School of Continuing and Professional Studies

Accelerated Degree Completion Program

Prior Learning Assessment Handbook

Revised November, 2013
Dear Prospective PLA Student:

Welcome to Philadelphia University and the Office of Continuing and Professional Studies!

We are pleased to have you highlight your knowledge and expertise as you complete your Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). This handbook provides information regarding policies, procedures and responsibilities for PLA Students. Once you have completed and successfully passed your first Philadelphia University Degree Completion Program course, you are eligible to become a PLA candidate. As a first step, please contact the Director of Student Services. The Director will help you decide if a PLA is feasible based on your background and prior work experience. The Director will also be key in identifying a PLA Faculty Coach/Evaluator who will help you navigate through the entire PLA process. Once you are approved as a PLA candidate, you have the option of completing your PLA as a distance student, a traditional face to face student or some combination of both depending on your personal preference, individual needs and schedule.

We will be happy to clarify any information or answer other questions you may have as you read this handbook!

Sincerely,

School of Continuing and Professional Studies
Accelerated Bachelor’s Degree Completion Program
FOREWORD

“Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn” (Benjamin Franklin)

Academic learning and college credit have historically been earned through enrollment in traditional college classes. Changes in the social, political, and economic landscape including a change in the composition of the workforce have encouraged educational experts to develop strategies for recognizing formalized learning acquired through activities outside the typical college classroom.

The “Council for Adult and Experiential Learning” (CAEL) which has an extensive program for assessing adult learning acknowledges that working adults bring to the classroom a wealth of knowledge acquired at work and in life which dovetails with formal classroom learning. In 1974, CAEL pioneered a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) approach that evaluates and awards credit for knowledge acquired “outside” the typical college classroom. Since then, hundreds of post-secondary education institutions have developed systems that award college credit for learning acquired outside the conventional classroom.

Philadelphia University recognizes that adult students returning to college bring knowledge grounded in actual experience to the educational program. Philadelphia University Office of Continuing and Professional Studies established a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process as a component of its Accelerated Degree Completion Program. The Philadelphia University PLA system is consistent with the academic standards articulated by CAEL and recognizes that though students may take in information by reading, writing, listening, memorizing, and relaying, they ultimately learn by actually doing. Philadelphia University is also a founding member of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Consortium on Prior Learning Assessment.

This handbook describes the Philadelphia University PLA process and is intended to serve as a guide for students engaged in that process. We encourage you to read it and understand the steps to this state-of-the-art college credit vehicle available to adult learners.
What is Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at Philadelphia University?

Prior learning is college-equivalent education acquired through non-traditional schooling, work, and/or other life experiences. Students in the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (S-CPS) Accelerated Degree Completion B.S. programs can earn credits for college-level learning gained prior to entering the program. Credits can be earned through:

- Transfer of credits from organizations with which Philadelphia University maintains a formal articulation agreement;
- Passing a CLEP exam; and/or
- Successful completion of the structured Philadelphia University Continuing and Professional Studies Prior Learning Assessment process (Phila U. S-CPS PLA process).

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a method of recognizing and crediting learning that is equal to college level learning but has been gained outside a traditional college classroom. PLA affords students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of a particular college-level subject area acquired through work experience, volunteering, outside study, or personal life experiences. Methods used to evaluate prior learning knowledge and experiences are addressed in the “Assessing Prior Learning” section of this handbook.

The Philadelphia University S-CPS PLA process is consistent with standards set by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and allows students to earn credit for learning that occurred through non-classroom based experience associated with the work environment, community involvement, or individual study. All PLA submissions must link a student’s "real life experiences" with relevant scholarly literature as well as demonstrate reflection on those experiences and document the student’s experiences. All PLA work must be assessed and the grades submitted within 6 months of completion of the student’s first course in the Philadelphia University Continuing and Professional Studies Accelerated B.S. degree completion program. In most instances, this means that the student must submit all PLA work to their faculty evaluator-coach within 5 months of completion of their first course. (See Philadelphia University PLA Procedures Section)

Philadelphia University allows students to register for Phila U. S-CPS PLA credits in the following content areas:

- **PLA 100** - Scientific Reasoning (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
- **PLA 110** - Historical Understanding (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
• Social Science (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
  ▪ PLA 120 - Psychology
  ▪ PLA 121 - Sociology
• PLA 130 - Information Systems (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
• Business Practices
  ▪ PLA 140 - Finance
  ▪ PLA 141 - Human Resource Practices
  ▪ PLA 142 - Applied Management Principles
  ▪ PLA 143 - Strategic Planning
  ▪ PLA 145 - Marketing
  ▪ PLA 146 - Training and Development
• Organizational Dynamics
  ▪ PLA 150 - Leadership and Supervision
  ▪ PLA 151 - Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
• PLA 160 - Clinical Practices in a specified health care specialty
• PLA 170 - Humanities (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
  ▪ Foreign Language and Culture
    ▪ PLA 175 - Spanish
    ▪ Other languages (subject to availability of Subject Matter Expert)
  ▪ Arts and Culture
    ▪ PLA 177 - Visual Arts
    ▪ PLA 178 - Performing Arts
• Professional Practice in a specialized area of public safety
  ▪ PLA 180 - Law Enforcement
  ▪ PLA 181 - Fire Safety
  ▪ PLA 182 - Emergency Medical Services
  ▪ PLA 183 - First Responder Services
  ▪ Other areas (subject to availability of Subject Matter Expert)
• Professional Practice in a specialized area of public administration
  ▪ PLA 190 - Public Housing
  ▪ Other areas-subject to availability of Subject Matter Expert

Students may earn a maximum of 30 credits through the PhilaU S-CPS PLA process. Credits may be (retroactively) used to meet the 60 credit requirement for entry to the S-CPS Accelerated Degree Completion program or applied to the Free Elective requirements in the Program.

All Philadelphia University S-CPS PLA submissions are graded on a Pass (Credit) or Fail (No Credit) basis. The student’s transcript will not be numerically graded but will be assigned CR (Credit) if the assigned faculty deems that the student has shown evidence of meeting identified Learning Objectives at the level of 70% or above and has demonstrated
the learning acquired to be similar in content, depth, and breadth to college-level learning.

Students whose work is assessed at a level below 70% will receive a grade of Unsatisfactory which will appear as NC (No Credit) on their permanent record. All academic work will be posted at the completion of the assignment or contract deadline. PLA work will not be listed as a term scheduled course or count toward enrollment course load. PLA billing is separate from tuition billing.

Students may apply for 3, 6, 9 or 12 Phila U. S-CPS PLA credits in a content area. Each award of 3 credits correlates with knowledge equal to content mastered in a 3-credit course. A student may submit PLA materials for a maximum of 12 credits in any one content area. The determination regarding the number of credits that may be awarded for the subject area rests with the Director of Student Services. The Director will engage in face-to-face interaction with the student. The determination of the number of credits that the student can earn will be influenced by factors such as the number and level of courses needed by the student to fulfill the degree requirements, the major or minor selected, and the ability of the student to demonstrate his/her level of learning.

Separate Phila U. S-CPS PLA materials must be submitted for each PLA content area. Students must register for each PLA focus area separately. Students may only register for one PLA focus area at a time. As previously noted, all PLA evaluations must be completed and grades submitted within 6 months of the student completing their first course in the Accelerated degree completion program. Similarly, in most instances this means that the student must submit all PLA work to their faculty evaluator-coach within 5 months of completion of their first course in the Program.

Assessing Prior Learning

Philadelphia University uses one of the most accepted methods of assessing prior learning credit-compile a detailed PLA document. The PLA document demonstrates college-level knowledge, grounded in theory and acquired in practice from life and work experience outside the typical classroom setting. The PLA document captures the acquisition of experiential learning by affording the student with the opportunity to draw upon their wealth of experience and articulate with specificity the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies acquired indicative of college-level learning. An assigned faculty member provides ongoing guidance and direction to the student in the developing of the PLA document.

An assigned faculty member, also called a faculty coach/evaluator, provides individualized guidance for the student to ensure that the student can better see the connection between life experience and the classroom and, in the process, can better articulate their own learning.
The completed PLA document is forwarded to the assigned faculty for review and evaluation of the relevance of the document to the goals and objectives and requirements of the course. General guidelines that evaluators use in awarding credit are consistent with standards issued by the CAEL for quality assurance. Each Philadelphia University Prior Learning Assessment Learning Contract should be written so that:

1. Credit is awarded for learning and not for experience.
2. College credit is awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit is awarded only for learning that demonstrates a balance between theory and practical application.
4. Determination of competence levels and credit awards is made by an appropriate subject matter expert.
5. Credit is appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.
6. Learning demonstrates an appropriate level of conceptual and/or theoretical knowledge in addition to actual application.
7. Personnel involved in the assessment of learning have received adequate training for the functions they perform.
8. Learning demonstrated is considered at 70 percent.

Students should be mindful that although college credit earned in the PhilaU PLA is awarded consistent with standards issued by CAEL, other colleges may not accept credit earned in this manner in transfer. Students should also recognize that some colleges require evaluators to assign a letter grade for the PLA document. Consequently, the transfer of PLA credits is governed by the receiving university’s policies. Because policies are university-specific, it is the student’s responsibility to check on the transfer and governing policies of colleges or universities where courses and credits may be transferred.

**Specialized PLA for Graduates of Police and Fire Academies** Note: These specific guidelines are reviewed and revised by the School of Continuing and Professional Studies on an annual basis.

Consistent with standards set by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning that allows students to earn credit for learning that occurred through non-classroom based experience, students in the S-CPS Accelerated Degree Completion B.S. programs may be awarded a maximum of 12 credits for college-level learning they gained through successful completion of training in a municipal police or fire academy prior to entering the S-CPS program. Graduates of the Philadelphia Police and Fire Academies will be awarded 12 credits. Graduates of other municipal training programs will be awarded credits based on an assessment of the specific training program when compared to the standard of the Philadelphia training program.
Students may only earn credits for completion of a municipal training program once (i.e. those who have received credits through another regionally accredited academic institution must either use the credits that were awarded by that institution or voluntarily decline to have those credits transferred into Philadelphia University).

Philadelphia University Prior Learning Assessment credits in Law Enforcement or Fire Safety will be awarded if the student successfully meets all of the conditions described below:

1. The student must participate in the mandatory S-CPS PLA advising session with the S-CPS Director of Student Services prior to submitting any materials. Detailed information and clarification regarding all PLA requirements will be provided at this advising session.

2. Student must register for PLA by submitting a registration letter addressed to the Director of Student Services, Continuing and Professional Studies, Philadelphia University that states the intended area(s) for S-CPS PLA (specifically, either PLA 180: Law Enforcement or PLA 181: Fire Safety) depending upon the area of training the candidate has completed.

3. The student must submit all of the following to the S-CPS Director of Student Services within 5 months of completion of their first course in the Phila. U. B.S. degree completion program:
   - Documentation of successful completion of police or fire academy training
   - A binder that contains the following components
   - 2-4 page paper that describes:
     Scope and content of the training program
     Dates of participation in the training
     Date of graduation
     Reflections on their acquisition of knowledge and their personal or professional growth as a result of their training
   - Evidence of successful completion of police or fire academy training (e.g. graduation certificate)
   - Name and contact information of individual who can provide additional verification and information regarding the student’s participation in the training program.

Note that a student must submit all of the above required documents and have submitted materials approved within 6 months of completion of their first course in the Accelerated B.S. degree completion program.
Students will receive notification of the awarding of credits (CR or NC) for the PLA within 30 business days of submission of all of the above listed materials. Official posting of PLA credit will be listed on the student's transcript as PLA 180 Law Enforcement or PLA 181 Fire Safety. The grade will be posted as CR. No posting will appear if the student's credentials are not deemed sufficient.

Students who have additional experience in the Law Enforcement or Fire Safety fields may want to consider applying for PLA credits in another content area such as PLA 150: Leadership and Supervision, PLA 146: Training and Development and/or PLA 151: Negotiation and Conflict Resolution.

Students will need to follow the customary Prior Learning Assessment Policy and Procedures (including submission of all applicable fees and registration letters) when applying for credits earned through any process other than graduation from a municipal police or fire academy.

S-CPS PLA Policies and Procedures

*Applicable to all students except those enrolled in PLA 180 or 181*

1. Students who wish to earn credits through the Phila U. S-CPS PLA process must schedule a mandatory individual S-CPS PLA advising session with the S-CPS Director of Student Services prior to registering for the S-CPS PLA process. For distance students, a telephone conference can be easily arranged.
   a. Detailed information regarding PLA requirements, areas of focus and the registration process is provided at these advising sessions.

2. Students who wish to earn credits through the S-CPS PLA process must submit all of the following:
   a. A registration letter addressed to the Director of Student Services, Continuing and Professional Studies, Philadelphia University that identifies the intended area(s) for S-CPS PLA (including course number selected from the list) and the number of credits for which the student is registering
   b. A non-refundable PLA registration and assessment fee for total amount of credits

   1. Assessment fee is determined prior to the start of each academic year
   2. Assessment fee for AY 2012-13 and 2013-14 is $200 for each credit S-CPS PLA. (*Policy effective 9/1/12-6/30/14)*

3. Upon receipt of the registration letter and fee, the Director of Student Services will select a content expert to serve as the S-CPS Faculty Evaluator/Coach and notify the student of their selection. Both parties will be provided with contact information so that they may begin the process of developing the Learning Contract.
4. The student and faculty evaluator will collaboratively develop specific Learning Objectives & Grading Criteria for the PLA course.

