



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR MANAGING CLUB STAFF

A bulletin series designed for Club managers to help improve the Club Experience.

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SUPERVISION, COACHING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The importance of effectively managing front-line Club staff, whose primary job function is to positively develop and impact young people, cannot be overstated. The intentional practices directors use regarding supervision, coaching and professional development can greatly affect both the quality and overall success of any Boys & Girls Club. Interviews with Club directors whose members indicated they routinely have a high-quality Club Experience informed the practices in this bulletin, which have been selected to help you improve as a Club manager.

Supervision, at its most basic, provides oversight and guidance for employees. Excellent Club managers, however, go beyond just directing employees. They use informal observation to identify employee strengths and areas of improvement. They promote staff creativity to enrich Club programs. And they embrace coaching to build skills. This issue considers how to use supervision to create a positive Club environment.

Excellent Club managers also value and promote a variety of learning opportunities to professionally develop staff. This bulletin examines how maximizing one-on-one meeting time, offering a mixture of learning opportunities, and providing coaching can develop staff and ultimately increase the quality of Club experiences offered to youth. ❖



PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SUPERVISION AND COACHING

Quality supervision involves thoughtful, consistent and focused attention on the long-term success of every employee. At Clubs, staff supervision influences program quality, so the effectiveness of managers directly relates to the Club's ultimate impact. Excellent Club directors use routine staff observations to assess not only staff effectiveness with youth and programming, but also to improve individual staff skills. Managers promote creativity to improve program delivery and increase staff retention. Skills coaching for employees helps build necessary skills and supports professional growth. These supervision tools – observation, creativity, and coaching for skill building – enable successful managers to lead staff teams that routinely achieve member reports of high-quality Club Experiences.

LEVERAGING OBSERVATIONS TO BUILD SKILLS

Observing staff interactions with youth and providing feedback based on the observation supports growth of employees by facilitating change in a way that shares control, focuses on strengths and creates opportunities for problem solving.¹

A majority of excellent managers cited use of informal observation to ensure effective staff-youth interactions and quality program implementation. During observations, directors watch nonverbal cues and assess time management and program fidelity. Observations may focus on a particular skill such as the inclusion of fun, the ability to resolve youth conflict, or an ability to adapt (a program ends early, weather changes plans, etc.). To address staff anxiety regarding these observations, be sure to discuss the practice and its process with new hires. To shape your informal observations, see **Considerations for Effective Staff Observations** in the Tools You Can Use section.

**“IF YOU’RE DOING WHAT YOU LOVE,
YOU’RE NEVER WORKING A DAY IN YOUR LIFE.”**

**- JAMES ARREDONDO,
BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF MCALLEN, TEXAS**

In Banning, California, Club Director Susan Grisham uses periodic staff observations to guide her supervision of the elementary-school based Central Club site of Boys & Girls Clubs of the San Geronio Pass. Her observations build on performance criteria from staff evaluations, such as knowing members' names and initiating conversations with parents. Observation notes and reflections fuel Grisham's one-on-one professional development discussions with staff members to enable constructive learning from the process.

ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY

Research shows that youth-serving organizations that develop the autonomy and authority of their youth workers benefit from more numerous and creative ideas and ultimately see better results for youth.² Excellent Club managers embrace this concept, encouraging their staff to be creative and pursue their passions, all while maintaining fidelity to program. In recognition that many staff – especially part-time employees – lack time needed to create full lesson plans on their own, many directors provide activity binders, lesson plans and/or program schedules from which staff can build and innovate. At the South Unit of the Boys & Girls Club of McAllen, Texas, staff receive access to www.BGCA.net, a flash drive preloaded with program materials, a start-up set of lesson plans, and expectations to be creative and collaborate on the best possible program ideas. A binder of high-yield activities and games supports creative implementation and fun. Director James Arredondo explains, “If you're doing what you love, you're never working a day in your life.”

Directors invite staff to bring new ideas, make age-based adaptations and creatively implement program to ensure it feels fresh and fun. In Denver, at the Cole Boys & Girls Club, Director Steven Roland Jr. provides staff with opportunities to do activities that match their passions, as long as they contain an educational component and are fun and engaging. Recent activities generated from staff interest included a Making Slime class and a program that engaged staff and youth in neighborhood walking tours to learn about the area's history. The combination of such staff-driven programs, along with interest-based selections of youth, keep the overall program relevant and exciting, and support high levels of staff job satisfaction.

