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# THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A DISABILITY COORDINATOR

SUPERVISION IN THE REAL WORLD



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# SOME COOL RESEARCH

- “College Students with Disabilities: What factors influence Successful Degree Completion? A Case Study” 2012 Disability and Work by Paula Barber:

*Overall, the students with disabilities completers reported mainly using services on campus and overwhelmingly attributed their successful completion to a **significant relationship** with either a professional staff member at the Office of Disability/Special Services or a faculty member.*

## SOME TESTIMONIALS

Two young men who participated in this study had traumatic brain injury resulting from car accidents while enrolled at college. Both attributed a “go-to guy” at the Office of Disability Services as a key factor in their ability to complete their education.

## SOME TESTIMONIALS (CONT'D)

One study participant attributed his ability to persevere, despite tremendous personal and learning obstacles, to his relationship with his mentor at the Office of Special Services. He said, “The positive social environment at the Office of Special Services made me feel comfortable.”

## SOME TESTIMONIALS (CONT'D)

A woman who returned to school as an adult possessed outstanding social skills. She reported that although she was easily distracted, had much anxiety, and feared failure, she persisted and successfully completed community college. She attributed her success to the genuinely supportive staff at the Office of Special Services...

# WHAT COORDINATORS DO IS IMPORTANT:

- What is our title?
- What do we do? According to AHEAD, we do ALL of this!!
  - Consultation/Collaboration
  - Information dissemination
  - Faculty/Staff awareness
  - Academic adjustments
  - Counseling/Self-Determination
  - Policies and procedures
  - Program administration and evaluation
  - Training and professional development



# WHAT ARE THE BACKGROUNDS OF THE DISABILITY SPECIALISTS?

- Social work
- Rehabilitation counseling
- Special education K-12
- Psychology majors
- Education specialists



# WHAT LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE DO YOUR COORDINATORS HAVE?

Are they:

1. Brand new to the field, perhaps recent graduates
2. Experienced within the disability field but not within higher education
3. Experienced in higher education but not within the disability field
4. Experienced coordinators from other institutions
5. Staff who have been promoted from other roles in your office

# TRAINING A STAFF MEMBER NEW TO DISABILITY SERVICES

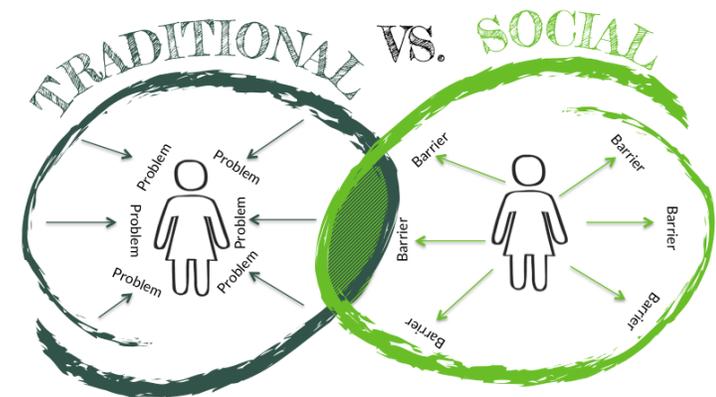
Acknowledge the daunting nature of the job description: determining what is a “reasonable” accommodation can be a frightening proposal, especially when the stakes are high. It is not enough to model behavior or to clarify process/procedure. Development of a strong, independent disability coordinator requires time, discussion and, yes, mistakes.

For staff members who have previous experience in higher education disability services, they may have expectations that your office will be run in the same way.

# TRAINING THE NUANCES OF THE ROLE

How do you teach the culture of your institution?

How do you teach the culture of disability and a social justice approach?

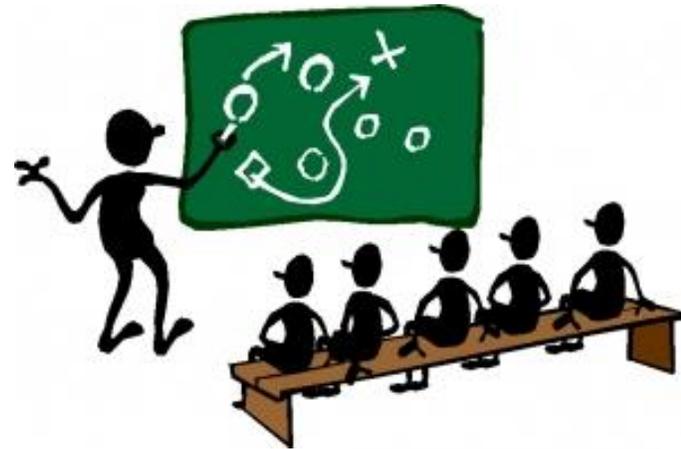


# AND WHAT SUPERVISORS DO IS IMPORTANT...

- Train and support staff
- Provide continuity in service to students and university community
- Ensure our offices continue to change to meet new challenges
- Work to provide consistent access for students

# SUPERVISING CAN TAKE ON SO MANY DIFFERENT FORMATS

- Coaching
- Advising
- Guiding
- Stimulating
- Challenging





# IS THIS COUNSELING?

What kind of a relationship are you building with your students?

