

Your & **POLICIES** Procedures Manual



BY JAY SOMERVILLE



**THE MOST CRITICAL
TOOL IN EVERY
TELECOMMUNICATOR'S
TOOLBOX**

Too often, telecommunicators view policies and procedures as a bludgeon that communication center directors and managers use to force accountability on them when things go wrong. Many managers have heard the groans when staff find a new policy in their mailbox: “Who did it?” and “Not *another* directive from the top.” All too often, employers do view policies and procedures as the mechanism for getting employees to do things the *right* way. Certainly, doing things the right way is critical to the success of any organization. However, policies and procedures are first and foremost meant to support the employees, keep them focused on the organization’s mission and motivate them to deliver the highest level of service possible.

In reality, an effective policy and procedure manual should be a tool *every* telecommunicator demands. Policies and procedures should help telecommunicators do their jobs more efficiently and effectively, not just be “new rules” to live by. Policies and procedures should be a guide for success, not a rule book used only for enforcement and compliance.

This article outlines several best practices managers should follow to effectively implement new policies and procedures, achieve employee buy-in and compliance, and raise the overall performance of their team.

DEFINITIONS & BENEFITS

Before we go any further, let’s make sure we agree on the definitions of *policy* and *procedure*. The APCO Communications Center Supervisor course defines *policy* as a “guide to thinking.” A policy defines the anticipated results of our actions. For example, a policy in a communications center may be, “The agency will make every attempt to call back the reporting party of a nonemergency call for service if response to their concern is delayed.” This policy defines the result. It does not specifically say

when the call will be made or who is responsible for making the call. We find those answers in procedures.

The APCO Communications Center Supervisor course defines *procedure* as a “guide to action.” A procedure directs the employee on the specific tasks that must be completed to comply with the policy. The procedure for the above policy might read: “It is the responsibility of the police channel dispatcher to call back, or ask that a calltaker call back, the reporting party of any nonemergency call holding more than 20 minutes. The reporting party will be notified of the delay and given a general time

frame when they can expect the call will be dispatched. This contact will be documented in the call for service narrative.”

Policies and procedures go hand in hand. They tell staff what the agency expects and how to achieve that expectation.

Here are the top four reasons that having a comprehensive, well-implemented policy and procedure manual will benefit your staff and your agency as a whole:

1. *Consistent delivery of service.* Every citizen expects that when they hear the words, “9-1-1, where is your emergency?” that they will always receive the highest level of service

in a consistent manner. A well-implemented policy and procedure manual guides your employees on how to deliver service consistently and successfully every time they answer the phone, provide caller instructions or dispatch a responder. It can serve as a reference manual for every employee if they have questions about how to complete a task. Consistent service is professional service.

2. *Liability protection.* An important purpose of any policy or procedure is to minimize discretion

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISPATCHER INPUT IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT



By John R. Brophy

Have you ever read a new policy and thought to yourself, “What were they thinking?” or “Whoever wrote this has no idea of what we do.”? If you’ve had these kinds of thoughts or reactions to new policies and procedures, you are not alone and were likely the recipient of a policy that was written with little input from the staff and front-line supervisors who have to execute it.

Whether it’s a new policy or the revision of an existing one, clearly the people whose work is directly affected by it know the policy perhaps better than anyone else in the organization. Invariably, when a policy is written by one person or group and then reviewed by others, the second group will often see things the first person or group did not see. Whether it is something as simple as a typo or as significant as missing critical components of a process, having these deficiencies caught before final adoption and distribution is far better than the alternative.

Having a few members of the staff who must execute a policy included in its creation or revision establishes much needed buy-in and creates a sense of ownership. At the same time, it provides a positive and open environment in which their expertise can be used to build up rather than tear down a new policy. For example, when revising your

training policy, it is important to include input from the people who actually conduct the training, as well as feedback from recent trainees.

Although management sets agency policy, the fact is that the people in the comm center often see things that need to be addressed or changed long before management is even aware. Additionally, as new personnel come on board, they view how things are handled through a different lens than the people who have been “doing it this way for years.” In both cases, the value of this diverse front-line input should be embraced and encouraged. As an example, I recall participating in staff meetings a year or so ago in which both day and night personnel, independent of one another, identified the same issue as being of significance to them. Through this identification of an issue, staff input and comprehensive follow-up with key points for consideration, we were able to revise a policy that provided for improved safety of field personnel and improved operational performance.

Another important aspect of policy development is the ability of the people involved to not take questions and criticisms personally. Just as a dispatcher is trained and becomes accustomed to not taking a 9-1-1 caller’s frustration, fear and, even at times, anger personally,

so too must those who write policies and lead organizations not take offense to less than glowing feedback on their ideas. Although this is easier said than done, particularly when a lot of time and effort have gone into the policy draft, it is something that, like 9-1-1 calltaking, is vital and develops and improves over time.