COACHING FOR SKILL-BUILDING

Coaching often focuses on developing and reinforcing new skills to enhance staff performance. Many managers, therefore, use coaching as a supervision practice to build staff skills.

Effective coaches adopt a continuous improvement cycle that involves setting a vision, establishing goals, creating an action plan, training, coaching, reflecting, evaluating and adapting practice.³

During this coaching process, directors guide staff to relevant hands-on opportunities, online courses and external development opportunities (e.g., through school partners) to target desired skills. Director Susan Louis of the Belaire Teen Center of Boys & Girls Clubs of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, created a coaching session called “What Makes This Work” to strengthen her staff’s collective ability to serve teens and provide a high-quality program. As a coach, rather than providing answers, she encourages staff to seek their own possible solutions and study the relevant findings. By offering strategies rather than answers, Louis’ coaching style teaches new skills, including self-reliance, while fostering a culture of learning.

At the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Alabama’s John A. Williamson Club, Director Lindsey Tillman uses a vision board to help staff build and hone core youth development practices. On this board, the vision takes the shape of a wheel, with a shared Club vision as the hub and individual staff goals depicted as spokes. Tillman coaches staff members to set their goals toward fulfillment of the Club vision of a positive Club climate. Her coaching also includes empowering staff to own changes they identify. ❖

¹ Akiva, T. (2007). *Quality Coaching* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation). The David P. Weikart Center offers quality coaching training and materials, such as this publication, for managers of youth programs as part of its Youth Program Quality Intervention model. For more information, visit http://www.cypq.org/products_and_services/training/QC.

² Kirk, Ryan (2014). “Youth Worker Voice Matters: A Case for Developing Autonomous Youth Workers,” *Practice Forward: Reflections on Autonomy and Authority*, NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship Working Papers, 2013-14, Augsburg College, <http://web.augsburg.edu/sabo/YouthWorkerVoiceMattersKirk.pdf>.

³ Gredler, M.; Gannett, E. and Gallagher, J. (2012). *Strong Directors, Skilled Staff: Guide to Using the Core Competencies for Youth Work Professionals and Supervisors* (Boston, Mass.: National Institute on Out-of-School Time for New York City Department of Youth & Community Development), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Strong_Directors_Skilled_Staff-Guide_to_Using_the_Core_Competencies.pdf.

Club Spotlight

MEADOWDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL UNIT



In Carpentersville, Illinois, the Meadowdale Elementary School site of Boys & Girls Clubs of the Dundee Township serves about half of the school’s population. Club

Director Isaiah De La Cruz **sets expectations and models the values** of collaboration, planning, new ideas and communication with staff. De La Cruz learned yelling was not an effective management technique as a leader of soldiers in Afghanistan, so upon joining the Club, he instituted a no-yelling policy. To model collaboration, he **co-plans programs and activities with staff** and then works with them to select the best version. **He welcomes new ideas**, and appreciates staff for their hard work. To ensure the best fit and secure staff buy-in regarding program implementation, De La Cruz confirms staff willingness to run certain programs before making assignments.

De La Cruz manages program implementation in several ways. First, he **meets one on one with staff weekly**. A formal observation occurs every two months. The organization’s observation tool uses a scale of 1 to 5 to assess areas such as organization, knowledge of topic, readiness and staff interaction. Before the observations happen, De La Cruz meets with staff to explain the process, the expectations and the ratings scale. After the observation, he meets with individual staff members to explain lower score ratings and **discuss areas for improvement**. In addition to these observations, **formal training** – including learning opportunities tailored to program areas and in-service training opportunities offered by the local school district – support the professional development of all of the Club staff members.



PLANNING FOR POWERFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development – the process of improving and increasing capabilities of staff through access to education and training opportunities from external organizations and by watching others perform on the job – proves a critical task for every Club manager. Excellent supervisors work with their direct reports to identify goals and growth opportunities to support their professional advancement.