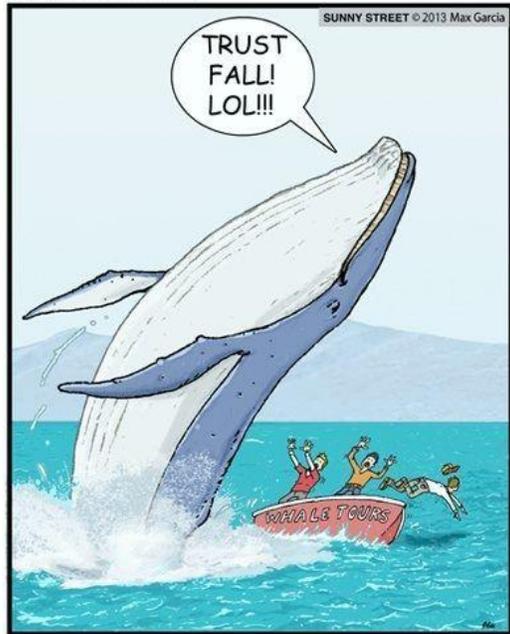
What are the boundaries?

What are the expectations in terms of time? Turn around? Are you a disability concierge?

**The supervisor needs to know the answers to these questions.**

# BUILDING A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP

SUNNY STREET



*Core of Everything!!!*

Not easy to do

Must listen, be fair, be consistent

Give honest, direct feedback

No gossiping, be civil

# HOW DO WE KEEP OUR FOLKS COMING BACK FOR MORE?

- Promote wellness
- Create an efficient, positive, and engaging office culture
- Support the professional development of each member of the staff

# PROMOTE WELLNESS

- Encourage time off time to be time off time (no texting or checking emails after work hours)
- Encourage use of vacation
- Create programs to support healthy choices
- Ex: Minutes for movement program to encourage staff to move at least 30 min each day
- Incorporate walking as part of the daily schedule
- Tap into campus resources the promote wellness (mindfulness groups, exercise classes, pool hours)

# CREATE AN EFFICIENT, POSITIVE AND ENGAGING OFFICE CULTURE

- **LISTEN:** to those who are on the ground—if there are processes that are cumbersome, see how to reduce the barriers to be more efficient
- **BE CONSISTENT:** and reinforce your message in multiple ways
- **USE HUMOR:** come on, some of the stuff we deal with is just outright hilarious. See it for what it is and allow an avenue to express that
- **RESPECT:** Know and understand your staff's strengths and weaknesses
  - Don't penalize the experienced ones by micro managing all

# SUPPORT THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EACH MEMBER OF THE STAFF

- Encourage, model and support connecting to the richness of the community that we sit in—encourage participation in academic classes, attending lectures, recreation and social events
- Encourage and support participation in community events in the community that surrounds your college
- Provide opportunities for half day and full day retreats, out of the office space to do strategic planning and team bonding
- Encourage participation in professional conferences and leadership opportunities: as a participant as well as a presenter

# UPENN POSITIVITY SLIDE

Negative meet negative--clouds problem solving to find a way to move forward

Analogous between supervision and meeting student with positive intent

Self-awareness - need to know triggers/patterns -

# USE OF SMART GOALS TO STRUCTURE SUPERVISION

Goal setting allows for a voice in making change.

Avenue to support staff in expanding their role to include their own passions, interests and experiences

Allowing structured opportunities for mutual collaboration and movement forward

# SMART GOALS

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-Based



# SMART GOAL FORMULA

Do \_\_\_\_\_ (specific)

in order to \_\_\_\_\_ (measurable, relevant)

by \_\_\_\_\_ (time based)

Achievable?

Worth-doing?

# HOW ARE GOALS COMMUNICATED?

Annual performance review only?

Does the staff member have the ability to track progress and comment?

Are completed goals acknowledged (and celebrated)?



# SUPERVISION CASE STUDY - KLM



# SUPERVISION CASE STUDY - MLM

# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

How do you handle difficult a difficult conversation with a disability service coordinator?

Think back and identify a few situations when you've had to address a problem with a staff member. Did you avoid the conversation? Did you confront the staff member angrily? Did you listen to their "side of the story"?

Take a moment to think about your last "difficult" conversation, then turn to someone next to you and explain what you did, and what you might do differently next time.

# COACHING VERSUS “SUPERVISING”

How can I best position myself to actually assist a staff member in developing the skills needed to excel at this job?

Set up a “two-way” street - what kind of “supervision” are you comfortable with? What style works best for you? What ways don’t work so well? Why?

# 360 DEGREE EVALUATION

Give coordinators regular opportunities to evaluate you. Encourage them to give you honest feedback, and set goals for yourself that they can track.



# TAKING CARE OF THE YOURSELF

Case load - how big is too big?

Do you take on tasks which make supervision difficult, i.e., work that could/should be delegated?

Do you make time to supervise?



# DON'T WAIT FOR THE PROBLEM

Hey, not fair!

# QUESTIONS FOR FILMING

- What have been positive experiences you have had from supervisors in the past?
- What are some negative experiences you have had from supervisors in the past?
- How would you like to see your supervisor communicate with you?
- What do you like about your job?
- What do you “not-like” about your job?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known (or been told) when you started this job?
- This is a presentation for supervisors of disability services coordinators. What advice do you have for them?



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