5. A Learning Contract signed and dated by both the student and the Faculty Coach/Evaluator that includes specific Learning Objectives, submission dates, and a detailed listing of materials that must be submitted to demonstrate evidence of knowledge acquisition must be submitted to the Director of Student Services within 30 business days of receipt of the student’s registration letter and fee.

   a. The Learning Contract must identify the deadline for final submission of the PLA materials. The Director of Student Services will sign and date the PLA Learning Contract and return a copy of the fully executed contract to both the student and the faculty evaluator within seven days. The original signed contract is retained in the student’s official record. A contract will only be considered valid if it contains all three signatures.

6. Once a student’s candidacy as a PLA student is approved, all students have the option of completing their PLA through either electronic or traditional face to face communications or through some combination of both depending upon student and faculty personal preference, schedule, and individual needs.

7. Students will receive notification of the final assessment (CR/NC) of their S-CPS PLA submission within 30 business days of final submission of PLA materials. Official posting of PLA credit is completed by the Office of the Registrar and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies cannot predict the exact timing of that posting.

**Earning Credit through PLA**

Philadelphia University has established 30 credits as the maximum number of credits that can be earned through the PLA. In consultation with the student, the Director of Student Services suggests the probable number of credits a student that a student might be able to earn based on the extent of the student’s experience, the total number of available elective credits, and student achievement of previous credits in the identified area of PLA interest. Students who intend to transfer PLA credits into a degree program in another institution of higher education, should check with that institution regarding their transfer policies.

The letter grade that is awarded for a PLA effort is either credit (CR) or No Credit (NC). No other form of letter grade is awarded for PLA work. The official transcript reflects the title of the course(s), the course number(s), credits earned, and a “CR” if the work is deemed as being passing level work (70% or better).
Registration Policies and Procedures

Students interested in exploring the PLA should request a PLA advising appointment with the S-CPS Director of Student Services via e-mail (harriss@philau.edu). In collaboration with the student, the Director will determine the course subjects and the probable number of college credits that may be earned. After the student submits their registration letter and fee, the Director will appoint the content expert Faculty/Evaluator to work with the student throughout the PLA process. The requirements of the approved PLA plan/contract must be completed by the student and graded at the 70% level by no later than 6 months after the student has completed their first course in the S-CPS accelerated degree-completion program.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

As soon as possible after completing their first course is the Accelerated B.S. degree-completion program, students interested in PLA consideration should contact the Director of Student Services through e-mail (harriss@philau.edu), in order to schedule a PLA Advising meeting.

After meeting with the Director of Student Services and discussing prior learning experiences, students should register to attempt to earn the PLA credits. Registration is accomplished through submission of a registration letter to the School of Continuing and Professional Studies accompanied by the required fee (fee schedule for AY 2012-13 is $200 per credit). Please note, students cannot register for PLA through the University WebAdvisor system and no student may proceed to meet with a PLA evaluator or begin to prepare a valid PLA document until they have registered and paid for the PLA course.

Once the student has registered, they will receive notification that they have been assigned a Faculty Coach/Evaluator. In collaboration with the evaluator, the student will develop a personalized Learning Contract that includes specifics of the requirements for completing their PLA documentation and course of study. The Learning Contract will include a time table for submission of drafts of the PLA reflective essays as well as specifics of required artifacts that must be included in the final PLA document.

As indicated under the responsibilities of the Faculty Coach/Evaluator below, the student and faculty will engage in an ongoing dialogue to develop and complete the PLA document. This dialogue may occur through traditional face to face meetings or through the use of e-mail,
phone, fax or digital chat technology. The student is expected to submit drafts and transmit supporting documents and artifacts to validate and authenticate his/her experience within the context of the PLA. The student will create reflective essays that describe their knowledge and experiential learning, demonstrate how they applied theoretical concepts during their past experiences, and clarify the college-level knowledge they gained through reflection and analysis.

Students will be required to submit the final iteration of their reflective essays and the documentation of their acquisition and application of college-level knowledge within 5 months of completion of their first course in the Phila U accelerated degree completion program.

The faculty evaluator will review all submitted materials and may request additional revisions. Final assessment of the student’s PLA efforts must be completed by no later than 6 months after the student completes their first course in the program. Students will not be able to complete any additional revisions after that deadline has been reached.

**Faculty Coach/Evaluator**

A faculty member is assigned to be responsible for evaluating the student’s knowledge of the content area through assessment of the PLA document. The selected faculty is a subject matter expert in the area in which the student is applying for credit. The selected faculty member works closely with the student to develop the Learning Contract which includes specific expectations regarding materials that will be submitted to demonstrate a variety of knowledge and skills.

The Learning Contract developed by the student and faculty parallels educational psychologist, Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy system which utilizes the affective, psychomotor, and cognitive domains. For PLA development purposes, the cognitive domain is utilized emphasizing intellectual outcomes. The cognitive domain breaks down learning into incremental levels with the higher levels involving critical thinking. The Learning Contract requires a level of critical thinking premised on a foundation of knowledge, comprehension, and understanding. Of the six levels in the Bloom’s taxonomy, knowledge (e.g., memory) and understanding (e.g., comprehension) are more applicable to lower-level college courses and application (e.g., usage), analysis (e.g., examination), evaluation (e.g., judgment), and innovation (e.g., creation) are more indicative of upper-level courses requiring higher levels of utilization.

In conformance with Bloom’s taxonomy a determination can be made regarding the number of credits applicable to a specific course of study consistent with already established college courses or courses developed by the faculty and student on a course-specific basis.
The assigned faculty coach/evaluator provides frequent one-to-one direction and oversight to the student in the development of the detailed PLA document. Interaction is accomplished in a mutually acceptable fashion either through face-to-face meetings, telephone conferences or electronic exchanges. The assigned faculty member provides individualized guidance to the student and reviews draft submissions to ensure that the student can better see and clearly articulate the connection between life experience and the classroom and the degree to which college-level learning has been acquired from life and work experiences. In the process, the PLA document becomes a lifelong leaning chronicle developed through the collaborative efforts of student and assigned faculty. In the final analysis, the completed PLA document is forwarded to the assigned faculty and Director of Student Services for review, evaluation and grade assignment.

The faculty evaluator is responsible for providing feedback regarding the evidence of critical and reflective thinking consistent with demonstrating college-level knowledge. Feedback or concerns related to content or format of the final PLA submission must be addressed prior to the six month deadline so that the final grade can be assigned within the specified deadline.

**S-CPS Director of Student Services**
In consultation with the student, the Director will determine an area of focus for each PLA and suggest a range of potential credits that might be earned through the PLA process. The Director selects and assigns the appropriate Faculty Course/Evaluator to serve as the student’s coach and evaluator. Selection criteria include content area expertise as well as availability. The S-CPS Director is also responsible for assignment of the final grade for PLA coursework. Therefore, students may be directed to complete additional revisions in order to address concerns raised by the Director of Student Services.

**Eligibility Requirements**
To be considered for participation in a PLA, the student must have completed one course in the Philadelphia University Accelerated degree completion program and be enrolled in the Philadelphia University School of Continuing and Professional Studies Accelerated Degree Completion Program.

**Length of Time to Complete the Process**
As previously mentioned, the entire PLA process must be completed no later than 6 months after the student completes their first course in the accelerated degree completion program.
Subjects Available for PLA Consideration

Philadelphia University School of Continuing and Professional Studies allows students to register for Phila U. S-CPS PLA credits in the following content areas:

- PLA 100 - Scientific Reasoning (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
- PLA 110 - Historical Understanding (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
- Social Science (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)
  - PLA 120 – Psychology
  - PLA 121 – Sociology
  - PLA 130 - Information Systems (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)

Business Practices
- PLA 140 – Finance
- PLA 141 - Human Resource Practices
- PLA 142 - Applied Management Principles
- PLA 143 - Strategic Planning
- PLA 145 – Marketing
- PLA 146 - Training and Development

Organizational Dynamics
- PLA 150 - Leadership and Supervision
- PLA 151 - Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
- PLA 160 - Clinical Practices in a specified health care specialty
- PLA 170 - Humanities (3 credits may be applied to Prerequisite Competence requirement)

Foreign Language and Culture
- PLA 175 – Spanish

Other languages- subject to availability of Subject Matter Expert

Arts and Culture
- PLA 177 - Visual Arts
- PLA 178 - Performing Arts

Professional Practice in a specialized area of public safety
- PLA 180 - Law Enforcement
- PLA 181 - Fire Safety
- PLA 182 - Emergency Medical Services
- PLA 183 - First Responder Services

Professional Practice in a specialized area of public administration
- PLA 190 - Public Housing

Other areas-subject to availability of Subject Matter Expertise

Students may earn a maximum of 30 credits through the Phila U. S-CPS PLA process. Credits may be (retroactively) used to meet the 60 credit requirement for entry to the S-CPS Accelerated Degree Completion
program or applied to the Free Elective requirements in the Accelerated Degree Completion Program.

**Communicating with the PLA Faculty Coach/Evaluator**
Each student will be assigned a PLA Faculty Coach/Evaluator as indicated in the previous section, to help them navigate through the entire PLA process. The role of the PLA coach is to provide coaching, guidance, and direction to help students successfully complete a PLA. The student’s role in completing a PLA is to take responsibility for all work by making sure to meet the agreed upon deadlines as set forth in the PLA Learning Contract and to resolve any questions or concerns with their respective PLA Coach/Evaluator. The student is responsible for developing and writing the document. The Faculty Coach/Evaluator will review documents and make recommendations if needed to enhance the PLA. It is recommended that students be receptive to recommendations and work closely with their designated Faculty Coach/Evaluator. The Faculty Coach/Evaluator has the best interest of the student in mind and their goal is the successful completion of the PLA.

For students who choose to complete their PLA as a distance student, it is recommended that the student take the opportunity to discuss and clarify any questions/concerns with the Faculty Coach/Evaluator. It is further recommended that students discuss how they would like to structure future communications. For example, some students enjoy the structure that periodic face to face meetings may provide. Other students prefer to work semi-independently in developing and writing their PLA and only check in with their respective faculty coach/evaluator when the need arises. Students should carefully consider which type of direction will better enhance their ability to complete their PLA and communicate their needs to their faculty coach/evaluator.

**Developing a Learning Contract**
Students and the selected faculty coach/evaluator will work closely to develop the Learning Contract. The Learning Contract articulates with specificity the goals, objectives, and areas to be addressed and corroborated to support the authenticity of the depth and breadth of experience vis-à-vis the college-level course. The Learning Contract will earmark the substance, requirements, timelines, and artifacts which identify, support and corroborate the students’ theoretical and experiential learning.

Developing a PLA Document
The student needs to demonstrate their specific college-level knowledge, clarify how they acquired that knowledge, and marry the theories,
principles, and concepts of the content area with their personal knowledge that was acquired through application and experience.

The PLA document must contain artifacts to validate that the learning was gained outside of the typical college classroom through experience, in-service training or independent study. Often, students find that the completed PLA document serves as a learning chronology and autobiographical journey replete with experience noted, training acquired, accolades received, achievements realized, and recognition afforded relative to the defined course specialty.

The PLA document’s artifacts should support and authenticate the depth of the college-level knowledge. The student should provide documentation to support and validate competency statements and experiential acquisition. Actual samples of work are essential to reflect those activities and events that significantly contributed to the student’s learning and development in the course discipline. The PLA document should also include a narrative reflection that captures the student’s knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and innovation applicable to the subject matter selected for PLA credits.

In the final analysis, the PLA document must demonstrate learning at the appropriate level consistent with course content, requirements, and expectations and Bloom’s taxonomy. As a subject matter expert, the assigned faculty member selected by the S-CPS Director of Student Services is available to work closely with the student via e-mail, phone, fax, in person, or by using any other communication media. The faculty member will assure that the student is aware of the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the approved course of study. Furthermore, the student will submit periodic drafts as well as artifacts and exhibits to verify, corroborate, certify, and authenticate hands-on knowledge of the approved discipline. Faculty will provide one-on-one guidance and counsel in an effort to ensure that the final product satisfies the requirements PLA credits.

**Mapping Out a PLA Schedule**
The faculty coach/evaluator will propose a timeline of due dates as part of the PLA Contract. This timeline will include several dates when various sections of the PLA will be due. It is important for the student to review the proposed dates before the contract is finalized to assure that all deadline dates can be met. Students should not hesitate to express a concern to their respective faculty coach/evaluator if they are not comfortable with their ability to meet the proposed deadline dates. Students should keep in mind that the grade for the PLA document is due no later than 6 months after the completion of the student’s first course in the Program. Therefore the faculty coach/evaluator will develop
a time schedule that allows for feedback and final revisions in order to complete the PLA in a timely manner.

