

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Coaching: The True Path to Proficiency, From an Officer's Perspective*

Alexander, M., L. Palombo, et al. (2013). "Coaching: The True Path to Proficiency, From an Officer's Perspective." Federal Probation 77 (2).

**Key Words:** Coaching, RNR, Skill knowledge transfer, Implementation

### Summary/Conclusions

The current study builds upon a previous coaching study.\* Utilizing officer testimonials, survey data, skill use data, and revocation rates, the current study examines the impact of coaching with the program Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR). After being trained officers would submit audiotapes, from which they would receive coaching. Officer testimonials confirm previous survey findings that coaching was a method to ensure knowledge skill transfer. Additionally, STARR skills use increased from 14% to 59% over the course of one year. \*[March 2013 RIB](#)

### Limitations of Information

The data from the survey contained a small sample size and may not be indicative of all attitudes and perceptions. Participants were from the United States Probation Office and may have different attitudes and perceptions than those of Colorado Probation Officers. The study included revocation reduction data, which it is not certain to what degree coaching influenced any increased positive outcomes. Finally, it is not clear if organizational structure or culture influenced any of the findings.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

### Perceptions and Benefits of Coaching

Coaching in probation and parole is an emerging concept. With an increased need for fidelity to programs as well as adherence to Risk, Need, and Responsibility (RNR) principles, coaching is one way to foster officer skill development. The current study examines officer testimonials, survey data, and other data to examine possible effects of coaching. Officers in a United States Probation Office attended one 3-day STARR training. STARR training emphasizes the use of core correctional practices in office visits specifically to address pro-social behavior and thinking. Officers would then submit audiotapes and attend mandatory coaching sessions. Coaching encompassed personal coaching sessions as well as group coaching. After reaching proficiency, as determined by an expert trainer, the participants attended a 2-day coaching training. These officers would then coach the following waves of STARR trained officers. New coaches would receive feedback from expert trainers.

When surveyed, almost all officers (92%) agreed or strongly agreed that listening to their tapes enhanced their skills. Seventy-seven percent would listen to every contact they audiotaped. Some (38%) agreed or strongly agreed the conversation was different than they remembered. Nearly half of officers (46%) reported anxiety prior to commencement of coaching. One of the more powerful officer statements was, "I can honestly say that without the individual coaching and booster (coaching) session my use of STARR would have

declined or stopped shortly after returning from my initial STARR training". In approximately one year's time, the percentage use of STARR in appointments increased 45% when this training/coaching model was utilized. The department cites over 70% of their officers trained are using the STARR skills in at least half of their contacts. Finally, the study reports that 12-month revocations decreased 14% in the same timeframe. The department attributes this to the implementation of RNR principles and the use of STARR.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Attend the EPE for Probation training to learn and practice the Elicit Provide Elicit method of coaching.
- ✓ When providing feedback/coaching it is important to encourage the individual to verbalize their perception of how they did. Help the person to identify their strengths as part of the process.
- ✓ Coaching staff through the implementation of new skills helps to solidify changes in practice. Supervisors should consider affirming staff who are involved in providing or receiving coaching.
- ✓ It is important to create a safe environment for coaching. Individuals may be anxious before receiving coaching. Setting expectations and explaining the process prior to the coaching event may ease some anxiety for individuals.
- ✓ Learning new skills takes time. Build time in to your schedule to practice and receive feedback.

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