

Training Requirements for Transportation Operations Personnel

James E. Reading, Barbara A. England, and James W. Strecker

Training Requirements for transit operations involve two important factors: skill requirements for hiring and training provided after a person is hired.

The human resources and personnel function of setting realistic, minimum qualifications and effective recruitment is crucial in determining the pretraining needed for a particular position. Even with competent candidates for the job, the process cannot stop here. It is unrealistic to expect a new employee to enter a job with all the detailed training from schools, universities, or from life itself without some specialized training and development. An organization must provide, in one form or another, the avenues to assure self-motivation and advancement for its employees. Various avenues available to organizations include outside courses; seminars and workshops offered by colleges, universities, professional organizations, manufacturers and vendors; and tuition reimbursement.

Human resources departments should be adept in job analysis and job evaluation. The job analysis and job evaluation process begins with the conscientious completion of extensive job questionnaires by employees. The questionnaires should be reviewed and verified by supervisors, department heads, and human resources department officers. From the questionnaires, a comprehensive job description is written and again verified and approved by the appropriate levels of management, including the general manager or chief executive officer.

In this paper the Operations Division, Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), is examined to illustrate the different types of training and development a transit authority might expect from and offer to its employees. It is difficult to make one direct statement as to general educational background for operations personnel because of the diverse range of functions within the division. For this reason each of the three major areas comprising COTA's Operations Division is examined separately.

For higher level managerial positions such as assistant general manager, operations executive assistant, and the superintendents of the different departments, a higher education in business administration is desired, along with training in the area of specialization. A combination of training and experience in labor relations, human relations and supervision, budget, and effective communications is highly desirable.

Operation divisions of transit authorities the size and scope of COTA are usually divided into three major functional areas: transportation, maintenance, and buildings and grounds. At COTA, the operations division comprises 87 percent of the authority's employees, including all who are represented by the Transport Workers Union (see Figure 1).

The transportation department is the largest in the operations division; it has 448 motor coach operators, in addition to transportation managers and super-

