

# At long last, management training for the masses

Any of you who have ever attended a TDCAA training event know that at some point we ask you to evaluate the course.

There are always two forms, and I typically make a very funny joke related to the color of those forms. I might say they are seafoam green and salmon, or teal and coral. Hilarious! Really though, they are green and pink. Always green and pink. (I think maybe purple snuck in there once.) Regardless, one of the forms is an evaluation for the course you just attended, and one is a questionnaire asking what areas you are struggling with and what topics you'd like to see more training on. I'd say we get about an 80-percent return on those forms, and aside from the occasional "Brian needs to talk less," the thoughtful responses we receive drive the development of our future training.

Without question, the No. 1 trouble area reported in the questionnaire is management, both in terms of managing your individual work and managing others. Oh sure, we get a lot of requests for more time in the day, wiser colleagues, and smaller dockets, but unless you are able to willfully disassociate yourself from reality, those things aren't changing any time soon. What we *can* change is how we approach those issues. That takes training and practice.

When I comb through the archives at TDCAA Central, I can see that all the past training directors have attempted to scratch the management-training itch. It has been tried by way of training tracks at various conferences, more focused forums, and even professional speakers. Still, we haven't quite hit our target, and management training has ended up being a poor fit for our training model. TDCAA's seminars are built to enhance specific skills our membership already possesses. Prosecutors typically become managers with no previous training, education, or experience in supervision. We become supervisors because we are good at our job, and our job is not management. This is a training issue whose solution is bigger than the current seminar calendar.



**By Brian Klas**

*TDCAA Training Director in Austin*

Enter the Prosecutor Management Institute. Or PMI for short. PMI is our new(ish) foray into training prosecutors and staff on how to be good supervisors and leaders.

The first step in getting this new training off the ground was to define the scope of our members' needs. Back in March 2016, TDCAA hosted a prosecutor management summit in Fredericksburg with our Houston-based consultant, Bob Newhouse. Our goal was to design a management course just for prosecutor offices. Bob had previously developed such a course for oil-field workers who, like prosecutors, don't necessarily promote to management positions based on management skills. (If you see him, ask Bob which group has been easier to work with.) At the summit, elected prosecutors, first assistants, and various chief-types from all over the state were invited to share their own issues with management as well as what characteristics they believe a good managing prosecutor will possess. From inception, it was crucial to us that this course be *by* prosecutors *for* prosecutors. The turnout was fantastic and the feedback was extraordinarily insightful.

Armed with the data collected during the summit, we began interviewing offices on an individual basis. (More data means more development.) From there, further meetings were held with existing supervisors to gather even more of the information necessary to finally put together the Fundamentals of Management module. (That's the name of the first course, Fundamentals of Management.)

We've put on the module three times, and the response from our test subjects has been glowing. To date, I've had the great fortune to both attend and help facilitate the course. I can tell you that it is nothing like anything TDCAA has done before. The training is two and a half days, the number of attendees is small, and the pace is fast. Every attendee is asked to take a couple of assessments prior to the course, the results of which are woven throughout the training. Now, I'll tell you that I am pretty skeptical of any sort of behavioral or personality assessment. How could any simple test, with any sort of accuracy, divine the habits or proclivities of someone as complex as myself? Well, as painful as it is to say, it turns out I'm not that complex. It also turns out that by having a better understanding of my behavior, I can diagnose the cause of my inability to successfully communicate in the past (although I still say some of those people I was trying to communicate with were just crazy). And if you want to succeed as a manager, no matter how you reasonably define success, you are going to have to effectively communicate with your team. This course will teach you how to best convey your message in a meaningful way—and that's just on the first day! By the end of the training you will be outfitted with an arsenal of tools designed to make you a better manager. When you are a better manager, your team will shrink their dockets, they will be wiser, and you will start to find a little more time in the day. You may even get better-looking.

The Fundamentals of Management module is designed for no more than 20 attendees and may be delivered to a single audience in a larger office or in one central location for a group of offices. It won't appear on TDCAA's online training calendar, and you won't get a brochure in the mail with a list of dates for this training. (Offices that are interested in this training should contact me at Brian.Klas@tdcaa.com.) Attendance to the entire module is required, and attendees will be awarded 10.5 hours of CLE. While TDCAA makes every effort to fund the program, there is a material cost associated with the module, and that cost is determined by the particularities of each individual training. And though the course is designed for prosecuting attorneys, other DA and CA staff in supervisory roles are welcome to attend and would benefit from it too.

Look, this course is a long time in coming. I wish I could take credit for it, but it represents years of work by TDCAA staff, volunteer trainers, and the feedback of our members. I am proud that Texas prosecutors are the first to see the need for and develop such a course. Unsurprisingly, we are well ahead of the curve on a national level. Our mission is to see that justice is done. If that mission is to be more than a mere slogan subject to the smirks and cynical eye-rolls of ineffectual critics, we must seek out and exploit every opportunity we can find to get better. Fundamentals of Management is just the first step in the process. Testing for our next phase is already underway, and with your support, the Prosecutor Management Institute can become another hallmark of professional Texas prosecution. \*

*We've put on the module three times, and the response from our test subjects has been glowing: Jarvis Parsons, District Attorney in Brazos County, raves, "This management course is exactly what has been needed in our profession for a long time! The Prosecutor Management Institute should be mandatory training for any elected prosecutor, as well as any supervisor who manages other prosecutors."*