**Reviewing a Learning Contract from the PLA Coach**

Students should play an active role in developing and finalizing their PLA Contracts. A faculty coach/evaluator will seek student input in order to decide what information should be included in the contract. By signing the learning contract, the student commits to the deadlines set forth in the contract. Students should not hesitate to question any information that needs clarification.

**Contents of the PLA Document**

As previously mentioned, the Faculty assigned to evaluate the PLA document will work closely with the student to discuss the document, identify supportive documentation, assess the extent and relevance of the developing document to the Learning Contract, and assess the credibility and authenticity of the exhibits to support the student’s declared theoretical and experiential learning. The PLA document must contain reflections on the student’s learning, as well as artifacts that validate the learning gained through experience.

Supporting documentation provides evidence of learning and whether the learning is current. It provides evidence to back up the student’s claims. Supporting documentation helps colleges meet accreditation standards for assessment and transferability by showing that the evidence of learning is accurate and the student is responsible for the work claimed.

Third-party validation can come from supervisory evaluations, completed work projects, letters of commendation, on-the-job training, job descriptions, and anything proving that the learner has an understanding of both theory and practices.

The PLA submission should contain be presented in a professional manner such as a binder or cd and should contain the following components:

- Table of Contents
- Title page including topic area of PLA
- Autobiographical Resume- *required*
- Descriptions that correlate with PLA knowledge/experiences (job description and elements in a performance plan)- *optional*
- Narrative reflective essay tying the student’s learning to college level courses/knowledge and referencing scholarly sources that
corroborate the student’s knowledge with college-level expectations- required

- Verification of application/use of knowledge including accomplishments (awards, articles, certificates, trophies, letters of recommendation, work reports)- required
- Third party testimony regarding competence (performance evaluations, letters of commendation, workshops, seminars, conferences attended)- optional
- Learning products that demonstrate application of knowledge (work samples, published works, critiqued work product, approved course of action)- required
- Certification (correspondence courses, on-the-job training, license awards, training completion certificates, memberships)- as appropriate
- At least three scholarly (3) citations that clearly depict and capture the high level of knowledge, comprehension, and understanding applicable to the selected course of study (see above) and a reflective essay that correlates the student’s knowledge with the knowledge evident in the citations- required
- Index of supporting documents and references related to subject- required
- Reflective paper with reference to scholarly sources as indicated above- required

There is no predetermined length to the document since length depends on the complexity of the project, the number of credits sought, and the narratives and supporting documentation. The document must provide reflections, valid demonstration of learning, authenticity of work submitted, and relevance of sections of the document to the appropriate field.

With experiential learning, students can depict their knowledge in a field and demonstrate the way they have applied the strategies, theories, and principles learned in a classroom at a place, system, or venue removed from the classroom.

**Document Submission**

Students are required to submit a hard copy of their entire document. *All final PLA documents must contain the required elements listed above and must be submitted in a binder that is organized in a manner that is readily understood by an external reader.* In addition, it is highly recommended that students also submit a digital copy of their PLA document. Depending on the contents of the document, some students may need to scan and submit PDF documents as part of their overall PLA. It is recommended that students keep at least a hard copy and preferably
both a hard copy and electronic copy of all documents submitted. The completed final document becomes the property of the University, is retained in the S-C.P.S. Office and becomes a part of the student’s official records.

**Receiving Feedback and Implementing Changes**

The role of the faculty coach/evaluator is to provide feedback, coaching, and direction in helping the student to successfully complete the PLA. Therefore the faculty coach/evaluator will thoroughly review all submitted documents. The faculty coach/evaluator will provide feedback to help students enhance the effectiveness of their PLA document. Students should remain receptive to all suggestions and recommendations. It is quite acceptable however, for students to express a concern to the faculty coach/evaluator if a recommendation is not understood or if a student does not agree with what is being proposed. Although an important role of the faculty coach/evaluator is to support the student’s effort to successfully complete the PLA to obtain college level credit for their prior work, their primary role is to assess the student’s acquisition of college-level knowledge and award the student the grade they have earned. In the event that a student does not demonstrate acquisition of college-level knowledge, they will not be awarded a passing grade for the PLA.

**Final Grade Report**

Once the student has completed all of the requirements of the PLA, including making any necessary changes recommended by the evaluator/coach and/or Director of Student Services, a final grade sheet will be completed by the PLA coach/evaluator. This final grade sheet requires the signature of both the faculty member and the Director of Student Services. The faculty member will indicate a grade of either Credit (Pass graded at the 70% level) or No Credit (graded at 69% or less) basis.

The Director of Student Services will not sign-off on the final grade sheet until all PLA changes/revisions (as required by either the PLA Content expert of the Director of Student Services) have been completed and incorporated into the PLA. Once the Director of Student Services signs/approves the final grade sheet, the student will be notified of the grade/credit for their PLA. The Director of Student Services will submit the final grade sheet to the Registrar’s Office for processing.

A hard copy of the fully executed (signed) PLA course grade sheet will be mailed to the student for their personal records. The Office of the Registrar is responsible for posting the final grade to the student
transcript. Any questions regarding the timing of such posting should be directed to that office.

Student Stories about the PLA process

Carol Lukens, was awarded PLA credits in Human Resources, stated that the PLA “actually allowed me to see how much I already knew and what I already had contributed . . . “. Carol further stated that she would ”definitely recommend” the PLA to other students and found the assigned faculty to be “extremely accessible and encouraging throughout the entire process and more than happy to meet and discuss any questions or issues I had with the project.”

Dino Ponzio, earned PLA credits in Information Technology, stated that the PLA provided “a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the expertise I have acquired through many years of being in the workplace.” Dino went on to say that the PLA is “an effective tool to measure the range and depth of each individual student . . . . and reflect (on) the years of work experience they have acquired.”

Richard Knapp, earned PLA credits in Information Systems, stated that “the PLA provided an opportunity to demonstrate all aspects of my professional learning experience. As an older student and working professionally, the PLA gave me an opportunity to display my work skills on an academic level and convinced me that earning a Bachelor’s degree is achievable.”

Faculty Stories about the PLA process

Joe Bucci, another Philadelphia University faculty PLA evaluator, remarked that he believed the PLA to be “an excellent tool for students with significant work experience to demonstrate what they have learned on the job and earn college credits. Joe emphasized, “I do not think that many students are aware of this option.” Regarding his assessment of the PLA process, Joe stated that “students do have a wealth of experience that can substitute for course work (and) it was a very enjoyable experience (that provided) the opportunity to work with students more closely than the classroom environment provides.”

Russ Sutton, a Philadelphia University faculty member who served as a PLA evaluator, had this to say when asked if he would recommend the PLA to other students. “Absolutely”, Russ said. “The potential of earning college credit for valuable career experience encourages a student to return to his or her interrupted pursuit of a university degree, changes a student’s perception of what it takes to earn a degree, (and) (t)he “impossible” is now “possible” thanks to jump-starting the accumulation of PLA credits. This small shift in perception can make a
big difference in someone’s life.” Russ closed by saying that “(w)ork experience has academic value and is worthy of college credit (and can) turn qualitative lessons learned on the job into quantifiable college credits.

Robbin Durie, a Philadelphia University faculty PLA evaluator, mentioned that the PLA experience proved “(t)he professionalism and quality of the student body.” Robbin found the PLA as “great preparation for a graduate level thesis and an opportunity to do self analysis.”

CLOSING

“The difference between school and life is in school you’re taught a lesson and then given a test whereas in life you’re given a test that teaches you a lesson” (Tom Bodett)

The Philadelphia University Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) offers adult learners enrolled in the accelerated degree program the opportunity to earn college credit which has been traditionally awarded for formal learning acquired in the classrooms. In response to the dynamic economic and academic environment of the 21st century, and in light of the need for educational institutions to acknowledge, respect, and recognize learning acquired by adult students outside the conventional classroom setting, the PLA affords students the opportunity to identify their experiential learning and demonstrate the way in which it matches college-level learning objectives and outcomes in a designated content area.

Responsibility for prior learning is a shared effort requiring input and insights from students and faculty. Its success is sparked and driven by the combined efforts of all involved. It demands joint collaboration and mutual commitment. Working together causes ordinary people to do extraordinary things and common people to attain uncommon results.

Aristotle once said, “One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try.” Experiential learning in tandem with theoretical learning allows you to learn by reading, thinking, learning, and doing. Philadelphia University Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) serves as a means by which adult learners can blend experiential knowledge acquired in life with theoretical learning learned in class.

References:

For further reading on Prior Learning Assessments (PLA), the following are recommended:


Meyer, P. (1975) *Awarding College Credit For Non-College Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

**SAMPLE PLA REGISTRATION LETTERS**

**Sample Standard PLA Registration Letter**

To: Continuing and Professional Studies  
From: STUDENT INSERTS THEIR NAME AND ADDRESS  
Date:  
Re: Prior Learning Assessment Registration

Enclosed please find $___(200 per credit during AY 2012-13) payment to register to attempt to earn ___ credits (student should insert number of credits--must be in 3 credit increments) in ______________________ (student should insert area of including PLA course #) through the Prior Learning Assessment process.

Thank you for consideration of this application. I look forward to hearing from my content evaluator in the near future so that we can develop the Learning Contract and I can proceed to begin my work on this PLA course.

________________________ (your signature)

*Please note that students are not registered until payment is received.*

- Enclosure (enclose a check to Philadelphia University, School of Continuing and Professional Studies in the specified amount indicated above. If you are not enclosing a check, be sure to include the method of payment you will use and to whom the bill should be sent.

**Sample Police and Fire Academy PLA Registration Letter**

To: Continuing and Professional Studies  
From: STUDENT INSERTS THEIR NAME AND ADDRESS  
Date:  
Re: Police or Fire Academy Prior Learning Assessment Registration

This letter comes as the official request to register to attempt to earn 12 credits in ______________________ (insert either PLA 180: Law Enforcement or PLA 181: Fire Safety as appropriate) through the Philadelphia University Prior Learning Assessment process.

Thank you for consideration of this application. I look forward to proceeding with this PLA course.

________________________ (your signature)
Sample PLA Learning Contract Signature Page

Philadelphia University
School of Continuing and Professional Studies

Student: ________________________________
Student I.D. Number: ________________________________

Number of PLA Credits: ________ credits
Topic Area including PLA Course #: ________________________________

Submission Deadline: ________________

____________________________________________________________________

Sharon M. Harris Date
Director of Student Services, School of Continuing and Professional Studies

____________________________________________________________________

SCPS PLA Applicant

____________________________________________________________________

Faculty Evaluator and Coach

Note: This signature page will be attached to a set of PLA-specific Learning Objectives and Submission Expectations for this Learning Contract. Signature indicates the student’s understanding and commitment to meeting the outlined PLA learning expectations.
Sample PLA Learning Contract

(Student: John Doe)
Philadelphia University/School of Professional and Continuing Studies

PLA 150: Leadership and Supervision

John Doe will demonstrate knowledge and experience related to Leadership and Supervision that he acquired through various employment experiences. Consistent with Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive learning, in his PLA, he will demonstrate the following:

**Knowledge** - His/her full knowledge of the leadership and supervision disciplines by addressing in detail his/her experience relative to the items listed below;

**Comprehension** - His/her understanding of the duties he/she performed and the guidance and direction he/she provided in the context of leadership, supervision, and oversight;

**Application** - His/her actual work experiences and artifacts to illustrate application of supervisory and leadership skills;

**Analysis** - His/her proven successes employing motivational strategies, empowering supportive staff to devise workable solutions to school-wide affairs, and embracing & ensuring consensus decision making in discharging duties;

**Synthesis** - His/her action steps in relation to goal success by tapping employee input into devising options, strategies, and alternatives to better achieve the sought after goal;

**Evaluation** - His/her ability to assess action taken in relation to management, leadership, and supervision by explaining the rationale for action steps taken, measuring the success or failure of steps taken, comparing action to alternative measures, and submitting a closing in support of action taken or offering other avenues to success.

In order to demonstrate a professional level of competence with respect to knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation vis-à-vis the cognitive domain, Mr. Doe will articulate in his PLA report his knowledge, skill, and ability with respect to the supervision and leadership as follows:

- Define long-term and short-term goals and set priorities;
• Plan, assign, manage, and evaluate work of subordinates and/or colleagues whose work he/she supervises or oversees;
• Manage the day-to-day operations of the office and provide consistent guidance and oversight to staff to ensure uniform execution of duties;
• Provide and encourage empowerment and collaborative dialogue among and between administrative staff to ensure consideration of different opinions and points of view;
• Evaluate the performance and contributions of employees he/she either supervises or leads;
• Formulate, coordinate and track individual development activities for office support staff;
• Establish & maintain an official personnel folder system for administrative staff;
• Develop a collaborative group of colleagues by encouraging group input, open dialogue, productive exchanges, participative problem solving, and collective goal attainment;
• Manage the office and staff by identifying organizational and individual needs and targeting training areas of greatest need and biggest payoff;
• Conduct needs analyses to measure training results;
• Offer strategies, consider options, and establish action steps to collaboratively reach goals and audience;
• Give feedback to employees on their work performance, style, and attitude and resolves conflicts which arise;
• Diagnose staff’s stage of development, seek to improve productivity and morale, facilitate the productive conduct of meetings, manage conflict and challenges, and implement action or changes, if applicable;
• Serve as an internal partner to and with administrative staff;
• Understands leadership through instruction and innovation;
• Mentor administrative staff and assist in the design of individual needs assessment plans for continued development;
• Interview prospective employees and converse with employees in the spirit of long-term networking and school-wide planning;
• Foster teamwork by embracing brainstorming and open lines of communication from people of different backgrounds and offices with an eye toward achieving organizational outcomes;
• Coach, mentor, and energize staff in operating as visionaries in maximizing peak performance;
• Serve as technical expert and coach in leading, coordinating, and overseeing the work of subordinate or parallel staff;
• Operate as a change agent in exploring new supervisory and leadership methods in the highly competitive arena; and
• Encourage team cooperation and coordination in addressing issues facing Philadelphia University.

