



2024 BJA TRAINING ACADEMY SPOTLIGHT



Superintendent of Training, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction: Mark Hooks

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's (ODRC) Reginald A. Wilkinson Corrections Training Academy (CTA) believes that a quality curriculum is the foundation of a solid training program. To support this, the CTA has a unit dedicated to curriculum development. Every unit member brings a unique combination of education and professional experience, which contributes to diverse perspectives being represented within the group. The unit's primary responsibility is to ensure our agency's training is current, accurate, and relevant. Further, the Curriculum Development Unit annually reviews, revises, and approves the curriculum for every in-service class. The primary responsibility of the unit is to ensure our agency's training is current, accurate, and relevant. In furtherance of this, the Curriculum Development Unit annually reviews, revises, and approves the curriculum for every in-service class.

ODRC found the most significant challenge to having a unit dedicated to curriculum development is identifying how to best utilize the team during lulls in the review cycle. To solve this, each curriculum staff is assigned at least one program to manage. Common program duties they undertake include scheduling classes, record keeping, updating content, serving as an instructor, creating instructors, and serving as an expert on the program. It is recognized that, without quality curricula, an agency can have the best instructors in the world and still fail its staff. This is why ODRCR recommends every training academy implement a unit dedicated to curriculum development.

Quality curriculum must be paired with quality instructors to successfully transfer learning to staff. ODRC believes this so much that they have put standards for training personnel and instructors into policy. Ohio self-certifies most of its instructors, so they have also created Instructor Trainers (ITs) for many courses. These instructor-level classes are designed to encourage critical thinking and prepare new instructors in the topic area.

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The feedback from those who go through these classes is largely positive. The effectiveness of the ODRC instructor development process is best evidenced by the agency's historical success with rolling out new or significantly revised procedures. The best advice Ohio can give to an agency looking to upgrade its instructor framework is two-pronged: formalize it in policy and require ongoing professional development.

ODRC has a vision to cultivate a workforce that embraces connection, empathy, and courage. In a bid to work toward this goal, the agency implemented a trauma-informed employee service team. The Employee Services Team (EST), a division of Human Resources established in November 2019, is dedicated to fostering a culture of belonging and connection among all ODRC staff, guided by our departmental values. The EST is valued for its unwavering support and engagement with employees. Ohio takes great pride in its department's commitment to the well-being of all employees, ensuring access to resources that promote resiliency. They recommend that all correctional agencies establish a dedicated team or unit that prioritizes the health and wellness of employees.

Corrections can be a difficult work environment. Due to this reality, retention is always an area in which Ohio is working to improve. To this end, ODRC piloted an extended on-site orientation at two of its facilities. The premise of this idea is that orientation is often the first real-world experience new staff have with corrections. This job shadowing pilot was designed to make sure that those joining ODRC are sufficiently exposed to the unique work environment they are entering before a significant investment is made by them and the agency.

The structure of the pilot program revises the initial time an employee spends at their assigned worksite from one week to three weeks. During these additional two weeks on site, employees shadow experienced staff members and mentors conducting their duties. The immersive experience exposes new employees to not only the work culture but also the expectations and challenges of the job.

The biggest challenge this pilot program faced was the apprehension of putting untrained employees in harm's way. To address those concerns, new employees in the shadowing process are never to be left alone and must always be with an experienced employee; within the institutions, they are not to respond to alarms. The effectiveness of this job shadowing pilot program is evident by looking at retention and vacancy benchmarks. The best advice for those wanting to implement this program is to involve your senior staff from the outset and start at a high-security facility. Your senior staff will help carry the message and get buy-in from the masses.

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