In the final analysis, policy creation and revision need not always start at the top. In fact, dispatchers and floor supervisors alike often have the opportunity to see things that need to be addressed and perhaps have valid solutions for consideration. The keen awareness and observation skills of front-line comm center personnel are valuable resources that should be encouraged and harnessed for the betterment of the organization. Doing so can have a positive impact on the safety of field personnel, operational performance improvement, morale and career development of the individuals included in the process.

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at the operational level. Having a clear set of rules helps protect both the employee and the employer from civil liability. As long as the employee adheres to policies and procedures, they can expect to be insulated from most legal claims. An employer strengthens the legal protection for their employees with a well-conceived and structured policy and procedure manual. (Consider having your agency's legal counsel review new policies prior to implementation.)

3. *Universal accountability.* Almost every union contract in effect today in comm centers across the country includes a clause stating, "work rules will be reduced to writing wherever practical."



a procedure with a new employee, the policy and procedure manual becomes a lesson plan the trainer can follow to ensure the topic is covered thoroughly and accurately. As a side benefit, nothing keeps your manual up to date and accurate like a good review by a trainee. Trainees will quickly identify those processes for which practice has strayed from procedure as they learn their new job.

THE BASICS

When developing policies and procedures, one question must be answered no matter what topic or task is being addressed: Is this policy and procedure in line with the mission of the organization? Policies and procedures are tools to guide staff as they carry out the mission of the organization. This means every directive must flow directly

the people. The process you use to create a new policy and procedure and the way in which you implement it is as important as the policy itself.

Here are six steps every manager can follow that will ensure new or updated policies and procedures are implemented successfully.

Involve staff at all levels. The key to successful implementation is getting those who must follow and enforce the new or updated policy and procedure to embrace the change and adopt it as part of their daily routine. (See p. 50 for more on this topic.) The adult learner does not like to have directives thrust upon them. When the adult learner feels as though they have not had an opportunity for input, their tendency is to reject the directive. Does this mean you should turn

How can you as a manager ensure the policies & procedures you develop achieve the desired outcomes? How can you motivate your employees to accept & implement new & revised policies & procedures?

QUITE SIMPLY, FOCUS ON THE PEOPLE.

Rules that are spoken have a limited lifespan and are most often misinterpreted and/or misapplied. Rules issued by memo or e-mail tend to get lost or forgotten over time. When the rules are in writing and indexed in a central location, everyone from the line employee who delivers the service to the supervisor who ensures compliance to the manager who provides organizational leadership all work from one playbook, each holding the other accountable for compliance and success.

4. *A 'how-to' book for new hires.* Anyone who has served as a communications training officer (CTO) in a comm center knows having a good policy and procedure manual is the best training tool you can have. When teaching a task or training on

from the agency's mission statement and core values.

When speaking with comm center managers at conferences and training classes, I receive many questions about policy development and implementation, specifically on how to format the policies or how to arrange the manual. It is not how the words are arranged, what agency logo is used or what font the policy is written in that makes a policy and procedure manual effective. Instead, it is the collaboration used in the development, the quality of the content, the time taken for training and the consistency of reinforcement and compliance that make a policy and procedure manual effective.

How can you as a manager ensure the policies and procedures you develop achieve the desired outcomes? How can you motivate your employees to accept and implement new and revised policies and procedures? Quite simply, focus on

policy and procedure decisions over to line-level staff or to the desires of a committee? Absolutely not. However, if you develop a "review and comment" process for policy and procedure development, providing an opportunity for employees to submit sincere input, you will find that when the time comes for implementation, your staff will be more accepting of the changes and quicker to implement them.

Posting a draft policy on the bulletin board or sending the draft out electronically for comment allows for discussion among staff. This discussion can generate new ideas on how to improve the content or, more importantly, head off potential conflicts the change may present to the work group.

Remember, the goal is to have the staff take ownership and embrace the new policy and procedure. You can write the best policy in the world but if staff

rebel against the change, it will be a tough sell at best or a failed implementation at worst. Involving employees early in the process means your desired outcomes will occur sooner and with less need for post-implementation enforcement.

2. Tell them how to do it right. The value of any policy and procedure manual is how functional it is for both line level and supervisory staff. If your policy and procedure manual becomes a listing of what not to do, better known as the “thou-shalt-not . . .” book, it is not a practical manual. Obviously your policy and procedure manual will be used to ensure accountability when directives are not followed. However, the most important function of a policy and procedure manual is to

you implement a new policy and procedure, training—whether it is conducted one on one between a supervisor and line employee or is the topic of a training class, roll call or group discussion—is vital.

Taking the time to explain what is written and answering the questions of staff will greatly increase the odds of a successful implementation. This is often called *front-end loading* the effort. Supervisors and managers who spend 20 minutes explaining and discussing a new policy and procedure with their staff will save 60 minutes by not having to correct employees after implementation.