The PLA report will consist of a comprehensive report of twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) pages in length addressing his knowledge, skill, ability, experience and knowledge with respect to Leadership and Supervision. Further, Mr. Doe will provide evidentiary documents such as memos/letters from supervisors or colleagues or work product to corroborate and confirm his involvement in the delineated areas.

The report will define and track his/her involvement, interaction, and collaboration vis-à-vis supervision and leadership. With comprehension and clarity, John will describe and provide evidentiary documents/material/artifacts to support his engagement in management, leadership, and supervision through his employ in a variety of leadership, supervisory, and administrative capacities.

Additionally, John must provide documentation to demonstrate his/her day-to-day dealings with and hands-on experience in developing, formulating, and proposing action steps to address actual situations that he/she encountered related to leadership and supervision.

Accordingly, John will enunciate his actual work experience vis-à-vis leadership and supervision and will support his/her knowledge of, experience with, and contributions to each discipline on the basis of work records, artifacts, training certificates, letters from collaborative authorities, references, reflection statements, and other evidentiary material to address and confirm his mastery of the field.

Seventy percent (70%) of the above work products must be deemed adequate in content, process, and form in order for a grade of Pass to be awarded for this (# of credits) Prior Learning Assessment course. The final twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) page paper in addition to clearly identified and categorized supporting artifacts, certificates, references, and other evidentiary data will be submitted in final on (due date).

________________________________________________________________________
John Doe (student)  Date                  Dr. T. Thumb (Coach/Evaluator)  Date
SAMPLE PLA

PLA 150: Leadership and Supervision

Jennifer Redanauer

Philadelphia University

Prior Learning Assessment

April 2012
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Employment History

I started working for The CXXX Group in 1996 as the executive administrative assistant to the President of the Company, W.. In 1998, Cm and CXXX combined resources and the managing partners of Cm moved to CXXX’s corporate headquarters. I was assigned the position to supervise and coordinate two administrative assistants and support all managing partners of both companies, along with the sales and marketing department. While working as the executive assistant, W. formed the CXXX Client Advisory Council. I was tasked with the role of Advisory Council Conference Coordinator and was asked to lead the initiative. In 2001, C, then Director of HR, offered me a position in the Human Resources department, which I accepted. I have worked for my company for fifteen years, advancing step by step up the corporate ladder. My HR experience and tenure has been for the last ten years of my employment. I have been included in my company’s HR succession plan which was the catalyst for me to return to school and receive my degree in Human Resources.

Company Overview

CH is the parent company of The CXXX Group and Cm. The CXXX Group provides global vehicle risks solutions and is the leading provider of fleet accident management, driver safety and risk management services. CXXX specializes in controlling the cost of accidents and reducing repair cycle time for commercial, institutional, government and truck fleets through a technology enhanced process backed by a highly trained and experience staff. CXXX started as a two-person office in 1983 above a body shop in Philadelphia. Today the company employs over two-hundred
employees handling one-hundred thousand claims a year while remaining a family business (www.CXXXnetwork.com).

Complementing The CXXX Group is its sister company, Cm Auto Body & Glass Centers. Cm has twelve locations throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey and employs over two-hundred people. Cm is family-owned and has been so for over thirty-five years. Cm is a full service auto body and glass repair facility and has been named preferred collision repair provider by most insurance companies (www.Cm.com).

Our human resources department supports both The CXXX Group and Cm with a combined total of four hundred plus employees primarily working in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, with a few sales representatives located in different regions of the country.

Section One

Executive Administrative Assistant

Working as an Executive Administrative Assistant, I was responsible for overseeing the sales team and administrative assistants. At the time I started working for The CXXX Group, there was no Sales and Marketing Director in place. During my employment as an executive assistant supporting the President of the company, we have had four sales and marketing directors come and go. My primary focus was to support the President of the company and supervise the activities of the sales team. I was responsible to make sure the sales team reported where they were going and who they were seeing on a daily basis. This was not an easy task; we had three sales representatives stationed in our corporate office, one in California and one in Chicago. None of which wanted to call me everyday or send me an email with their schedule to let me know where they were going and who they were seeing. To complete this task I requested everyone to start
utilizing an online calendar giving me access to their respective calendars so that I could check where they were at a moment’s notice when asked. This system worked very well and is still currently in place today. We have expanded this function to all executives, managers, and sales team members along with our meeting rooms to keep everyone organized and things running efficiently.

In addition, my main goal was to keep the sales team members up to date with all expenses. This was a huge task. Some members would not complete expense reports for six months at a time. Others would send in handwritten lists with reCXXXpts attached requesting reimbursement. I created an Excel spreadsheet and trained everyone to use this sheet to record all expenses. I was ultimately responsible for auditing all expense reports ensuring applicable reCXXXpts were attached and calculations were correct. Included as artifacts are supporting emails and communication (Artifacts #).

Working with the sales team members especially during a lull in direct supervision was not easy. In my experience sales representatives feel they do not need to report to anyone, their primary focus is to sell the services of the organization and they should be able to do that on their time and schedule. I have had a great working relationship with our sales team. From the beginning I made it very clear that my job was to support them with whatever needs they had. If I was handed a presentation at five o’clock that needed to go overnight via a courier, I would stay past closing and complete that assignment. I learned that respect was earned and by showing that I was willing to put the hours in and work hard, the sales team learned to respect me and we started to work as a team.

With such a large group of executives, managers and sales representatives
working in different directions, I was responsible to ensure the administrative team was working together. I had two other administrative assistants working with me. In the beginning I attempted to distribute the work load out between the three of us on a daily basis. I quickly learned that this was unproductive for myself and found I was micro-managing the team. I decided to try a new approach, for our day to day responsibilities I assigned each one of us specific people. We would support the group we were responsible for and then when large projects came up or someone had free time, I would shift the workload around. I made sure that at least one of us was always present in the office. We worked very well together as a team and respected each other. As I moved into Human Resources, one of the administrative assistants took over my role as supervisor and is still currently working in that role with two other assistants.

As the company continued to grow, we eventually ran out of space. We had already expanded into an adjacent office suite and we had nowhere else to go. The Director of Human Resources and an owner of the company, C, asked if I would be interested in taking on the project of organizing a full company move. The President, W., had just negotiated a large contract that had resulted in doubling the size of the company. At the time we had fifty employees working and needed to add another forty to fifty employees over the next year.

Once the new location was found, I was given the job of configuring the new floor plan and organizing our entire corporate location to move with as little downtime as possible. Our operations department runs on a seven day, twenty-four hour basis. In order to successfully complete this project I started meeting with all department leaders to find out their requirements with the new space. I needed to learn what would make each of
their departments run more efficiently and which departments worked together. I met with architects and laid out how each department interacted to assist them in developing the floor plan. Once I had the floor plan approved by the executive team I then created a coding system labeling all office and units to make the move as seamless as possible. To successfully complete this move I recruited a few employees and management to be part of the team and started weekly meetings to ensure all bases were covered from moving the information technology lab to making sure our corporate address was updated. I was ultimately responsible for supervising the team and all activities relating to moving our entire operations.

The move occurred over Columbus Day weekend in 2001, we unhooked our computer lab on Thursday evening and on Friday morning we were up and live and had a small group of employees at the new location taking calls. By end of day Sunday, everyone had moved into their new home and office. Monday morning we were back to business. Moving the company was the biggest project I have ever completed, it took supervision and leadership to keep all employees and management organized. By requesting recruitments of employees I felt we had all bases covered and were prepared. I had one team captain at the old office while I was at the new office coordinating the movers and arriving employees, everyone worked well together and we pulled it off. The company move would not have been successful were it not for the employees of the company, everyone took a special interest in moving knowing that we were headed in an exciting direction with the company growth. Included as artifacts are memos and emails to document my communication to the employees and team members (Artifacts #).

On a personal note, while I was busy planning and organizing my company’s
move, I was also planning and organizing my wedding. My wedding took place one month following the move on November 10, 2001. I had created two large binders that I carried everywhere I went, one for the company move and one for my wedding. My wedding party and guests were actually larger than the number of employees I had to move. Both events went off without a hitch. The company move and my wedding were essentially the first leadership roles I had.

The successful completion of the move prompted C, then Director of HR, to inquire if I would be interested in working in HR. Now that we had moved, HR had the job of filling the much larger space with capable new hires. This became a full-time job for Kathy Latzko, Manager of HR. In the year following the move Kathy interviewed and hired over eighty employees. Starting in January of 2002, I began my training in HR.

Meeting Planner / Advisory Council Conference Coordinator

Working as W.’s executive assistant came with lots of responsibilities and work, and most days were stressful and challenging. One of my favorite aspects of the job that I truly enjoyed was the chance to coordinate and lead our Client Advisory Council. Wayne had been selected to sit on several insurance companies advisory boards and decided to establish one with our top ten to fifteen largest clients. I had some meeting planning experience working at CXXX, I was responsible for the quarterly partners meeting and the board of directors meeting that took place in Florida each year. Neither of which were had provided me enough insight into planning and coordinating a client advisory council. I started researching and joined several online meeting planning organizations to expand my knowledge.

Once the clients were chosen and they had accepted the invitation to sit on our
advisory council, I was given a budget to work with. Typically we held two meetings a year, one in Philadelphia and one in a different city. My role was to plan the advisory council from the beginning deciding on what city we would visit, what venue we would choose and then all logistics involving the meeting including attending. Each year, Wayne would provide me a budget and I would research and pick two places I thought we should visit that year. I would then give my presentation of cities and venues for approval. I learned early on how to make quick decisions and plan all aspects. My job was to lead the group including the clients to a successful meeting, this meant making most of the decisions for the group. My experience has found that most executives prefer when things are planned for them and once I had proved I was up to the task most of the clients had come to trust my judgment and follow along.

In March of 1999, we held our first Client Advisory Council in downtown Philadelphia. This was my first of fourteen meetings ranging from 1999 to 2006 I had successfully planned and coordinated. I have held several in downtown Philadelphia using the services of The Four Seasons, The Ritz Carlton and The Rittenhouse Hotel. In addition, I have traveled and planned several meetings outside of Pennsylvania including Lake Tahoe California, Scottsdale Arizona, Miami and Palm Beach Florida, New Orleans Louisiana, San Antonio Texas, and Charlotte North Carolina. To successfully plan and lead an advisory meeting with twenty to twenty-five people traveling from different points, it is best to conduct thorough research and to have confidence when presenting your findings and choices. Included as artifacts are communication, meeting agendas, and signed contracts to support my work (Artifacts #).

When I transferred from executive assistant to the HR department, I was asked to
continue on as the council coordinator by W., President and the committee of clients. The October of 2006 was my last meeting I lead. I trained PD to take over the executive position and advisory council leader position. I had made the decision to relinquish my advisory position when my child was due during the dates of the March 2007 meeting. The advisory council was significant for the company, the company established many changes and new technologies as a result of those meetings. As for my role and position, I established long standing relationships with many clients and still interact with them today. We have several of our employees working remotely and on-site at several large clients, most of whom were advisory members, I handle all paperwork including background checks and drug tests for their HR departments.

**Human Resources Assistant / Benefits Administrator**

Transferring into the HR role as an assistant and benefits administrator was more of a learning role. I absorbed as much information as I could involving human resource management with a main focus on business insurance and employee benefits. I enrolled and completed several training seminars on the aspects of HR and employment laws. My HR training was step-by-step with focus on one specialty at a time. As I developed a clear understanding of that discipline, I gained ownership of that area.

Working as an HR assistant I was primarily responsible for the business insurance needs of both companies, primarily workers compensation insurance. Having twelve remote auto body locations can be challenging in regards to workers injuries. In the body shop industry injuries range from eye injuries to burns to back strains from lifting a car hood improperly. I was the first contact when an injury occurred. The general manager would contact me to discuss the next steps and reporting functions. I was responsible for
keeping all locations compliant with employee injuries and workers compensation laws. This was not an easy task with twelve remote locations. I would find out about some injuries when I received a hospital bill three weeks later. I was tasked with getting the shops on board with proper reporting procedures. I tried several ways to communicate and to get the general managers to understand how serious this was and I was not getting anywhere which was quite frustrating.

