them see how learning from problems is worth the time and the sense of risk that is initially there when addressing problems.

Schedule a monthly or quarterly session with your staff and share what you learned from the problems that were reported.

Brainstorm on how you can prevent these problems in the future. Reward participation and model disclosing mistakes and how to learn from them.

One way to think of problems is to decide if a problem is:

- An *event*. Events happen once and will not likely happen again. Events are a one-time collision of circumstances and, though they must be fixed, they do not necessarily indicate a need to change processes. Still, the learning should be captured.
- A *pattern*. Patterns happen over and over and it can be beneficial to learn as much as you can about when, how, why and under what circumstances they are likely to arise. Looking at patterns can help you prevent them. Since they happen often, there is usually enough information about them to learn quickly and there is motivation to fix them.
- A *structural problem*. A structural problem is something that happens because of the way we think – the paradigms we hold. For example, if we think needs assessments are a waste of time, we will do business without them and will reap the rewards and costs of that. If problems arise because of that way of thinking, we will not really solve them until we solve the underlying thinking that is the root cause.

Classifying a problem like this can help you and the client decide how to respond.

Summary

A quality assurance process helps you prevent quality issues and protect a hard-earned client relationship. They also are a form of a sales call—use them, respecting the client's time—to introduce the next way you think you can best serve the client. It's one more way you can prove to the client that you care about their success and mean to support it in every possible way.