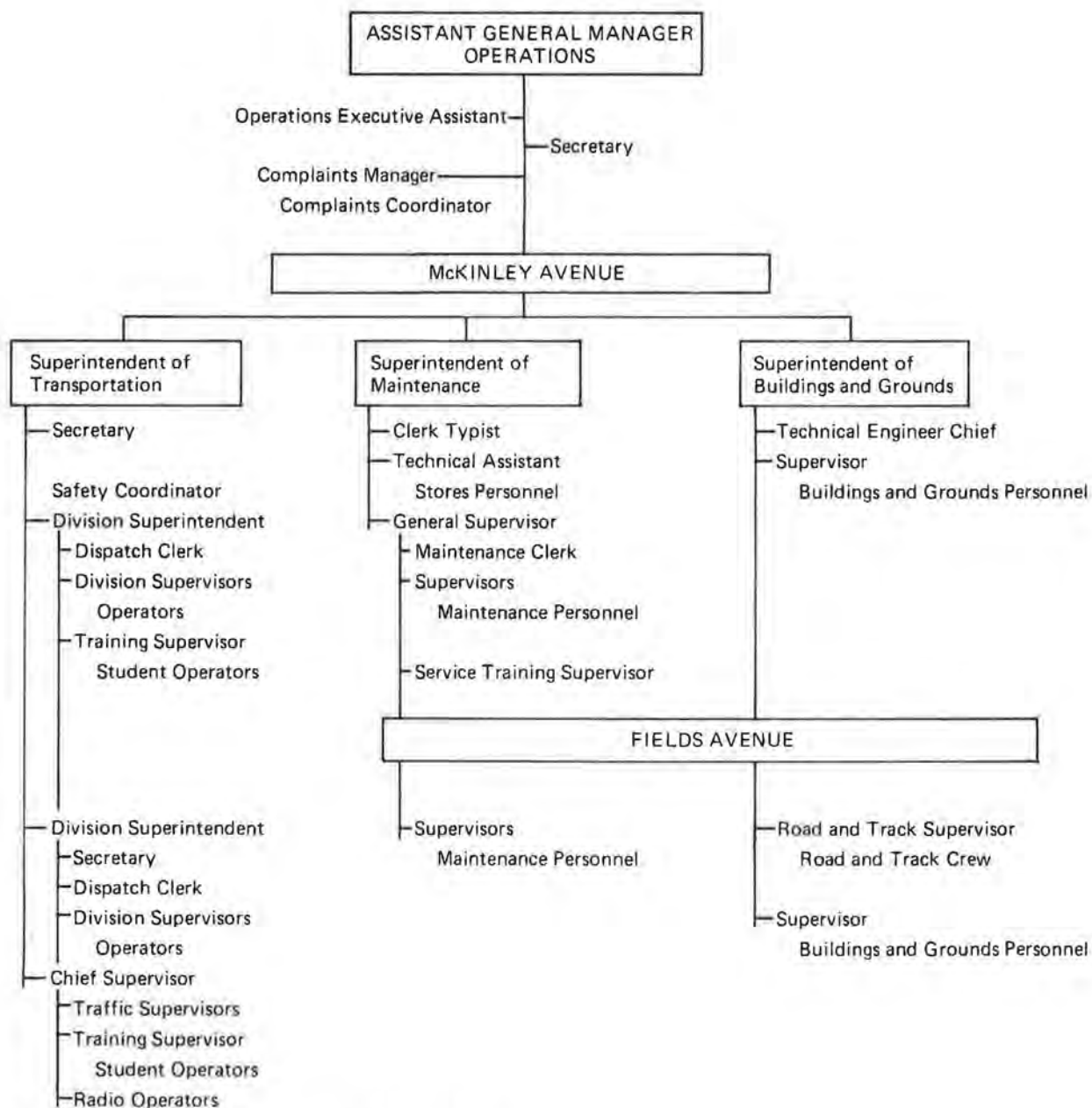


FIGURE 1 COTA operations division.

visors, and clerical staff. The maintenance department is composed of 100 unionized employees (heavy equipment, service line, inspection, and running repair), maintenance managers and supervisors, and clerical staff. Buildings and grounds is the smallest department in number with 30 unionized employees (building maintenance, utility, unskilled labor, and janitors); buildings and grounds superintendent; supervisors; and clerical staff.

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

The following qualifications for motor coach operator are necessary for employment:

1. At least 25 years old,
2. No relatives employed by COTA,
3. No previous employment by COTA or its predecessor,
4. Have own transportation,
5. Valid Ohio driver's license,
6. No moving traffic violations in last 2 years,
7. No more than two moving traffic violations in last 5 years,
8. No history of moving violations,
9. Four years employment in last 5 years (with excellent references), and
10. No physical disabilities to prohibit or limit ability to perform job.

Once candidates have been selected as motor coach operators, they begin an intensive training program as student operators for 6 to 7 weeks. The COTA Transportation Department has two training supervisors who instruct students using a training package developed by the AFL-CIO Appalachian Council. The training package includes film strips, films, and detailed explanations of bus maneuvers, defensive driving, and passenger relations.

Also, COTA's policies and bulletins are covered extensively twice during the training period. New student operators work with the training supervisors for 9 days of classroom time and actual bus-driving experience. The students are then sent on the road with selected operators to learn specific routes and to practice driving. Finally, they must take a test on the various routes to qualify as motor coach operators. At this time, the students receive an operator's handbook, the bargaining agreement between COTA and Transport Workers Local 208, and a bus manual from the Flxible Corporation.

The two training supervisors also conduct refresher training for motor coach operators involved in preventable accidents or operators who have been absent due to lengthy illnesses. Once a year, all motor coach operators are required to attend a refresher training seminar on defensive driving. During the refresher training, reoccurring driving problems that appear to apply to all drivers are discussed in detail.

All drivers are trained on use of the automated fareboxes. This training is a cooperative venture between the transportation and finance departments. A video training tape is used for continual viewing in the operators' lounges. A transportation training supervisor is available for additional explanation when needed.

Future training is being developed for motor coach operators and radio room operators (supervisors) in the implementation and operation of a computerized two-way radio system. The contractor will be involved in the initial training,

and staff will be prepared to orient and train all future users of the radio system.

MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT

Because the entry-level position and many other positions in the maintenance department require the operation of a motor coach, new maintenance employees are given 8 hr of driving instruction by the transportation training supervisors. Then, entry-level staff are trained by a maintenance supervisor in the job requirements of the position that involves cleaning the coach.

From this position, maintenance employees usually advance to the service line where a maintenance supervisor is responsible for much of the on-the-job training. Employees enter classified positions and receive approximately 170 hr of training from a combination of maintenance supervisors and other employees in the area into which they bid. Figure 2 shows the various functional areas and the progression employees can make.