At the time I had completed the Nyman’s Group’s Power Presentation Skills seminar and Power Communication for Effective Leadership which gave me the idea to present to the general managers as a group to show how workers injuries affected their bottom line. I invited all general managers to corporate and presented them with a PowerPoint explaining how our insurance premiums were calculated and how injuries affected our premiums which in turn hurt the manager’s gross profit margins. This presentation was extremely effective and since we have had full compliance of our general managers. We have since implemented a safety team at each location at the request of our managers to help lower premium costs. Included as an artifact is the work comp presentation (Artifact #). Getting the managers on board was a trying experience but I kept at it and in the end I was able to lead them in the right direction for both our employees and company.

When I took on the role of benefits administrator we were in the process of changing our health care providers. The changing of our providers I believe was actually beneficial for me in establishing credibility with employees. I was involved in the process from the beginning. I had been invited to the decision making meeting and was able to give my vote of provider. Once the decision was made, I decided the best way to handle
the body shops were to visit each one explaining the new benefits and guide them if they had any questions. This went a long way with the employees, I have learned that the body shop employees respect you more when you give them the time to hear them out and explain things to them. The shops and employees went through growing pains, they were accustomed to working as small independent entities.

In addition to visiting the shop locations to explain the new benefits for all employees I also took the chance to train the CSR’s on how to complete the health benefit forms the proper way. Each shop location has a customer service representative who handles the front desk greeting all customers, they are also HR’s liaison between the shop and corporate. With twelve remote locations it is impossible to visit the locations when we have a new hire or a termination. Therefore, the CSR’s have all been trained to complete the proper paperwork and forward to my attention. I made each CSR responsible for their location thereby empowering them to complete the task. This has worked very well with the CSR’s, in the past I had been sending incomplete forms back to them which was unproductive for both parties. I have since expanded the CSR’s role and have trained them and implemented an HR Binder with procedures and checklists for hiring new employees, transferring employees from one location to another, terminating employees, how to handle injuries, employee benefits completion and OSHA respirator procedures. Each CSR is trained at hire by me and given an HR binder to use as reference, this practical tool has benefited both myself and the CSR’s. Included as artifacts is the procedures and communication to CSR’s (Artifacts #).

In 2007, we needed to expand our office again. I was tasked with how to do this and where, without having to move out of our current location. I started meeting with
each department head to again learn how their departments were working within our space and what if any needs or changes did they have. In meeting with all departments, I discovered our information technology department needed more space and would prefer a quieter remote location in which they could utilize a “war room” to hash out new ideas and new technology. We made the decision to move the information technology department and sales and marketing departments downstairs expanding our space for our core operations on our main floor. This move was much easier than the last; I met with the architects and had them give me a layout utilizing the new space. New units were installed cutting down the expense of having to dismantle and reinstall. Both departments are very happy with their new space and the IT department has been very productive with their newly designed “war room” space. Included as artifacts are communication from me to department heads advising of the move and the coordination (Artifacts #).

**Human Resources Assistant Manager**

Human Resources involve an immeasurable number of factors and every day can be faced with a new challenge. The Human Resources department is primarily responsible for establishing the culture of our company and doing what is right for the employees while ensuring adherence to the goals of the company. In our HR capacities, we proactively enable our employees to contribute to the success and goals of the company. Working in HR, I am responsible for the mentoring, coaching and guidance of employees to lead them to perform to the best of their abilities and possible advancement. I have coordinated training and educational courses for our employees to participate in and have encouraged employees to continue with their education levels. We have partnered with Bucks County Community College and have offered business writing
classes and customer service classes to our employees. I have also coordinated a meeting with LaSalle University for employees to learn about options in returning to school.

Our HR department proactively rewards our employees and I am always looking for new and creative ways to motivate our employees. We have a large pool of employees that have been employed for ten, fifteen and twenty plus years. I have instituted the ten year, fifteen year, and twenty year anniversary incentives for our employees. When an employee reaches ten years they are invited to lunch with the CEO, W. and all key members they have interacted with over the years. For example if an employee has transferred from one department to another both managers are invited to the luncheon to celebrate the employee’s accomplishments over the ten years. Ten year employees also receive a one hundred dollar American Express gift card and a crystal plaque marking their service with the company. Fifteen year anniversary employees are invited to a lunch in the boardroom with the CEO and executive team to celebrate their fifteen years and name added to our wall of fame collection that hangs in our boardroom for all clients and visitors to view. Fifteen year employees receive a five hundred dollar award in their anniversary year. Twenty year employees are invited to a luncheon with their department and CEO and receive a thousand dollar award bonus for outstanding loyalty with the company.

Our primary goal in HR is retain our employees. We have invested in training new hires to successfully complete six weeks of training before being released on the floor. We also invest in continuing training and advancing skill sets to advance our current pool of employees. Leaders can make a difference when they are focused on creating and maintaining a productive and happy workforce, this is what my team and I
strive for within our company. When the recession hit, HR and our executive team decided we would do our best to not have layoffs and let natural progression run its course. Our goal was to cultivate the skills of our employees and offer incentives for hard work, loyalty, dedication and team spirit. Our employees pulled off excellent customer service levels and exceeded our expectations. While we instituted a wage freeze during this time, my team found creative ways to reward employees such as the anniversary incentives, competitive sessions such as ping pong tournaments in our employee game room, employee barbecue’s in the summer with managers sitting in dunk tanks and having pies thrown at them, soft pretzel days and ice cream and water ice breaks. Awarding employees with games, competitions, treats and giving out comp time for excellent customer service kept our employees happy and stimulated during tough financial times. We have viewed this time as extremely successful for my team as we spent very little money and kept the majority of employees engaged.

Expanding in my HR role to the Assistant Manager came with new responsibilities. I am responsible for the supervision of the body shop CSR’s as they relate to HR and the newly hired benefits administrator, Karen to the team. Supervising the CSR’s has become more straightforward with the HR binder and training they receive at hire. The CSR’s have really embraced their new role from greeting customers to having primary responsibility of new hires and HR paperwork. I have learned by making myself more accessible to the shops and CSR’s they have actually needed my guidance less. Included as artifacts is a presentation given to all CSR’s explaining their expanded role within the company (Artifacts #).

With the company growing and adding additional shop locations the decision was
made to hire a benefits administrator to the team. Karen was hired in 2008 from our core operations department. Hiring within the company for the position was extremely beneficial. Karen came into HR with an understanding of what the employees needs were and how to relate to them. I successfully trained Karen on all employee benefits one-by-one. Once Karen gained insight and direction on each level of benefits she gained full ownership. Today, Karen handles the benefits for both companies with little to no support from me. I am still actively involved in the decision making process with new providers. Karen reports to me daily and keeps me informed of any issues or conflicts I need to be aware of. Karen also interacts with the shops and has assisted with the training of new CSR’s. I have learned that supervising does not need to be micro-managing when you have the right people on your team. Learning to properly train Karen and the CSR’s was a big task, by providing them with procedures they have the tools necessary to complete the task. I keep communication lines open with each location and check in to see if anyone is having any problems. Included as artifacts are emails and communication to support my role (Artifacts #).
**HR Turn-Key Operations for Body Shop Acquisitions**

As assistant manager of HR, I am responsible for the Turn-Key Operations when new body shops have been acquired. When the managing partners have completed an acquisition each department manager is responsible to ensure a smooth transition of the original employees to our company. Typically when we purchase new locations we offer to keep any employee that is interested in working with our company. I am responsible to be present at the new shop on day one of ownership. I meet with all employees to answer any questions or concerns they may have and make them feel welcomed with our company. I go through the new hire paperwork transitioning their pay to our system, explain our company guidelines and policies and review our company benefits. Transferring employees are eligible to come on our company benefits on day one. I have been involved with two successful acquisitions. Included as artifacts are the Turn-Key procedures and emails (Artifacts #).

**Leader in Employment Law Compliance**

A primary responsibility I have is keeping both companies and my team up to date on all employment law implementations and changes. Working as an HR professional means understanding the employment laws and how they affect your company. When a new law is added or is changed I research the law and provide my team with the necessary information to implement any changes. I am ultimately responsible for any changes and implementations and follow up with all team members answering any questions they have. I have attended several seminars to keep up to date and apprised of all changes to keep my company out of harms way. I have included as
artifacts supporting documentation and communication (Artifacts #).

Listed below is a sampling of changes and additions I have implemented:

- 2009 Revised Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification
- Affordable Care Act reporting of health value on W-2
- 2010 HIPAA Privacy & Security Changes
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
- Cobra Coverage Expansion
- Cobra Tax Credits for employers
- Cobra Subsidy and UI Extension Signed Into Law March 2010
- 2009 CHIPRA Law
- Age 26 dependent coverage
- Philadelphia New Employment Application Rules

**Employee Issues and Conflict Resolution**

Working in HR you are faced with employee issues and conflicts on a daily basis. I am responsible for investigating employee’s conflicts and specifically harassment claims. I have investigated several sexual harassment claims of male to female, female to male and male to male claims.

Recently, our Chief Operating Officer with Cm had to resolve an employee harassment lawsuit for a harassment complaint in 2010. I had conducted an investigation of a shop employee who complained he was being verbally harassed and bullied by his general manager. At the beginning of the claim the employee had requested to be transferred to our larger body shop which is a fifteen minute travel closer to his home. The employee had requested the transfer to increase his skills and learn more. I had
approved his transfer immediately at his request and started my investigation. During my investigation it was uncovered that the general manager was indeed harassing the employee and had a substance abuse problem. After a very thorough and intense investigation I reported back to the executive team my suggested course of action was to approve the claimant’s request for transfer and training. In addition due to the general manager’s admittance of substance abuse and his prior stellar performance I wanted to offer the general manager assistance to receive rehabilitation. The executive team agreed with my decision. Shortly after the claimant had transferred he terminated his employment. The general manager refused to seek treatment and therefore terminated his employment. This was disheartening.

In 2012, we received word the claimant had filed lawsuit against the company. JT, COO, answered the lawsuit and it went before a mediator. The claimant won an award of fifty thousand dollars. The mediator informed Jim that while this was one of the most thoroughly investigated claims he had seen and felt we had done everything right by the claimant the lawsuit would have cost more to fight in court. This was a defeated moment for me and a learning experience. I felt I had lost due to the financial settlement, but have come to realize had I not completed my investigation the company would have had to pay out a much larger figure. My HR role is to provide the leadership to support the company’s policies and guidelines and to defend the rights of the employees as it relates to the company’s policies and guidelines. Included as artifacts is the completed investigation and supporting documentation (Artifact #).

**HR Online and Performance Management**

As the assistant manager in HR I am responsible for ensuring all employees
receive a fair and just evaluation. All managers are required to submit their team’s
evaluations to me for HR approval and possible merit increase. I had started to notice that
the evaluations we were receiving back had become fragmented, the managers were
not providing any comments to the employees regarding their performance and how to
improve. They were not listing any goals for the employee to meet in the next year. The
evaluation system had simply become a score with no direction to the employee. In 2010,
I was tasked with recreating our employee evaluation system establishing a more
straightforward method and an effective system. Our manager and team leaders were
complaining that the current process was long and tedious and they did not feel they were
providing the employees with any valuable feedback. In addition to creating a new and
effective system, I needed to motivate our managers to properly complete and deliver a
constructive assessment to their employees regarding performance and job expectations.

Performance evaluation systems are established to support continuous
organizational and individual development and improvement. They are typically
conducted as a developmental tool to motivate and mentor employees for personal
growth and progression within the company. Well-designed evaluations have the
potential to motivate and develop staff, provide planning tools for staffing purposes,
communicate goals and feedback between employees and managers and serve as the
reason for promotions, transfers or termination.

Effective managers lead by example and have the talent to inspire their
employees, develop their employees’ skill sets and drive results through their abilities.
Managers should use the tool of the evaluation to develop and improve rapport with their
employees and to build on their own management skill sets. Managers should be trained
to give constructive criticism to employees and should have the aptitude to evaluate both an employee’s strengths and weaknesses. In addition, managers need to be able to deliver the evaluation to the employee promoting a channel of communication between the employee and manager to exchange ideas and points of view on job performance and opportunities for improvement. To deliver this message to our managers I held a training class to educate them on the purpose of the evaluation system and to challenge them to achieve the goals the company had set for each manager. I have restructured the evaluation process, listening to the managers and taking their suggestions into account. The new system is web based and has been simplified for the manager to complete. I have received positive feedback from all managers regarding the new system. Included as artifacts is email communication, training materials and the presentation given to all managers (Artifact #).

I have learned it is effective to continually communicate with the managers each year reminding them of the evaluation objectives and providing them with key points for completing employee evaluations. Included in my communication and presentation is the SMART goals. As described in a report from SHRM on managing employee performance, employees are usually less defensive and more likely to respond to favorable feedback that is helpful and constructive and should have performance goals that are SMART (SHRM.org). SMART goals for individual employees should align with the organizational goals and should be:
It can be very effectual for managers to utilize a performance log throughout the year making note of both positive and negative actions of the employee. With my personal experience being responsible for ensuring all employees receive a fair and just evaluation, I have instituted this process and I have received positive feedback from the managers. The managers utilize an online performance log, time stamping comments and actions of the employee throughout the year, thereby providing backup documentation to support the evaluation. The performance log is located in our web based application, HR Online which can be shared with the human resources department if an employee issue needs to be addressed during the year prior to the evaluation. I have strongly advised our managers to not only focus on the negative actions but to try and emphasize the positive actions of the employee as well. Managers should not wait until the year-end evaluation to address a negative issue with an employee. Employees need coaching and mentoring to correct their actions and managers will not do well when surprising an employee with a negative review at year-end.