The free foundation-level distance learning courses available through Spillett Leadership University's School of Management provide ideal opportunities to hone performance management skills and knowledge. From BGCA.net's [Training page](#), select the "Register for Training" icon at the top right. Two courses in particular align to this bulletin's content:

- **Human Resource Management: Performance Management** – Learn how to apply concepts related to planning for, monitoring and appraising employee performance.
- **Human Resource Management: Providing Feedback, Coaching and Counseling** – Provides a set of important skills to help manage employees more effectively.

MAXIMIZING ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

Professional development often occurs during one-on-one meetings with staff. Director Raquel Archer at the Morningside Middle School Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth, in Texas, uses these individual meetings with staff to ask questions, give feedback and determine needed resources. After asking staff members about their hobbies, passions and professional goals, she works with them to set their professional development plans.

Archer also uses meeting time to cast a vision for the Club and increase employee engagement. She explains, "It's hard to get someone excited about something they don't have a vision for, even if they have a passion for the job. I want them feeling empowered to do their job and have what they need."

Effective one-on-one meetings include time for professional development conversation, opportunities for both staff and supervisor to share, and a discussion of upcoming work. Of note, millennials – many of whom work at Clubs – who meet with their managers on a regular basis are more than twice as likely as their generational peers to be engaged at work, with engagement highest among those who meet with their managers at least once per week.⁴

"IT'S HARD TO GET SOMEONE EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING THEY DON'T HAVE A VISION FOR, EVEN IF THEY HAVE A PASSION FOR THE JOB. I WANT THEM FEELING EMPOWERED TO DO THEIR JOB AND HAVE WHAT THEY NEED."

- RAQUEL ARCHER, BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER FORTH WORTH, TEXAS

The One-on-One Meeting Tips and Conversation Prompts found in the Tools You Can Use offers tips to make your one-on-one meetings with employees more focused and productive.

DIVERSITY IN LEARNING IS KEY

Club directors value a mixture of professional development experiences offered throughout the year. This blend of learning opportunities should take pre-existing levels of knowledge and experience into account to provide engaging options for all employees. Research supports this value on training, reporting out-of-school time programs that provide more training have higher staff engagement scores.⁵ BGCA's own data supports this finding, with National Youth Outcomes Initiative survey results indicating that when staff report receiving beneficial training, their Clubs have more youth who report an optimal Club Experience.⁶

Club managers indicated their staff benefit from training delivered by different sources, in diverse formats and on varying topics. For instance, several managers cited the value of **Spillett Leadership University online courses**, especially for new staff members. Local organization classroom trainings, on topics ranging from membership systems to data collection and program implementation, help front-line staff hone their work as youth development professionals. Other directors cited workshop topics such as social-emotional learning, behavioral challenges and learning styles offered through community partners like mental health centers and area schools.

Recent training at the San Marcos Elementary School site of Boys & Girls Clubs of San Marcos in California featured an orientation to the Club's data from the National Youth Outcomes Initiative and how to identify areas for improvement based on the data. In addition, San Marcos employees attended training on supportive relationships, in recognition that if youth have fun and enjoy a positive relationship at the Club, they will keep returning.

COACHING FOR CAREER GROWTH AND ADVANCEMENT

In addition to coaching for skill building, coaching can also support longer-term professional development. Coaching focused on career growth and advancement uses open-ended inquiry to gain staff input, supports collaborative problem solving and requires supervisors to provide actionable feedback.

To effectively coach, managers must learn and embrace reflective listening – the communication technique of listening carefully to a speaker's idea and then offering the idea back to confirm understanding. Working together to set a goal or vision of development is a critical first step in any coaching relationship. Managers should ensure goals support incremental growth to avoid staff feeling overwhelmed.

For many youth development professionals, their position at a Club is their first job. Managers can play a key role in helping these staff begin a lifetime of professional growth and advancement.

“IT'S OK TO HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS. AS LONG AS YOU COACH, COMMUNICATE AND PROVIDE SUPPORT, THEN PEOPLE WILL DO GREAT THINGS.”

