

**Designing A Desired Future:  
An Assessment of Clerical Training in the  
52<sup>nd</sup> First Division District Court**

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Over the past several years, unreliable evidence shows that morale, skills and abilities of the clerical staff of the 52<sup>nd</sup> First Division Court in Novi, Michigan has worn, along with the court suffering a high turnover rate in this area of staffing. It is the thesis of this paper that the majority of these problems could be lessened or completely eliminated by an effective, institutionally grounded employee-training program. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of clerical employee training in the 52<sup>nd</sup> First Division District Court (MI) and makes recommendations for improvement to the current system.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> First Division District Court, located on the west side of Oakland County in the state of Michigan, is a limited jurisdiction court that employs a staff of sixty-two people. With the responsibility for processing traffic tickets, landlord/tenant filings, civil and criminal cases, thirty-one clerks manage the front counters. In the year 2001, the Traffic Division entered 40, 521 new traffic tickets into the system, the Civil Division initiated 10, 200 new civil cases, the Criminal Division had a total case filing of 57, 634 and the clerical staff of the Probation Department created 2000 new case files. Three judges and three magistrates serve a population of approximately 175,000 members of the surrounding communities (52-1 District Court Annual Report, 2002).

This study asks, “Where does the 52-1 District Court fall short in training?” The answer to this question will enable the 52-1 District Court to improve and respond directly to the specific needs of staff and offer a better work environment and the opportunity to work with greater efficiency and increased productivity. Therefore, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Confirm that the quality of training is in need of improvement;
2. Identify what aspects of training are ineffective;
3. Identify what department or particular person is having difficulties;
4. Determine if there is a problem with a particular supervisor providing training;
5. Identify what variety of training is needed or desired;
6. Determine if this problem occurs during initial training or because of the lack of in-service training; and,
7. Determine if the lack of training is affecting how the court responds to the public

In the spring of 2002, a team of court management and clerical staff developed a general operations survey and administered it to thirty-six clerical, fourteen professional and six judicial support staff of the court. From this data, the survey that is the research instrument for this project, was developed with assistance from the *Trial Court Performance Standards and Measurement System Implementation Manual* (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1997). Seven categories: Counter Training; Phone Training; Computer Training; Off Site Training; General Training; Orientation and Biography, formed the basis of the survey and the results were used to identify problem areas in training and employee morale.

The survey was pre-tested and it was then given to 31 members of the clerical staff. All 31 clerks were required to complete the survey giving it a 100% response rate. An Excel spreadsheet was developed and responses of the survey were imputed. From these results, the following recommendations for court improvement were devised:

- uniform manuals should be developed and maintained;
- a training manual development team should be created to update and maintain court manuals;
- phone training should be given to all necessary staff;
- a train-the-trainer program should be developed and implemented; and
- a computer training program should be created.

The recommendations of this study should be implemented as soon as possible and made an on-going part of this court's culture. Heavy workloads and the scarcity of time should not be excuses to postpone or stall the implementation of these recommendations. Every practical attempt to improve conditions at the court should be made by management and employees should be encouraged to take responsibility in that improvement. It is understood that it will take time to implement many of these recommendations and that to be successful, all interested parties must play a part. Management and personnel should work together as a team in developing and improving systems and keeping the lines of communication open. The poor morale, distrust of management, and high turnover rates can be a thing of the past if everyone works together for the common good. Even with the budgetary challenges this court continues to face, many of these changes and improvements need not be costly and some may cost nothing at all. But the benefits from simply attempting to improve this court environment will reap rewards for years to come. The questions have been asked, the employees have responded and now it is time to do the hard work that will inspire the 52<sup>nd</sup> First Division District Court to exceed all expectations.

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