

time a center is conducted new situations arise that a director can learn from.

The most beneficial aspect for a co-trainer is the association with others who have dedicated their efforts to the improvement of educational administration.

Individuals to be trained in the Assessment Center process frequently enter the sessions as skeptics; they are often critical of the process. However, once involved, participants find that they can feel secure with the training plans and procedures.

The training process is intensive, rigorous, and demanding. Trainers must

strive to maintain high expectations and at the same time conduct sessions that are motivating and meaningful.

The preparation for training sessions requires a large investment of time. Trainers must have mastered every aspect of the assessment process. Much of the effort put into training can become invalid should the trainer appear to be unsure of the process.

Trainers must also monitor each participant's performance. The performance of each trainee is discussed at the conclusion of each session to determine which individuals will serve as future assessors.

□ *Components of Good Assessor Training*

BY MARY LEE HOWE

MY TRAINING AS an Assessment Center assessor was a significant professional experience, and I was more than willing when NASSP asked me to become a trainer of assessors.

As I began training, I became aware of the considerable skills needed to be an effective trainer in this project. When teaching a group of bright, competent adults, it is critical to be an articulate speaker, project self-confidence, manifest appropriate body language and physical gestures and, in general, be "quick on one's feet." Effective trainers utilize their voice to make a point,

maintain eye contact with the audience, vary the pace to avoid monotony, move about the room, and generate enthusiasm throughout the presentation.

Another important component of good training is interpersonal relations—the ability to read the members of the audience and be sensitive and responsive to their needs. Timing is a critical factor in this process, as is the ability to motivate the assessor trainees. A trainer also needs to project an open, warm manner and a sense of humor, and to model enthusiasm and excitement.

In teaching assessors, it is essential that the trainer possess and demonstrate an unshakable belief in the assessment process. Technical proficiency and skills are requisite to do the job well. Historical background, as well as the

MARY LEE HOWE is director of personnel and staff development, Encinitas (Calif.) Union School District.

materials and activities used in the assessment center process, must be internalized.

In addition, the trainer needs considerable assessment experience in order to draw upon specific examples to support the teaching of a particular activity or process. Trainees appreciate having these "real life" illustrations to help clarify and lend credibility to the vast body of material covered.

Since a significant portion of the training models an actual assessment center, the trainer needs to be skilled in facilitating the assessment process and monitoring the assessors' individual and group performance. My experiences in directing assessment centers in the San Diego County project assisted me in learning to combine the right amounts of directive behavior (keeping the assessors on track) and sensitivity (to assessors' needs to elaborate or question). Just as in directing an assessment center, in the training process, the trainer must be confident and cannot vacillate or be tentative in responding to participants' concerns or questions.

There are two trainers involved in the assessor training, and it is extremely important that the individuals interact well together. They must support each other and present a united front. Consistent illustrations and responses are required to prevent confusion on the part of the assessor trainees. In this training, one person acts as the lead trainer and carries final authority; the other individual is called the co-trainer. It is especially important that the co-trainer endeavor to complement the work style and personality of the lead trainer and provide support during the training process.

A crucial variable in being a successful trainer lies in one's ability to deal with the needs of the assessor trainees. These people are all successful school administrators who know good teaching and come to the process with high expectations and, frequently, a "critical eye."

The trainer must be knowledgeable about adult learning theory and be aware of the various learning styles within the group. Trainees need to know the total picture and the rationale for what they're learning. They also need to have the pacing of the training varied and the content structured to maximize individual involvement.

Adult learners want to participate in the training process and be able to ask questions and discuss concerns. The trainer needs to discourage individual war stories while providing an opportunity for productive discussion. Adult learners also have strong needs for feedback and positive reinforcement. An effective trainer recognizes these needs and responds with comments such as "You're right on target!" and "The other members of the group really benefited from your comments," as well as nonverbal nods and smiles.

Assessor trainees are not used to sitting in a classroom environment for eight hours a day for four days, along with three hours of homework each night. It is imperative that the trainer be responsive to the fatigue level that occurs in such an intense training process and provide needed coffee and stretch breaks, as well as time to move outside the room for fresh air or to take care of personal needs. For example, most training sessions discourage smoking in the room, and the trainer should be

aware of the needs of the smoker for a break.

The trainers and the trainees interact not only on a formal basis during the scheduled training periods, but also informally during breaks, over meals, and during evening work sessions. Many professional relationships and friendships are formed between trainers and trainees.

Many trainers find that the more they

train others in such dimensions as problem analysis, decisiveness, leadership, and sensitivity, the more effective they, themselves, become in each of those areas. I look forward to every training opportunity. Each time I serve as an assessor trainer for NASSP, I strengthen my own skills as an assessor and an administrator, and return to my present position enriched and strengthened.

□ Twelve Skill Dimensions: Professional Benefits

BY DOUGLAS S. McCALL

The Michigan Institute for Educational Management's (MIEM) Assessment Center Program is one of the most exciting projects in the educational history of Michigan.

In November 1984, I was sent an Operation Plan with instructions to read it prior to reporting for assessor training. When I finished reading the "Criteria for Assessor Training," one sentence remained with me: "Although assessor training often improves administrative skills, it is not intended to be an inservice tool for administrators."

The plan stated that the program had been basically designed "... to improve the quality of leadership at the school building level through more objective selection procedures and a clinical approach to professional development." This is accomplished by

evaluating a candidate's strengths and weaknesses in the 12 skill areas, which have been identified as "... requirements for effective performance in the principalship."

During the assessor training and the first assessment center it was very difficult to keep the basic purpose of the program constantly in mind while observing 41 individuals as they behaved in relation to the 12 skill dimensions. In fact, it was impossible.

The assessor training was improving my administrative skills, and I began to feel guilty that my involvement in these two sessions really had been a valuable inservice. I *had* been taking a close look at my administrative abilities, and there was definitely some honing to be done.

The 12 skill dimensions should already be ingrained in an administrator's repertoire. However, unless an individual has lost complete touch with reality or never makes a mistake, the

DOUGLAS S. McCALL is principal, Allegan (Mich.) High School.