Evaluations also help keep an organization out of legal trouble by providing
documentation to support a terminated employee’s performance thus defending the reason for the termination. When used correctly an evaluation system can be a preventative tool, keeping problems from escalating and providing the manager the chance to improve an employee. If used consistently, evaluation systems naturally become your first line of protection with problematic employees. They are used to document your decisions and provide proof of repeated discussions for an employee to cure and correct their actions.

Reduction in Force

During an economic downturn, employee evaluations can be resourceful in helping to determine the lowest performing employees if a reduction in force or a company layoff is likely to occur. In 2009, my company was faced with a workforce reduction due to a decline in claim count of eight percent and a decrease in net sales of four percent. This was the first time we had been faced with a reduction in force. The reduced volumes and net sales were the direct result of downsizing of our customer base and an erosion of our margins due to price competition. In order to keep our costs in line with our claims, revenue and net sales, we needed to reduce our direct operating expense though a workforce reduction. An eight percent reduction in workforce headcount resulted in the loss of eighteen employees. We lost a few employees to retirement and natural turnover.

My team needed to determine the key employee skill sets we needed to retain and to establish the criteria needed to determine which employees would be subject to the workforce reduction. We knew we would need solid, dependable performers with consistent schedule adherence and the ability to move within the departments to remain
strong in more volatile economic conditions. The criteria we utilized in deciding which associates included the last two performance evaluations they received, their attendance and schedule adherence history, and the diversity of skill sets they possessed to work across departments. Once we had established which employees would be subjected to the reduction in force, we needed to establish what we could do for the employees that were losing their jobs, lessening their hardship. Each employee received a severance based on their tenure with the company. We provided one-week per year of employment. In addition, we paid out any remaining vacation time the employee had left. To assist the employees through the difficult time, we provided them with a folder of information outlining their rights to unemployment including the steps to receive unemployment and Cobra forms explaining the reduction in premium by sixty-five percent due to The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

As the assistant manager of HR, I was primarily responsible for creating a policy to establish the parameters we had decided would support the workforce reduction and to make certain no discrimination had occurred. Our labor attorney approved the criteria we had established and the guidelines to complete the workforce reduction. To prepare our managers, I conducted a meeting explaining how the reduction in force would occur, what their role was and provided situational questions and answers for the managers to review prior to each termination to prepare the manager to handle emotional responses. The managers were responsible for delivering the message to the employee and then HR would take over the meeting explaining the next steps and answer any questions the employee may have. Included as artifacts are the parameters and guidelines established (Artifacts #).
District Manager and General Manager Training

We have twelve remote locations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. This provides a logistical issue for HR. It is not possible to be present for each employee discussion or termination. In addition, due to the nature of the body shop and the crafts and skills needed to perform most tasks, we have allowed our District Managers to handle all body shop hires for all production jobs such as auto body technicians, assemblers and painters. I am the leader in my team regarding all employment law and I am responsible for ensuring our district managers and general managers do not have any discrimination issues. Each year I meet with all body shop management including district managers, general managers, production managers and assistant managers to explain employment law and how they can hurt the company if they are not aware of what laws they need to follow. I started with discrimination classes and have further expanded on hiring, firing, documenting and generally how to treat all employees fairly. I present a PowerPoint outlining employment laws to all managers each year to provide them with general knowledge of federal and state laws and to increase sensitivity to key issues. This also supports the company demonstrating their intentions are to treat all employees fairly and to prevent any negligent issues. In addition, we require the managers involve HR with specific situations including any they feel could harm the company. Included as artifact is the presentation (Artifact #).

Changing the mentality of the body shops from operating as a single body shop making their own decisions to now operating as a corporation was not an easy task. The managers had viewed the HR department as the benefits and payroll department only. When we first introduced employee guidelines and company policies the body shop
employees had defined the HR department as the enforcement department and whenever we visited a location the fear was set that we were only there to reprimand or terminate an employee. This was not the image we wanted for our HR department. To change the perception of HR we started a campaign to change how we interacted with the body shops. The first step was to visit each shop to introduce ourselves and meet all employees. We visited each location walking around and talking with the employees informally, meaning we did not pull them into the office or training room, we wanted to be viewed as non-threatening. We walked around chatting and meeting each employee and asking them if they had any concerns with the new changes. Since then we have changed how employees are reprimanded and terminated. The district managers have been trained to handle all communication with the employee, HR is present to ensure the district manager does not say anything to hurt the company and to ease any concerns the employee may have in regards to payroll, benefits and unemployment. We needed to establish that employees could trust HR and seek them out when they had an issue or felt harassed. I can without doubt state we have been successful with our campaign. Over the years, employees have increasingly contacted HR to discuss any issues they are having and have even recommended to new employees to contact HR if they feel they are being harassed or threatened. Our managers have also come a long way and have started to act as managers within a corporation. I continually visit each location and attend benefit meetings to help ease any concerns the employees have. We are no longer viewed as only visiting each location to terminate an employee. Included as an artifact is the communication email sent to all shops to start our campaign (Artifact #).
Identify the effective skills needed by both a leader and supervisor.

Leaders and supervisors should be knowledgeable in their respective industry, to lead a team you need to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish your goal. Furthermore, have the competency required and respect to the specific activities or projects that need to be accomplished daily. Human skills are extremely important when leading or supervising. Knowing how to communicate with people, understanding feelings and motives and having the ability to influence and direct a team.

Both a leader and a supervisor need to have the ability to get the best that each of their team members or direct reports has to offer on a consistent basis through a combination of all of their personal skills. These skills include the ability to inspire, a
strong work ethic and being a “big picture thinker”. Effective leaders and supervisors lead by example, have great communication skills and can easily adapt and evolve with the business needs and changes.

*Describe those skills that are unique to a leader and, conversely, describe the skills that are unique to a supervisor.*

The skills unique to a leader are the ability to motivate and inspire…because a leader typically does not have the supervisory responsibility, they need to gain respect and drive results through their abilities rather than their authority. A good leader knows when to push and when not to. They do not feel the need to control everything. Good leaders build teams not just reporting structures. Good leaders have confidence in themselves and in the ability of their team.

Skills unique to a supervisor include organization and patience with all those that report to them. Supervisors typically are focused on the present and maintaining the existing structure and culture of the company.

*Identify any specific skills, if applicable, that are critical for a leader in your respective industry. Also, identify skills that you believe are important for a supervisor.*

*Discuss the similarities and the differences.*

Working as a leader in human resources you need strong personal ethics. HR professionals deal with employees lives on a regular basis whether determining their salary, negotiating benefits, ensuring discrimination does not come into play when choosing the right candidate and handling employee conflicts. It is imperative to plan your actions to not have any negative consequences. HR leaders need to think strategically and always be a step ahead with a plan for the future.
A critical skill for a leader in HR is the ability to manage themselves and have social awareness. Handling relationships with others, whether employees or management is fundamental to any HR role. Human resource professionals walk a line between the goals of the company and what is best for the employees, working to balance the needs for both.

An HR supervisor would have to possess many of the same attributes as a leader but typically is not involved in the strategic aspects of the organization and employee conflicts. An HR supervisor is more concerned with the present, what is happening in the organization today and does not need to think about the future.

**How can a new leader help move the vision and the mission of the organization forward? How would that differ for a seasoned leader?**

A new leader can move the vision and mission of an organization through the infusion of new ideas and a re-focus on teamwork and results. A new leader can initiate things like a corporate rebranding in order to infuse a new fresh look and feel into the
organization. A seasoned leader may rely more on their experience and add new talent to the organization that they relied on through previous successes in their career to move the organization forward more quickly.

*How can a supervisor help the organization achieve its mission and vision?*

A supervisor can help the organization achieve its mission and vision through not only solid performance of their team, but through ensuring that their team works well with the other teams in the organization. Avoiding the “hero mentality” and working within your team and amongst other teams is a key way that a supervisor can help an organization be successful.

*When discussing leadership, much attention is focused regarding thinking and acting strategically. Based on what you have learned and absorbed in your prior work experience, discuss how, in your current role, you (now) think and act more strategically than previously.*

In my current role it is important to recognize the interconnectivity of different parts of the company and how each strategy undertaken and each decision made impacts every aspect of the organization. As I have gained more experience, I realize that having a plan is critical to success. It is also important to communicate that plan to the team in a way that they understand their role, feel part of the process and know that if the desired results are achieved that they had a role in the organizations success.

In my work experience as an HR manager strategic planning is part of my everyday work day. Staying on top of our staffing needs and hiring the most qualified individuals for openings within the organization take planning and execution. Proper job postings must be set up, interviews must be arranged and discussions must take place.
Every action plan I devise must be strategized to make sure it is in lockstep with the set company goals and vision.

*Based on your experience, do certain characteristics and traits make a greater impact than others on a person’s leadership style?*

Leaders like anyone else will develop a leadership style that directly reflects their personality. A leader that is competent, honest, forward thinking and has the ability to communicate with others will become respected. Someone who does not possess the traits will struggle to gain respect in the workplace.

I believe two traits that have a profound impact on a person’s leadership style are their work ethic and their respect for those with whom they work. Traits and characteristics such as intelligence, fairness and an even-keel demeanor are all important…but if a leader does not show respect to those he or she depends on, and does not put in the hours required to get the job done, the other characteristics are rendered moot.

*Discuss how a leader can help empower others to reach organizational goals.*

*Describe (or contrast) how a supervisor can help empower others to reach organizational goals?*

A leader can empower others by identifying what their teammates do well and putting them in positions to execute upon their strengths. A good leader encourages his or her staff to unleash their potentials so that they can become outstanding employees, responsible managers and one day a good leader themselves. Leaders resist the urge to look for credit and understand that any and all credit deserved will come through the achievement of the stated goals.
A supervisor can empower their team by identifying areas of decision making autonomy that can be turned over to team members that have earned it. You want your team to know that every day is important and each day you have a chance to make a significant impact on the organization.
*What role does culture play in both effective leadership and supervision?*

Culture plays a critical role in effective leadership and supervision as it is a company’s culture that sets the first set of boundaries and guidelines on what is and is not acceptable. Corporate culture describes and governs the ways a company’s owners and employees think, feel and act. In order to help a company foster an environment that champions employee growth and creativity, an effective leader should be keenly aware of the corporate culture within the organization.

Without the right workplace culture, talent cannot be continually refreshed and sustained. Corporate culture is what makes an organization tick. An “open door” culture that encourages free thinking yet drives accountability can present a leader or supervisor with an environment that encourages growth and improvement.
What challenges do leaders face when managing teams?

The challenges faced when managing teams are many. They include but are certainly not limited to diverse skill sets and personalities within your team, challenges presented by the culture of the organization, business challenges including overall business performance, technology challenges and keeping team members motivated and invested in the work.

From your prior experience, what one or two emerging issues either internally or externally will impact your ability to lead in the future?

Two emerging issues that impact one’s ability to lead are the differences in the generations of the workforce, and the economic environment in which we are all operating. The newest generation of workers present unique opportunities and challenges that includes their reliance/comfort with technology, and the “instant gratification” culture in which we all live, but one in which they were raised. The economic realities that we are now presented with appear to be here for some time to come – this drives a “do more with less” mentality throughout almost every business that places increased importance on leadership.

Describe how your personal leadership characteristics have evolved throughout all of your prior work experiences.

My personal leadership characteristics have evolved greatly over the past ten years, mainly in my approach to challenging situations, and in my overall patience level. I try to adopt the “never get too low, or too high” theory when managing through both bad times and good in order to stay consistent and provide a calming influence to those that I lead. I also employ a significantly greater level of patience when dealing with both business and personal challenges. I have become more analytical and strategic than I use
to be. I use to set a goal and strive to achieve it at all costs, now I am more reflective about the actions and best course to achieve the goal.

In summary, how have your supervision and leadership skills changed and evolved from your first supervisory position to today.

It took time to develop the necessary skills to lead a team. At first, I felt it was my job to roll up my sleeves, get in the trenches and show everyone “how” things should be done. The only thing that got me was more work. As I gained more experience, I realized it was necessary to use that energy to properly train and mentor. No one was ever going to learn from me always doing the work and not providing the proper guidance.

The main way in which my leadership skills have evolved is in my ability to get the most out of those that work on my teams. Every person you work with has a different skill set, different strengths, and different personalities. It is critical for a leader to recognize what people are capable of giving, and ensuring that they get every bit of that from them through their management style. Holding others to your own personal standards and expecting things that one cannot give are aspects of leadership that create more problems than they do solutions.

As the years have passed, the challenges have definitely changed. As an effective leader, I must recognize the new circumstances and challenges and move quickly to manage them effectively.

