

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Does Training and Coaching Matter? An 18-month Evaluation of a Community Supervision Model

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Key Words: Community supervision, offenders, probation, coaching, training

Summary/Conclusions

This study sought to determine the role that training and coaching plays in core correctional skill use over an 18-month period following training. Researchers assigned 43 probation and parole officers to either a control or experimental condition. The experimental group of officers received training and coaching, while the control group was untrained and received no coaching for 18-months. From coded audiotapes researchers discovered that officers in the experimental group scored significantly higher in six Core Correctional Practices. Additionally the officers in the trained and coached group showed greater improvement over time.

Limitations of Information

The study did not differentiate between the training and coaching, so the impact from just training or just coaching cannot be determined. The outcome measure in the study utilized metrics covered in the training. Thus, trained officers likely scored higher than untrained officers. It is unclear if officers in the study participated in any additional practice outside of the coaching sessions they received.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Using coaching for skill building over time

As organizations are becoming increasingly interested in achieving improved outcomes, training and coaching are receiving more interest from researchers. The current study examines the impact of training and coaching on core correctional practices. Researchers randomly assigned 43 probation and parole officers to an experimental (28) or control group (15). In the experimental group, officers attended a 3-day supervision program training, submitted follow-up audiotapes, and were coached for 18-months following training. Officers in the control condition did not receive training or coaching but also submitted audiotapes for 18-months.

Trained researchers reviewed submitted audiotapes to determine officer skill use. The researchers were specifically listening for Core Correctional Practices. Core Correctional Practices are anticriminal modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, problem solving, structured learning, effective use of authority, cognitive restructuring, and relationship skills. Each skill was rated 0 if no skill was used, 0.5 if the skill was used but there were major steps missing, and 1 if an officer used a skill.

The trained and coached group submitted more tapes and rated significantly higher adherence to the 6 of the 8 Core Correctional Practices. Effective disapproval, anticriminal modeling, and problem solving were the lowest scored skills for both groups. The trained group

gained 12 points on their total skill use 12 months after training. Both effective reinforcement and effective use of authority did not change for either group during the 18-month follow up.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Ask a supervisor or colleague for coaching when trying out a new skill following training.
- ✓ Utilize the Assessment and Case Plan Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement tools to check your own work, coach staff, or coach peers.
- ✓ Attend Super Series training courses on Elicit - Provide - Elicit (EPE) Coaching and Assessment and Case Plan QA/CQI, as both may help with coaching.
- ✓ Schedule coaching after attending training. Officers in the study continued to improve 12-months following training.
- ✓ When coaching, look for officers challenging criminal thinking, demonstrating effective disapproval, and helping probationers develop problem solving skills.
- ✓ Use strength-based coaching to not only provide areas of improvement but to also affirm the good work officers are already doing.
- ✓ Attend trainings like Brain Train, LSIP overview and IBA, and Intervention and Recovery Strategies to develop Core Correctional Practice skills.