

Program Name: Hard Times Cafe

Your name and date: John Sedlander

Purpose:

The bylaws of the Hard Times Café state that its purpose is to "provide opportunities for disadvantaged people to work together to meet basic needs while developing skills, habits and motivation that lead to regular employment."

Of interest to COTS are three program components:

1. Empowerment -- clients assume a large role in decisions both for the organization as a whole and for the work teams on which they participate.
2. Points of Improvement - a performance-based matrix to divide profits of the business and to encourage improvements in skills that lead to regular employment.
3. Conflict Resolution - elected Elders from among the clients decide on consequences for violation of HTC principles, without regard to precedent or consistency.

Principles: (expressed)

Honesty	We will be truthful, ethical, moral, trustworthy, sincere and dependable.
Quality	We will seek quality in our thoughts, work and relationships. Quality implies value. We want to think, work and relate in ways that are valuable to each other, ourselves and our community.
Self Sufficiency	We will do all we can to support ourselves and others. We will not seek handouts but will work to earn what we need.
Courtesy	We will respect and show consideration for others no matter how they treat us.
Faith in a Higher Power	We will remain loyal to the religious principles that guide each of us.
Perseverance	We will follow through with our commitments, obligations, and responsibilities. We will go the extra mile.
Endurance	We will stick with it and won't give up until our efforts are no longer needed or helpful.
Self-Esteem	We will remember that we all have the potential and capacity to improve. We will build self-esteem by becoming more competent and accomplishing our goals.
Ambition	We will maintain a strong desire to improve ourselves and our community.
Positive Attitude	We will strive to look for positive opportunities in everything that is presented to us.
Work Together	We will listen to each other's needs and cooperate in building something that is greater than each one of us.
Sharing	We will be open to each other with our feelings, ideas, needs and resources. We believe that when we help each other we all prosper.

Key Points:

Organization Structure:

Nine "Elders" are elected to one-year terms. Their functions are to set the agenda for the weekly meeting of the clients and to decide on consequences for violation of HTC principles.

Self-managed teams do the work of the organization: running the thrift shop, automotive business, and other administrative tasks. Assignments and goals are achieved daily through consensus, not direction.

Every Thursday afternoon and evening, clients meet to celebrate successes, share a meal, and consider various proposals that affect the organization.

Consensus decides everything - not Robert's Rules of Order. Clear rules define the meeting process. A single patron's objection can defer a decision until the next meeting; two people can block a proposal indefinitely.

Offering this much influence to the clients gives them "empowerment" that will allow them to see that they can take charge of their lives.

Staff employees "coach" clients. They wield no authority.

Points of Improvement:

HTC *Points of Improvement* are awarded for making improvements and for showing positive work habits, based on performance in the following areas:

- Early for work or appointments
- Good hygiene, clean and dressed appropriately for the job
- Follows directions, asks questions if needed
- Friendly, courteous and cooperative
- Plans and organizes work
- Aware of safety concerns, works carefully
- Works at a steady pace - appropriate speed for the job
- Can start work on own, works independently
- Proper documentation
- Open to input, listens to others
- Good public relations

Follows through, finishes job or shift
Expresses thoughts and ideas clearly
Teamwork
Follows principles of Hard Times Café
Quality of work

Ratings for each attribute range from 1 to 5

5 = outstanding, exceptional performance
4 = very good performance, employer might be thinking about a raise
3 = employer would be generally satisfied
2 = room for improvement
1 = definite need for improvement
0 = serious problems

Staff evaluates each client for each day worked. {That day's rating} x {hours worked} = {points of improvement earned}

Points of Improvement are exchangeable for items at the thrift shop and the company store. A portion of a client's POI can be used toward vouchers for housing, transportation, food, medical needs, etc. and are redeemable at local businesses.

Conflict Resolution:

Rather than "Rules of Decorum" and consistent "Consequences" like we use at COTS, Elders at the Hard Times Café decide on consequences for violation of HTC Principles. Precedents and consistency are not part of the decision. Justice means "restoring right relationships," not "let the punishment fit the crime." Consequences are lenient, and often include apologies and resolutions to do better next time.

How does the program define or measure success?

Success means improving clients' performance in building and sustaining basic work habits so they can secure regular employment. Client success is demonstrated each week by how many Points of Improvement they earn.