Section Two - Nyman Group Keys to Effective Team Leadership

Introduction

When my role changed in HR to assistant manager, I was no longer managing just a process. I attended a series of workshops the company had offered through their partnership with The Nyman Group. The Nyman Group workshops assisted me in
becoming a more equipped leader. My goal was not just to get the present job and task at hand done by leading or directing. My new role is to inspire and motivate employees, to mentor and cultivate skills and to be able to communicate solutions and not just the problem.

**Persuasion: The Language of Business Leadership**

During the persuasion model I learned the difference between persuasion and coercion and that successful leaders use language and the influence of interpersonal skills to motivate employees, express vision and strategy, adapt to challenging environments and how to critique an employee without using criticism. Learning how to use communication styles to change attitude and behavior and to discuss with an employee a different way of handling a task was key for my HR training. People in general do not react well to criticism, they become defensive and often leave resenting the person delivering the criticism. A persuasive leader is knowledgeable on the topic they are speaking to and is empathetic and trustworthy. As a leader attempting to change behavior I have found focusing and offering solutions and opportunities to change rather than focusing on the problems and reasons lends to my credibility and knowledge of the topic.

As an example, when delivering my message to the general managers at the body shop in regards to employee injuries, I used persuasion to appeal to them and to get their attention. I have found when you explain how something can affect the bottom line of profits and then remind them we want to promote a safe working environment I was able to get my message across clearly. If I had intended to tell the general managers that they were not doing their jobs correctly they would have shut down on me and the meeting would have been unproductive.

**Leading Through Conflict**

Conflict by its very nature is part of the dynamics of any organization. Conflict is inevitable, it is due to different goals and objectives, differing opinions and ideas. Uncontrolled conflict and unchecked emotions within the workplace can cause stress, low
morale, poor productivity, tainted working relationships, higher turnover and employee burnout. Emotional intelligence is fundamental when dealing with conflict in the workplace. Conflict can also be positive to an organization, it can stimulate creativity and can help a company grow. As Daniel Goleman states to possess conflict management skills a person should be able to handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy and tact; spot potential conflict, bring disagreements into the open, and help de-escalate; encourage debate and open discussion; and orchestrate win-win solutions (Goleman, 178).

Learning how to lead through conflict has been benefited me on a daily basis within human resources. Issues surrounding conflict whether between two employees or a manager and employee generally find there way to the HR department. My role in conflict situations is to listen to both sides trying to manage the emotions of all parties and to assist in both parties reaching a mutually agreeable solution. When a conflict arises between two employees I will typically meet with each employee individually to discuss each persons specific conflict and what expectations they expect from the outcome or other party. In the end both parties will need to meet together if they can move forward in their working relationship. It is not necessary for people to like each other, in the workplace we do need employees to respect each other and have a willingness to work together. When trying to get two parties to reach an agreeable solution it is usually best to get the parties to forget determining who is at fault and accept the fact that there is a difference and they need to agree to work towards an agreeable solution.

It is not uncommon to have one employee bring a conflict to me that the other employee is not aware exists, or a manager is not aware there is a problem. My job is to listen to the employee’s problem, ask them their expectations, and determine if HR needs to be involved or suggest ways for the employee to resolve the issue by talking honestly with the other party. I have had situations where an employee will bring an issue they have with their direct supervisor and they are expecting HR to resolve the situation. Typically after hearing the employee’s issue, I will talk with the manager to find out their translation
of the problem and bring both parties together to reach an understanding. I follow-up with both parties to make sure things are progressing in the right direction.

It is important for me to remember I am not the judge and jury when dealing with issues. It is also just as important for employees to know I do not just side with management. I am ultimately responsible to ensure all parties are treated fairly and to make sure both sides have a voice. People are going to have bad days, they do not always communicate properly and typically react to situations wrongly when they feel they are being unfairly treated. As a leader in HR, my role is to be accessible and provide both employees and managers the environment necessary to effectively reach solutions.

**Coaching, Counseling & Giving Feedback**

Coaching and counseling skills are vital leadership tools. In a leadership position, your ultimate objective is to motivate others to get the job done to the best of their ability. Employees need coaching and mentoring to improve performance and advance in their career. These skills are necessary to complete and deliver performance evaluations and feedback to employees.

The Nyman training series involving coaching, counseling and feedback has benefited me when training managers on the completion of the evaluations each year. HR and managers are expected to give feedback in a positive and constructive way. My Nyman training taught the three-step process for giving feedback which I have applied and recommend to the managers:
✓ Step One: Set Realistic Goals and Expectations
✓ Step Two: Be Immediate
✓ Step Three: Be Specific  (The Nyman Group)

If an employee is not aware of the expectations of the job from the beginning, any feedback would be considered unfair criticism. It is in the interest of the manager to involve the employee in setting goals and getting the employee to agree to the goals. When fault needs to be addressed with the employee, the employee will be less likely defensive because they agreed to the goal from the beginning. Feedback should be conveyed to the employee whether positive or negative as close to the actual event as possible.

Feedback should always be specific and should include ways to solve the problem or issue. Using the IMPACT formula for feedback has been very effective when training managers on the completion of performance evaluations. I have also applied this formula when coaching managers prior to them having a discussion with an employee. Typically, when an employee needs to be addressed about an issue the manager handles it directly with the employee after they have discussed it with HR. I am present for more serious matters or matters that have continually declined, but most times the manager does the warning with the employee and I am present as a backup or to answer any concerns after the fact. The IMPACT formula is useful when dealing with delicate issues such as inappropriate attire and multicultural challenges. I have an employee who is from India and she has a very strong work ethic and expects everyone to have the same work ethic. If she finds a mistake another employee made she will criticize the employee. I have had to counsel her on how she converses with other employees.
Conclusion and Personal Summary

The entire series of training from The Nyman Group has enhanced my skills necessary to lead in different areas, whether I am handling a personnel issue or explaining to managers how to effectively utilize the performance management tool. I have learned better organization skills and delegation skills. The objectives I have gained from the leadership training have included conducting and creating a more effective performance evaluation system, training management on how to complete an effective evaluation and how to conduct the meeting with the employee, role playing scenarios to handle issues with employee, coaching and mentoring employees and management, and learning how to give constructive feedback.

The number one reason employees leave their job is they do not like or respect their supervisor or manager. My role as an HR leader is to remind our managers and supervisors to acknowledge when an employee should be rewarded whether a milestone anniversary or they have received a positive feedback call from a client. When managers
wait for an annual review to list the positive events of the year the momentum is over and there is no effect.

In today’s working world we have had to learn how to handle cross-generational differences and learn how to apply motivators across the generations. With the influx of N-Gens/Nexters I have personally found they need more flexibility and do not want to be micro-managed. Understanding cross-generational differences are vital skills for a leadership position.

My leadership skills have greatly evolved over the years. I used to be shocked by employees and managers and my expectations were much higher for most people. I have learned that it is human nature to act out at times and each situation cannot be controlled. People need to be reminded of how to do things and how to act properly, they start to slip when they become too comfortable. I have become less narrow-minded and more accommodating. I look at the bigger picture and the good of the whole. Being a leader is knowing when and how to motivate and inspire people.

The ability to manage myself is critical to my job. For instance, being part of the HR team requires a tremendous amount of trustworthiness. Employees confide in me and entrust me with personal information, making it necessary for me to adhere to the values of honor and integrity. I believe in consistently treating all people fairly and with respect. At the end of the day if you can say you treated everyone fair, you had a good day. A leader does not come in at the end and save the day – they are present at the beginning, directing and motivating, cultivating skills and working hard with their team to accomplish the end goal.

Since returning to school to receive my degree in human resources, I have been promoted to Human Resource Manager and have been included in the company’s
strategic planning session. Attending the strategic planning session in February was enlightening for me. I was able to see how each team and each goal can affect the other. I was able to pull “it” all together. I am responsible for the business initiative of operational growth and expansion. As new clients come on board with my company I need to be prepared to handle the operational needs by having the staff in place. I am also on the team of the business initiative to develop, retain, and attract employees. I have been given the initiative to provide incentives with our health insurance and work on getting employees to become more consumer driven. Our goal is to empower our employees and make them more accountable for their own health care and how their money is spent.

Completing this PLA compared to the first one on Human Resource Practices was challenging and demanding. I would like to thank all involved in this process, in particular Sharon Harris, Director of Student Services for allowing me the chance to complete two ambitious PLA’s and for Professor Joe Bucci for guiding me through the process.
Works Cited


<http://Cm.com/>.


Prior Learning Assessment 181

Fire Safety

Philadelphia University
Accelerated
Bachelor of Science Degree
Leadership in Emergency Services

By: Steve D. Edwards
Requested Information to satisfy credit for PLA 181 Fire Safety

Scope and content of the training program
“The purpose of the training program is to identify emergency service personnel who demonstrate competency in the performance requirements necessary to perform the duties of a firefighter. The NFPA 1001 Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications identifies the minimum requirements for a person at the first level of progression. A person certified at the Fire Fighter I level will have demonstrated competency in the necessary knowledge and skills, while working under direct supervision, to function safely and effectively as a member of a firefighting team.”
(http://www.osfc.state.pa.us/osfc/cwp/view.asp?a=355&q=269881)

The training program I completed was designed to identify and recognize emergency service personnel whose accomplishments in training and education met or exceeded nationally recognized standards. The NFPA standards for Fire Service Professional Qualifications identify the minimum requirements for a person at a particular level of progression. Please see the attached for a more detailed course description from the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy.

Dates of participation in the training
I attended training on Tuesday evenings and one weekend per month for approximately four months at the Delaware County Emergency Services Training Center. My training concluded on April 21, 1998. The Tuesday meeting consisted of class training and the weekend meeting would involve our “live training”. This training would include working with ground ladders, ropes and knots, forcible entry tools, etc. The classroom time would consist of lecture and general course material.

Date of graduation
I received my certificate on April 21, 1998. I received my certificate upon completion of the “live burn” exercise. The live burn entailed a real life structure fire in the training center burn tower. I had to show that I had a general understanding of the skills that are necessary to advance a charged attack line into a structure fire while wearing Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (S.C.B.A) and be able to perform an initial or indirect attack and suppress a room in contents fire. Although I was in a controlled burn setting, I experienced a structure fire and was given a baseline and general understanding of fire progression and behavior.

Name and contact information of individual who can provide additional verification and information
Scott Lefferts
610-585-**** (H)
610-626-**** (C)

Past Chief 2001-2003
Collingdale Fire Company #1
501 Bedford Ave
Collingdale, Pa 19023
**Reflections and First Impressions**

I can remember when I decided to joined the fire service. It was the fall of 1997. At the time, my sister was dating and soon marrying a volunteer fireman with the Collingdale Fire Company. He would ask me from time to time if I would ever consider becoming a volunteer. I never gave it a thought until one day I decided that I would just give the volunteer thing a chance. I joined and I was instantly hooked on the fire service and never looked back. I have been involved in the fire service now for over a decade and I’m enjoying every minute of it. I love what I do and now it’s become a part of who I am and my children are having a lot of fun with it as well.

I have learned about myself and who I am as a person. The structure has taught me self discipline and how to be a professional. I have gained a sense of what life really has to offer, by devoting my time to a volunteer organization. I feel good knowing that I’m contributing to the community and I’m also giving something back to society. It wasn’t easy the first time I stepped into the fire house as a “probie”. It was new unexplored territory for me. I really had no idea what to expect. My brother-in-law gave me a rundown of what to expect during the first few months. I didn’t receive any preferential treatment, which I didn’t expect. I wanted to gain respect of the fire company on my own and without anyone’s help. I preferred it that way. I had no problems making friends and getting to know people that were already established in the company. I was the new guy, so I had to start from the bottom and work my way up. Needless to say, I have reached that social status within the fire house. I am no longer with that company since I have moved out of that particular area. But, I do still have friends there and will keep in touch from time to time. I’m now an active member of Springfield Fire Company and ironically Springfield is assigned as Rapid Intervention Team (R.I.T) on all structure fire alarm responses in Collingdale.

I think back to when I was going through fire school. It was very overwhelming and I had no idea how physically demanding the job was. You’re working with heavy equipment in the worst conditions. It was ok during the cold months, when you appreciate the warmth of your firefighter turn out gear. During training, the cadets were exposed to every possible situation the fire service encounters. The training would range from a motor vehicle accident to a confined space rescue. It was fun crawling through concrete tubes that only had enough room to accommodate one fire fighter wearing SCBA. Fire school is not the only training that I have received. I have many other certificates of training. The fire service is always training to keep up with the changing times. There are more hazards to prepare for since the 9/11 attacks on America. Now, domestic terrorism has become a buzz word, and the fire service has to be prepared to handle acts of terrorism. The fire service takes an “all hazards” approach when managing situations. We have to be prepared to handle almost anything. And if we cannot handle the incident, we rely on mutual aide and other resources that are available to us.
One of the most important things the fire service considers is personal safety and the safety to the citizens we protect and serve. Besides the protection of life and property from the destruction of fire and other causes, we have a strong commitment to our own personal safety. My safety is my first priority, along with my fellow brothers. I have written an informative paper on fire safety and have included some of my personal thoughts and startling facts about fire fighter injuries and L.O.D.D. (Line of Duty Deaths). Some of the statistics are troubling but, awareness needs to be raised to possibly prevent untimely deaths and avoidable injuries.