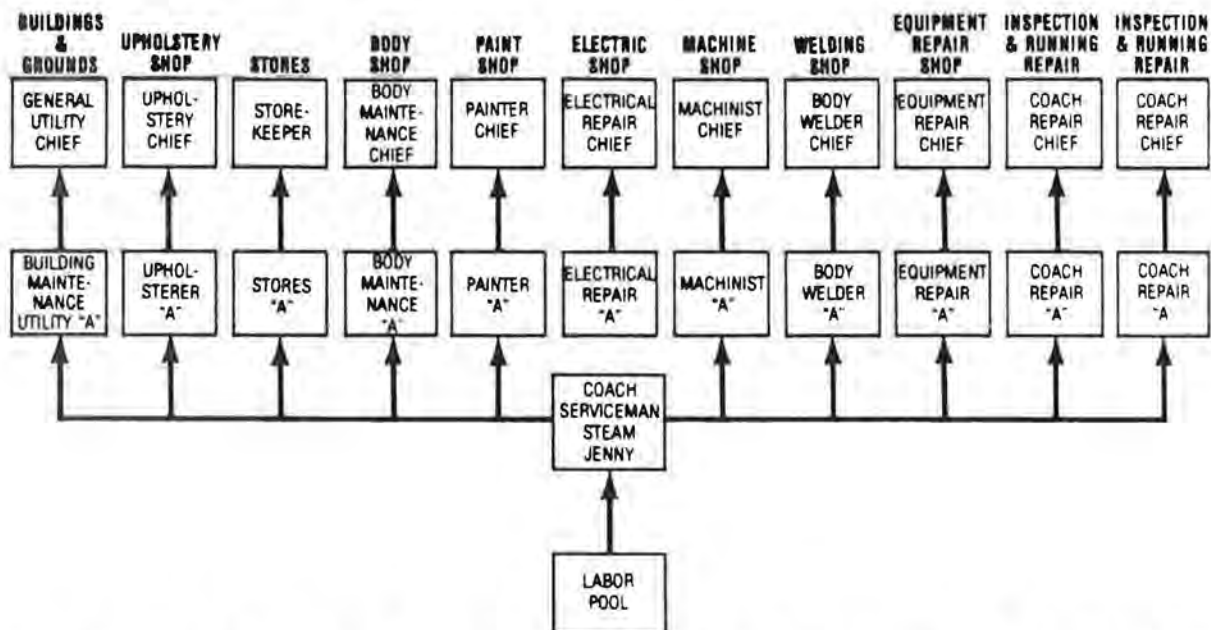


FIGURE 2 COTA service department's progression chart. [Note: This is only a line of progression chart and does not represent vacancies.]

The maintenance department takes advantage of training seminars offered by various manufacturers. For example, employees are sent to Great Lakes for basic diesel mechanics, Allison of Indianapolis for transmission work, and Flexible Corporation for body work. All coach electricians are sent to a 1-week school at Delco Remy of Anderson, Indiana, which includes training in coach air-conditioning repair. Recently, five employees and two supervisors were sent to Chicago for instruction in repairing the new automated fareboxes.

Often manufacturers are invited to the facilities to present workshops on their products and to discuss proper repair procedures. Other manufacturers send video tape demonstrations that can be viewed by one or several employees as required. For example, Midland Ross has a video tape for brake repair. Increasingly, COTA is requiring this type of service in purchase contracts because it has proven to be an effective means of training.

One COTA electrician was selected to participate in the development of a detailed job-performance manual on coach electrical repair in conjunction with the AFL-CIO Appalachian Regional Council program. COTA's recognition of the importance of on-the-job training led to participation in this effort.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS DEPARTMENT

This department uses contractors and manufacturers of new equipment to train their employees. The pump and seal school is one example. Also, the chiefs in buildings and grounds serve as instructors for new employees as do other employees acquainted with a specific job or piece of equipment. New employees are rotated throughout the different areas within the department to orient and train them in all department functions.

Supervisors attend seminars in custodial training and preventive maintenance. In the future, it is hoped that employees can be sent to trade schools for specific training. In addition, management is preparing a training manual and detailed work cards on the various jobs and schedules for maintenance of building equipment, passenger shelters, and park and ride sites. Most electrical work, other than heating and ventilating, is done by outside contractors.

Training in industrial safety is another area in which a transit authority should be concerned. At COTA, regular safety sessions are presented by the industrial safety coordinator. These training sessions are held in employee lounges for the convenience of maintenance and buildings and grounds personnel. Films and informational handouts are made available on such topics as fire prevention, slip and fall protection, safety apparel, and safety manuals. Safety bulletin boards are used extensively. In addition, the industrial safety coordinator counsels individuals on safety issues on the job.

COTA has recently expanded its commitment to internal training and development by creating a new training and development coordinator position within the human resources department. But even before the creation of this position, COTA actively sought training opportunities for all employees and encouraged educational development through the tuition reimbursement program. Outside training seminars and pertinent courses are brought to the attention of supervisors and employees to encourage employees to continually develop in their current jobs or to work to qualify for promotional opportunities.

A transit authority should require a certain level of training and experience before employees take positions, but should follow up on this basic experience with training and development after employees are on the job. Employees in new positions should be enrolled in specialized programs to enhance their ability to perform their new responsibilities. Many examples can be cited in COTA's experience.

The human resources director was sent to the Wharton School to study human resources development. This same person continued self-development by taking advantage of COTA's tuition reimbursement program in labor relations and recently has been promoted to assistant general manager of operations.