4. Over explain “why.” When you’re implementing policies and procedures, never forget that your audience

your staff doing it right.” For example, if you issued a new policy on how to dispatch structure fires, review audiotapes or listen to dispatches as they occur to ensure compliance with the change. The key to success is that when you hear a staff member properly following the new policy and procedure you point out their good work and praise them for their ability and willingness to implement the change. This positive reinforcement sends the message to your staff that the policy and procedure change was necessary and that you appreciate their efforts. It also sends the message that you are serious about the change and that you expect all staff to take implementation seriously. When you make your expectations known by reinforcing new policies and procedures, employees are more likely to



**Why is this policy change necessary?
What was wrong with the old policy?
Why should I buy into the change? If
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give direction to staff on how to do things right. It is far more than a rule book. It's a manual for success. It should be seen as the “how-to/go-to” book for every employee.

3. Practice active implementation. When your policy and procedure manual has been drafted, commented on, revised and finalized, the next step is implementation. Does your implementation plan involve only a copier and employee mailboxes? If so, you're missing the most important step of implementation: training.

Even though you posted a draft and asked for employee input, don't assume employees understand and can easily implement the final product. Successful implementation depends on employee understanding and application. Don't wait to see if your employees will fail. Be proactive, and ensure their success. Every time

is made up of adult learners. Adult learners always need an answer to the *why* question. Why is this policy change necessary? What was wrong with the old policy? Why should I buy into the change? If you as the manager don't adequately explain the need for the new policy and how it will benefit the organization and the employee, implementation will be harder and less likely to have long-term success. Sometimes the answer is obvious. Sometimes it takes extensive explanation to answer. Either way, it is critical that the manager answer the *why* question for the employee to ensure successful implementation.

5. Reinforce expectations after implementation. Don't confuse *reinforcement* with *enforcement*. *Reinforcement* is positive and motivational, where as *enforcement* is corrective in nature. Take the opportunity to “catch

take ownership of the change and continue compliance for the long term.

6. Monitor implementation to ensure intended outcomes. As you recall, policy is a guide to thinking and procedure is a guide to action. Together, they direct staff to a desired course of action in hope of achieving a specific outcome. Even though you may have solicited input from staff during the development phase and you took the time to train your staff during implementation, the outcome you expected may come with some unintended consequences. All too often, managers elect to keep flawed policies and procedures in place. Sometimes, this is the result of an illogical attempt to minimize disruption and change in the comm center. Other times, managers simply refuse to admit that a mistake has been made.

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Either way, policies and procedures that don't produce the desired outcomes are a danger to any organization and must be revised.

Many times, your telecommunicators or line supervisors will bring these flawed policies and procedures to your attention. Other times, managers will discover the flaws when they review system reports or receive complaints from customers. Either way, if the outcomes of a new policy and procedure were not what you anticipated, take the time to start the process over and develop the policy and procedure you

and your staff actually need to be effective and efficient.

A policy and procedure manual is a living, evolving document. With the rapid changes in technology, implementation of new equipment, new demands for service delivery and changing homeland security issues, new and updated policies and procedures are a constant in any comm center. How you implement a policy and procedure is as important as the directive itself. Keeping the focus on the people who deliver the service and giving them the proper tools and support in carrying out the

mission will ensure both the individual success of your employees as well as the collective success of your organization. **||PSC||**

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1. **A policy is a:**
 - a. Statement of purpose.
 - b. Guide to thinking.
 - c. Guide to action.
 - d. Mission statement for the agency.

2. **According to the article, all policies and procedures must:**
 - a. Flow directly from the agency's mission statement and core values.
 - b. Be formatted using the same font.
 - c. Be numbered sequentially.
 - d. Be at least two paragraphs long.

3. **Policies and procedures tell staff what the agency expects and how to achieve that expectation.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. **When considering liability, policies and procedures are said to:**
 - a. Create more liability for the employer.
 - b. Keep the employer from being sued.
 - c. Minimize discretion at the operational level.
 - d. Hold the manager responsible for errors at the operational level.

5. **Policy and procedure manuals hold only the line-level employee accountable.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. **When training a new employee, the policy and procedure manual can be used as:**
 - a. An evaluation tool.
 - b. A "do-it-yourself" manual for trainees.
 - c. A lesson plan a trainer can follow.
 - d. A manual to ensure CTOs teach the important topics.

7. **Having the correct font and number systems are the two most important aspects of a policy and procedure manual.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. **The most important step of implementation is training.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

9. **Reinforcement of a new policy and procedure is:**
 - a. Punitive in nature.
 - b. Positive and motivational.
 - c. Offensive to the employee.
 - d. Corrective in nature.

10. **If the outcomes produced by a new policy and procedure are not what was anticipated, the policy should be reviewed and revised.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

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