In closing, I will continue volunteering and helping out those in their time of need. I hope to use the knowledge gained from my studies and incorporate it into the volunteer work that I’m doing. I will also use my skills and training learned and will utilize those resources during my academic career. The discipline has helped me tremendously and has helped set the stage for my academic future. I will model all of this skill sets, use it to my advantage and excel in whatever I choose to do in my professional career. I will set the standards high, keep my priorities straight, will not forget where I came from and that my family will always be the supporting foundation in all that I do.

"Ad Serviendum Dedicatus"
(Dedicated to Serving)

Fire Service Terminology
Alarm: (1) system for detecting and reporting unusual conditions, such as smoke, fire, flood, loss of air, HAZMAT release, etc; (2) centralized dispatch center for interpreting alarms and dispatching resources. See fire alarm control panel.

Fire Behavior: The manner in which a fire reacts to fuel, weather, and topography. Common terms used to describe behavior include: smoldering, creeping, running, spotting, torching, and crowning.

Fuel Load: The amount of available and potentially combustible material, usually expressed as tons/acre.

FAST (or F.A.S.T.): Firefighter Assist and Search Team (also called Rapid Entry Team or Rapid Intervention Team) — firefighters assigned to stand by for rescue of other firefighters inside a structure; an implementation to support the Two-in, two-out rule; may have specialized training, experience and tools.

Firefighter: People who respond to fire alarms and other emergencies for fire suppression, rescue, and related duties. Formerly called "firemen", but modern term includes women as well.

Fireground: The operational area at the scene of a fire; area in which incident commander is in control. Also used as name of radio frequency to be used by units operating in the fireground, as in “Responding units switch to fireground.”

Fire prevention: Fire safety; standards for minimizing fire hazards.

Fire tetrahedron: The fire tetrahedron is based on the components of igniting or extinguishing a fire. Each component represents a property necessary to sustain fire: fuel, oxygen, heat, and chemical chain reaction. Extinguishment is based upon removing or hindering any one of these properties.

Forcible entry: gaining entry to an area using force to disable or bypass security devices, typically using force tools, sometimes using tools specialized for entry (e.g., Halligan, K-tool).

Hazard: a source of danger of personal injury or property damage; fire hazard refers to conditions that may result in fire or explosion, or may increase spread of an accidental fire, or prevent escape from fire. Under worker safety and health regulations, employers have a general duty to provide a workplace free of hazards. See also fire prevention, and HAZMAT.

Incident Commander: The officer in charge of all activities at an incident. See Incident Command System.

Incident Safety Officer: The officer in charge of scene safety at an incident. See Incident Command System.
**Initial attack**: First point of attack on a fire where hose lines or fuel separation are used to prevent further extension of the fire.

**Indirect attack**: Method of firefighting in which water is pumped onto materials above or near the fire so that the splash rains onto the fire, often used where a structure is unsafe to enter.

**Mutual aid**: An agreement between nearby fire companies to assist each other during emergencies by responding with available manpower and apparatus.

**NFPA**: The National Fire Protection Association, which sets a number of standards for firefighting, equipment, and fire protection in the United States, and also adopted in many other countries.

**Pre-planning**: Fire protection strategy involving visits to potentially hazardous occupancies for inspection, follow-up analysis and recommendations for actions to be taken in case of specific

"**Probie**": (also rookie) new firefighter on employment probation (a period of time during which his or her skills are improved, honed, tested, and evaluated).

**Size-up**: initial evaluation of an incident, in particular a determination of immediate hazards to responders, other lives and property, and what additional resources may be needed. Example: "Two-story brick taxpayer with heavy smoke showing from rear wooden porches and children reported trapped."

**Standard operating procedure, guideline**: Rules for the operation of a fire department, such as how to respond to various types of emergencies, training requirements, use of protective equipment, radio procedures; often include local interpretations of regulations and standards.

**Volunteer fire department**: A group of part-time firefighters who may be unpaid or paid when on-call, during incidents, or drills. Often professionally trained and equipped with state-of-the-art equipment.

**Working fire**: A fire that is in the process of being suppressed; often a cue for dispatch of additional resources.
Firefighter Safety

Everyone gets out alive!
**Fire Safety**

I chose to write about the awareness of fire safety. This has a tremendous impact on responders from the professional level to the volunteer level. All levels of the public safety spectrum are affected. The types of responders include police officers, EMS, firefighters and tow-truck recovery drivers. My primary focus is on fire safety awareness when responding to a call to operations on a fire ground. I have been a volunteer firefighter/EMT for 11 years now and have enjoyed most of my career. There have been times when I have questioned myself to “why am I doing this?” and I could never come up with an answer to the question I propose to myself. It has never stopped me from getting out of bed at 2:00 am in the morning or right before I start eating dinner with my family. I love what I do and enjoy what I’m doing for the community I reside in and the fire company I represent.

I am currently a member of the Springfield Fire Company in Delaware County, PA. SFD is a volunteer fire/rescue company located 12 miles Southwest of Philadelphia, covering our own local area and providing mutual aide response to surrounding communities. We average over 1000 calls a year ranging from structure fires, vehicle fires, accidents, automatic fire alarms, assisting the public, brush fires, and Rapid Intervention runs. Our company takes a lot of pride in providing the most cutting edge fire protection and the latest technology in vehicle rescue equipment. Our mission at Springfield Fire Company is to continue to “protect the lives and property from destruction by fire and other causes, and the advancement of fire protection and fire prevention”.

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Recently in Delaware County, there have been a few fire related incidents that have resulted in the death of a few volunteer firefighters. Just this past year, September of 2007 to March of 2008, there has been two fire related deaths and two critical injuries that occurred in three separate incidents the county. Delaware County has mourned the passing of Firefighter Mike Regan from Sharon Hill and Lt. Nick Picozzi of Lower Chichester. Both men died while in the line of duty fighting a fire. Could these deaths have been preventable? No one knows. Conditions can deteriorate quickly during a structure fire. Depending on the age of the home, fire behavior, and the intensity of fire spread. Firefighting is a very dangerous profession and there are risks taken every time a firefighter rides on a piece of apparatus responding to a developing emergency.

Many of the volunteer companies have a R.I.T (Rapid Intervention Team) on a building fire response. A R.I.T is designed to reduce the risk of firefighter injuries and deaths. The teams provide rescue to fallen firefighters or reduce the severity of injuries inflicted on firefighters. The teams consist of 2 firefighters, 2 in/2 out Rapid Intervention Crew. Their goal is to enhance fire ground safety for interior firefighting personal, and to conform to state and local federal regulations. The crews use a buddy system when making a rescue or when doing a primary or secondary search for potentially lost victims. The crews operate under the R.I.T incident commander and are a separate operation from the Incident Commander. The crews will have priority with radio communications if ever activated for potential search and rescue operation. The crews are activated to perform a rescue by the I.C. (Incident Commander) or may be self activated by the R.I.T commander under the direction if the I.C. The I.C. would be notified if ever in a rescue
operation. Priority would be in effect on the fire ground for all R.I.T firefighters during a rescue operation.

Due to the recent deaths in the county, Springfield Fire Company has written and implemented our own set of operating guidelines when in service during a R.I.T incident. We are requested on a few mutual aide building fire responses in the County for the R.I.T. The commanding officers in the company found that it was necessary to have some standard operating procedures when operating in another town. The guidelines map out the response order from our station to operations on the fire ground. Our commitment to safety has led us to develop these R.I.T procedures when going into service in the event of a fallen firefighter.

These teams have given the interior firefighters an added sense of security when aggressively fighting fires. The extra safety measures that are implemented on a fire ground provide everyone operating with the same sense of safety, but accidents and lives are still lost despite the effort. Conditions can deteriorate very quickly during the early stages of a structure fire. The officers in charge during a fire have to be diligent and safety conscious during every minute when operating on the fire ground.

Firefighter injuries don’t just occur on the job. Injuries and deaths occur during training and while responding to the incident. The deaths caused while responding are usually accident related going to or returning from an incident. Volunteers have been killed while en route to the firehouse. According to national statistics from 2006, FEMA reported that there were 1,140,900 (career: 316,950, volunteer: 823,950) firefighters killed while on duty. There were 3,245 civilians that lost there lives as a result to fire and 16,400 injuries. Fire has killed more Americans than in all natural disasters combined.
These statistics are alarming and are increasing every year. Unfortunately, children playing with fire cause hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries each year. Preschoolers are most likely to start these fires, typically by playing with matches. In 1999, children playing with fire started 41,900 fires, causing an estimated 165 civilian deaths, 1900 civilian injuries and $272 million in direct property damage. Most of the people killed in child-playing fires are under 5, and such fires are the leading cause of fire related deaths among preschoolers. Children also start fires by playing with candles, stoves, fireworks and cigarettes. Usually, children who start fires are children in crisis, with fires acting as cries for help from stressful life experiences or abuse, according to the studies of fire-setting behavior. (www.firepreventionweek.org)

Education and early intervention is the only way to inform children and adults about fire safety. During the month of October, fire prevention week is practiced across the United States. Fire prevention week usually runs the second week of October and gives fire companies a chance to open their doors to the communities they serve. Many fire companies hold “open houses” and host a variety of different events. The annual open houses are held each year to coincide with National Fire Prevention Week. Springfield Fire Company holds their open house during this week and this forum allows the members of the company to get the message out about fire safety and also gives the community an opportunity come out and see the station. Many of them include fire safety programs that are geared towards children. Some of these programs include stop, drop, and roll, practicing fire drills, and what to do in a fire emergency. One of these programs involves planning a home escape plan. According to NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) survey, only one in four Americans has devised and practiced a plan to
escape from the home during a fire. While 66% of Americans have escape plan in case of fire, only 35% of those with a plan have practiced it. This year’s National Fire Prevention theme is “Prevent House fires”. Fire prevention week will run from October 5-11, 2008.

Another way of reducing firefighter injuries is to have a designated safety officer assigned to the company. This role usually includes the safety officer to be diligent and raise awareness to firefighters when operating on the fire ground. Not every incident will justify the need for a safety officer. The benefit is when companies are in service on a fire ground or using hydraulic tools for vehicle extrication. Especially, during any extended operations when fatigue may impair a fire fighters judgment for safety and potential injuries may present occur. Anytime that you may be in service using ground latter’s, dropping supply line, operating forcible entry tools, using saws, and operating in and around fire apparatus. You’re always at risk even if the proper safety measures have been implemented. The safety officer will help fire fighters avoid unnecessary injuries. Don’t get me wrong, injuries will still occur but, the frequency of injuries may be reduced.

Safety is one of my biggest concerns. I think about safety from the moment I step into my vehicle when responding to the fire house to answer a call. I prepare myself mentally for any potential challenges that I may be faced with. Every incident is different, no call is ever routine. The moment I let my guard down, is the moment that I may be injured or one of my colleagues may be injured. I’m always concerned about safety for myself and anyone who is operating around me. I have been in situations where fire fighters have been injured and things spiral out of control and utter chaos ensues, making a manageable situation unmanageable. Depending on the injury sustained, by the fire fighter. We train for almost every possible situation, but training isn’t always going to
save lives. There is always going to be a situation that will present itself and be challenging to the rescuers. Another way the fire service prepares is to properly size up an incident before we go into service. Taking the time to do a “scene size-up” will possibly prevent injuries to firefighters and civilians. Allowing commanding officers and personal to use the proper tactics and strategies when preparing how to handle an incident efficiently as it’s unfolding. As an emergency responder, I find it important to know what I will be dealing with as I’m arriving on the scene. Listening to radio reports and the delegating of jobs to personnel before arrival will ensure that we will be ready and hopefully have an added advantage when dealing with an emergency.

During the past decade, I have been a witness to many horrible events that have left emotional scars on me and often at times have made me question why I’m still doing this. I have had a lot of exposure to death and destruction that fire causes. I have seen the end results of driving while under the influence of a controlled substance or alcohol related fatalities. The end result of many of these accidents usually has a poor outcome. People make stupid decisions which result in either their death or someone else’s. I can’t tolerate people who get in their vehicles after heavy consumption of alcohol and attempt to drive. There is no excuse for this type of behavior. We live in a society that knows the devastating effects of drinking and driving. This hasn’t changed the way I feel about volunteering and helping people in their time of need. I believe this has made me a stronger person when dealing with these types of emergencies.

There are people who do appreciate what we do in the public service sector. Who would communities rely on if the there were no volunteers? I don’t expect to be rewarded
for what I’m doing and will never take praise for it. Volunteering is a choice that I have made and will continuing doing until I’m no longer able to do so. I get a lot of personal satisfaction helping out others. Safety is always my number one concern. Injuries will always present to firefighters and sometimes, death. There is no way to avoid accidents from happening to firefighters. We’re always going to be at risk and hopefully through the fire safety awareness we can reduce the number of firefighter and civilian fire related injuries and deaths.