At least 15 middle managers and supervisors have been sent to the management programs at Northeastern University of Tennessee, Indiana University's Institute for Transit Management, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Northern Florida.

As a result of this positive stance in providing ongoing training opportunities, many employees have been able to grow, assume more responsible positions, and enhance COTA's position within the transit community. COTA fosters and supports the concept of promotion from within the company and encourages all qualified employees to apply for higher positions within the Authority. All employees are hired because they are capable of performing the specific job in question and indicate some potential, in many cases, of advancing to higher level positions. Those employees who participate in training programs position themselves for upward mobility.

COTA's promotions and transfers policy provides for mobility within the COTA structure, assuring employees the opportunity to improve their rate of pay, conditions of employment, and job satisfaction by establishing a procedure for applying for advancement. Job vacancies are posted in conspicuous, specified locations for 5 consecutive working days before the position is closed to in-house applicants. For 3 days immediately following the fifth day of posting, no outside applications for a posted job may be accepted.

Criteria used to evaluate candidates include their work record, education and training (including COTA's effective communications course), skills knowledge related specifically to the job, and results of a supervisory-managerial test of general aptitude and attitudes about people and supervision.

COTA believes in upward mobility for qualified employees. A female employee was hired in 1977 as a mail clerk at an annual salary of \$5,609. A short time later, she was promoted to the newly created clerk-typist position in the accident investigation section. She was quickly promoted to accounting clerk. After slightly more than 1 year of competent performance as an accounting clerk, she was promoted to finance secretary. In 1981 after about 3 years as finance secretary, she was promoted to finance coordinator at an annual salary of \$25,480. In 16 years a black male progressed from student motor coach operator to traffic supervisor and, in 1984, to division superintendent, supervising 448 operators. Another black male was hired as a purchasing clerk; he advanced to minority business enterprise (MBE) secretary, then to administrative assistant to the board of trustees, and is now COTA's MBE officer. One female employee moved up from receptionist to the general manager's executive secretary to administrative assistant and, finally, to scheduling specialist in a span of 5 years. In total, 26 minority and female employees have been promoted from within the organization within the past 5 years.

Training programs are continually being developed and implemented to assist supervisors in dealing with bicultural groups. Quarterly and annual progress reports are provided to top management. Recommendations are made, not only to enhance the company's affirmative action program, but to improve the quality of work life for all employees.

COTA management is continually encouraging employees to participate in educational programs and specialized training to enhance job performance and to provide promotion opportunities. Additionally, employees are paid for the amount of time spent in educational sessions required by COTA in accordance with the union agreement or salary administration plan, or both. COTA reimburses the tuition paid by employees for educational programs related to some phase of COTA oper-

ation, and all employees are encouraged to attend local and national seminars in their areas of concentration; COTA pays the cost.

The ability to communicate and effectively deal with people, especially in supervisory positions, is one of the most important areas COTA has addressed. COTA contracted with a local university to provide an 8-week supervisory training program for employees. The training is for those new to supervision and employees interested in general development or future supervisory possibilities. In order to tailor this course to the needs of transit and COTA personnel, two employees from the human resources department attended a 2-week seminar in Chicago created by Consult Limited and sponsored by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA).

After staff returned to COTA, the course was adapted to COTA's time frame and requirements. To date, COTA has offered the new 16-hr course twice and has received outstanding ratings by employees who attended. Some of the topics in this course are active listening skills, human behavior, discipline and conflict, identifying the troubled employee, and group dynamics. An interesting thing happened at the completion of the first program. Participants suggested the program name be changed from Supervisory Training to Effective Communications and Leadership in order not to discourage attendance by those not specifically interested in supervision.

Other in-house training programs are in stress management and weight management. These seminars last 2 to 3 hr with 12 to 15 interested employees. In stress training, participants are encouraged to identify the causes and symptoms of stress, discuss alternatives for dealing with stress, and are trained in deep muscle relaxation.

COTA has also instituted quality of work life programs. A quality circles team has been set up in the telephone information center, and representative employees in transportation and maintenance have established communication and problem-solving committees. Both of these programs involve training in problem solving, team work, and data collection. Suggestions from the information center's quality circle resulted in certain specialized training and the development of a detailed training and refresher training manual for that unit.

By establishing realistic educational background and experience for new employees and offering varied avenues of training and development to employees after employment, transit authorities receive many benefits: higher morale, less turnover, better overall attendance, fewer incidents of tardiness, fewer grievances, and more qualified applicants and employees.

The development process is ongoing and, oftentimes, overall benefits cannot be assessed for a number of years. The success of such a process and the continuation of transit depends on the realistic assessment of skills needed in operations and the establishment of a comprehensive program to provide employees with technical skills, the ability to deal effectively with people and problems, and the leadership qualities to carry transit into the next century.