Measures of success for the organization were not clear from the material we have.

Describe a successful participant.

A successful participant learns basic work habits, including:

- Thinking, planning, and organizing skills
- Teamwork and organization
- Good work ethic and commitment to continuous improvement
- Effective communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution
- Experience in leadership and public speaking

At what level would a participant enter the program?

Hard Times Café clients include those who have:

- Poor motivation
- Poor work habits
- Low self esteem
- Limited work skills
- Poorly developed interpersonal and problem solving skills
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Poorly developed thinking, planning and organizing skills
- No support network
- Very few resources
- Difficulty accepting responsibility
- Problems with commitments and follow-through
- Handicaps that limit employability

Program Approach (Application)	Method (How it's used?)	Outcome (What would it look at COTS?)	Measurement (How do we measure success?)
Human Growth & Transformation	<p>"Empowerment" through genuine influence in the organization gives clients a sense of self-worth.</p> <p>The Points of Improvement offer daily/weekly feedback and encouragement in developing good work habits</p>	<p>In the singles programs, we could use the concept of a weekly meeting where the members could actually make decisions. In the Family Shelter people aren't around long enough for this to work, and in the Shared Housing program they may be too dispersed and independent.</p> <p>Points of Improvement would work better in the COTS program for singles. It would require significant staff time to organize and maintain.</p>	<p>The ultimate measure would be an increase in job placements for our members.</p>

<p>Staff Interaction with Clients</p>	<p>Staff's role is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate meetings • Provide advice and feedback to teams • Administer POI ratings 	<p>It's hard to imagine changing COTS into an organization where clients can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify any activity, policy, or procedure • Approve budgets • Elect board members • Approve new programs • Overturn decisions made by the board of directors 	<p>Success would be if the organization managed to keep from falling off the rails.</p>
<p>Client-to-Client Interaction</p>	<p>Every client has equal voice. Elected Elders resolve conflicts.</p>	<p>We could definitely do this at the Opportunity Center. It would best to schedule weekly meetings so Elders could come from the working population. The Family Shelter would also be a possibility, although terms of Elders would have to be very short.</p>	<p>Better adherence to the Rules of Decorum.</p>
<p>Client Self-Help</p>	<p>Genuine Empowerment and increased self-esteem through meaningful participation in program decisions.</p>	<p>Give clients some real influence at weekly meetings.</p>	<p>Not clear.</p>

Does this promote a responsible and accountable lifestyle? How?

Accountability to peers may be more powerful than accountability to COTS staff.

What are the client decision points in this program?

Weekly meetings provide the forum for community decision making.

Points of Improvement provides:

- 1) daily opportunity to improve and
- 2) a channel for individual feedback.

What would you change to make the program or concept more useful in our setting?

Use the Elders as a group that determines "consequences" at the Opportunity Center.

Additional Issues:

- **Staffing**

Points of Improvement requires additional staff. Client "empowerment" necessitates letting go of control.

- **Aftercare**

Not applicable.

- **Costs**

Additional staff for Points of Improvement.

No additional cost for increased client involvement in conflict resolution.

Hard to say what would happen once clients took over the agency.

Additional Comments

What makes you like this program or concept? What makes it appealing or motivating to the clients? How would you sell this to the clients?

How would community support be generated for this program?

I like the idea of clients determining "consequences." I'm uncomfortable about the way we at COTS punish members "by the book" without regard to what makes sense for the individual.

I have a hard time imagining COTS giving up as much authority to clients as is implied in the Hard Times Café program.

The Community would support Points of Improvement as well as a greater involvement of clients in conflict resolution.

COTS has too much good community support to risk losing it to a body of decision-makers from our client population.

Points of Improvement would add a lot of administrative overhead: company store, vouchers for local merchants. We could use the same concept, but still give seasonal employees a paycheck every two weeks. However, rating by staff would appear arbitrary to employees and would engender resentment and the appearance of favoritism.

Sources

Bob van Oosterhout, *Hard Times Café Training Manual*, January 2000.

Alan Schilling, CEO of MMI, phone interview, June 24, 2002.

Hard Times Café website: <http://www.mmionline.com/training/hardtimescafe.html>

Mid-Michigan Industries website: <http://www.mmionline.com>