- PRESLEY AUSTIN, BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER SALT LAKE, UTAH

At the Lewis Abraham Lacochee Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay, in Florida, Director Cassie Coleman recognizes this unique opportunity. She believes Boys & Girls Clubs serve as a stepping stone, and helps her part-time staff members pursue their career goals, from becoming a full-time staff member to obtaining a college degree. Coleman routinely discusses progress toward goals with staff and identifies scholarships, trainings or other resources to aid goal achievement. Recently, Coleman allowed a staff member pursuing a degree to come in early to use the computers for her online classes. Coleman also offers to mentor staff, introducing her mentees to key people in the organization or community who can guide them in achieving their goals.

In Kearns, Utah, coaching for staff of the Oquirrh Hills Elementary School Club of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Salt Lake begins with setting professional development goals. As a coach, Director Presley Austin lets staff do most of the talking and determine the level of support they need or want. She balances staff members' individual goals with an ultimate goal: training staff to take over her job. The feedback loop Austin employs involves:

- Focusing on the positive.
- Providing suggestions and tips.
- Offering help.
- Modeling the behavior and attitude that are desired.

“It's OK to have high expectations. As long as you coach, communicate and provide support, then people will do great things.”

In addition to receiving coaching, employees can grow professionally by coaching others. For example, the **Spillett Leadership University Learning Coaches Initiative** – which engages Club staff as facilitators of in-service training for front-line staff and volunteers – provides a meaningful opportunity for Club staff to demonstrate and practice leadership skills by teaching and coaching their peers. The Learning Coaches Orientation can be accessed via the [Training page](#) on BGCA.net. ❖

⁴ Adkins, A. and Rigoni, B. (2016). “Managers: Millennials Want Feedback, but Won't Ask for It,” *Gallup Business Journal*, <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/192038/managers-millennials-feedback-won-ask.aspx>.

⁵ Miller, B. (2005). *Pathways to Success for Youth: What Counts in After-School*, Massachusetts After-School Research Study Executive Summary (Intercultural Center for Research in Education and National Institute on Out-of-School Time), <https://www.wcwonline.org/proj/mars/MARSfinalexec.pdf>.

⁶ Boys & Girls Clubs of America (2018). *The Impact of the Club Experience: Insights for Improving Program Quality*, www.BGCA.net/ProgramQuality.



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The following insights were culled from a 2017 professional literature review focused on the management practices found in high-quality out-of-school time programs.

Coaching Yields Higher Program Quality

A practical how-to manual on coaching published by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality recommends a method based on reflection.⁷ For supervisors, the guide explains, coaching helps staff improve, which in turn, yields a better program experience for youth.

The method builds on a mirror metaphor and the concepts of respect, observe and support. To establish a relationship based on respect, a coach celebrates a staff member's strengths, connects with him or her personally, and builds trust with him or her. After carefully observing the staff member facilitating a program session with youth, the coach supports the staff member in making improvements by listening actively, asking questions, guiding self-reflection, helping to make action plans to address issues, and modeling good practices. In short, the coach acts as a mirror, reflecting information back to staff to help them improve.

Intentional Development of Staff Creates Great Youth Workers

Great Club leaders create great workplaces, and these in turn, help create high-quality Club Experiences for youth and teens. Research on supervision of youth workers has found that much of what is known about high-quality youth work overlaps with the concepts of adult learning. Best practices for nurturing healthy, capable youth can also aid in development of capable adult youth workers.

One such practice views development as never-ending and in need of continuous support. The research assigns to supervisors the responsibility for creating a culture for staff to reach self-actualization, supported by work conditions in which they can learn, grow and develop as staff and individuals.⁸

Additional research from a guide focused on building staff competency supports the use of adult learning principles for effective professional development. The guide makes suggestions for how to apply these principles in a youth development work environment:

- Address supervisees' diverse needs.
- Set challenging but achievable goals.
- Encourage supervisees to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Give staff opportunities to learn by doing.
- Facilitate small-group work.⁹ ❖

⁷ Akiva, T. (2007). *Quality Coaching* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation), http://www.cypq.org/products_and_services/training/QC.

⁸ Wiedow, J. S. (2014). "Redefining Supervision in the Field of Youth Work," *Practice Forward: Reflections on Autonomy and Authority*, NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship Working Papers, 2013-14, Augsburg College, <http://web.augsburg.edu/sabo/RedefiningSupervisionWiedow.pdf>.

⁹ Gredler, M.; Gannett, E. and Gallagher, J. (2012). *Strong Directors, Skilled Staff: Guide to Using the Core Competencies for Youth Work Professionals and Supervisors*, http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Strong_Directors_Skilled_Staff-Guide_to_Using_the_Core_Competencies.pdf.



TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Clubs should review their own policies and procedures, as well as all applicable state laws, before adopting any new tool to ensure full compliance.

Considerations for Effective Staff Observations

Take into account the person's experience, time on the job and skill level. Decide whether your observation will focus on general program facilitation or on a particular skill as part of a coaching process. Consider including the following topics.

Overall Program Management

- Programs are well planned and organized (prepared lesson plan, adequate supplies, age appropriate, mix of activities to engage members).
- Five Key Elements for Positive Youth Development are thoughtfully included:
 - Safe, Positive Environment.** Program space is safe. Any unsafe behavior is immediately addressed, including negative hurtful comments from youth.
 - Expectations.** Staff review behavior policies, set expectations for specific program activities with youth.
 - Relationships.** Staff use youth names. Positive staff-youth interactions occur.
 - Fun.** Evidence of incorporating fun into program is present through activities and staff energy/presentation.
 - Recognition.** Staff recognize youth in a variety of ways (noting good questions, celebrating birthdays, welcoming members who have been absent).
- Activities allow youth to make choices and share in some decisions.
- Time is well managed, with flexibility and creativity shown as questions, changes arise.

Youth Relationships and Input

- Warmly greets and welcomes individual youth as they arrive in the program area.
- Encourages youth to help facilitate parts of the activity and asks youth for feedback.
- Listens actively and openly to youth.
- Captures attention of youth in a positive manner quickly when needed.
- Creates opportunities for youth to work together during the session or activity.
- Effectively resolves youth conflict.
- Notes unengaged youth and takes actions to involve them.

Program Facilitation

- Responds appropriately to questions and nonverbal clues from members.
- Clearly communicates program/activity purpose, ground rules, instructions.
- Uses reflective questioning to reinforce and extend learning of youth.
- Challenges/inspires youth to move beyond their comfort zones.
- Uses developmentally appropriate techniques to engage youth.
- Assesses learning and understanding throughout program implementation.

Take detailed notes as you observe. Afterward, schedule a feedback session. Allow sufficient time for meaningful discussion. Begin by mentioning which session was observed. Ask a question such as, "What was the highlight of this session for you?" or "Was there anything that did not go as expected?" Listen carefully and reflect back to the employee their insights. Follow up with your own observation feedback.

One-on-One Meeting Tips and Conversation Prompts¹⁰

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

- Consider starting by asking how your staff member is implementing one of the Five Key Elements for Positive Youth Development.
- Adhere to a regular meeting schedule.
- Prepare ahead of time.
- Complete follow-up tasks that you commit to and report back on progress.
- Divide the meeting into equal portions:
 - Time for your employee to share their updates, concerns, highlights.
 - Time for you to share organizational updates, policies, projects, etc.
 - Time to focus on the staff member's long-term career development.
- Think through how to present actionable feedback, and what positive recognition you can provide.
- Balance discussion of recent achievements with planning about upcoming projects.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage self-reflection and self-directed learning (see below).

Conversation Prompts

Tell me about what you're working on.

How has your week gone?

Where can I be most helpful?

What program support do you need?

How are you going to approach this?

Tell me about anything you stumbled over.

What are your thoughts on my changes?

Would you update me on [specific project]?

What challenges might you have with meeting the deadline?

What questions do you have about the project?

How do you think we can do this better?

What areas are ahead of schedule?

What are your future goals in this area?

What are your plans to get there?

In which areas are you most confident?

What worries you?

What can you/we do differently next time?

What suggestions do you have?

What have you learned from this project?

What suggested ideas/improvements do you have?

¹⁰Adapted with permission from KIPP Foundation (2016). "The Basics of Effective One-on-Ones," accessed from the KIPP Foundation Resource Library, <http://www.kipp.org/approach/resource-library/>.