

TRAINING OF JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATORS IN THE PACIFIC

*Hon Miguel S Demapan**

This article addresses the need for further formal training of administrators who aid Chief Justices in the administration of their responsibilities. Research has shown that much of a Chief Justice's time is spent working on administrative matters; thus, hiring well-trained judicial administrative officers will help to lessen the administrative burden carried by Chief Justices, allowing them to focus on matters of law. The article outlines the importance of training Pacific judicial staff members from different jurisdictions who can then train their colleagues when they return home.

Cet article souligne les raisons qui justifient la nécessité d'assurer une formation spécifique des greffiers pour qu'ils puissent utilement seconder les présidents de juridictions dans leurs tâches administratives qui comme toutes les études le confirment, les accaparent de plus en plus au détriment du premier rôle des cours qui est de rendre la justice.

Several years ago, I attended the Conference of Chief Justices of Asia and the Pacific in Hong Kong and learned about the need to have more formal training for court administrators who assist chief justices in the administration of their respective judiciaries. Judge Clifford Wallace¹ informed those in attendance that, according to his research, chief justices spent from 25% to 50% of their time working on administrative matters. Since this is a substantial amount of time, it is only reasonable to explore ways to lessen the load. The primary way to do this, of course, is to hire qualified and well-trained judicial administrative officers. A survey from the Asia and Pacific Chief Justices showed a strong desire to provide additional training for these administrators so that they may better assist chief justices in their court responsibilities.

* Chief Justice, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

¹ The Honorable J Clifford Wallace, *Administrative Duties*, Hong Kong 2007.

The Pacific Judicial Council is an organisation of judiciaries in the Pacific regions of Micronesia and American Samoa with a mission of providing training to judicial officers and staff. In the past years, the court administrators of the PJC have met together for training throughout Micronesia. Aside from attending lectures and being involved in discussion groups, court administrators have also learned how to take these newly-acquired skills back to their courts and teach their colleagues how to be more productive and efficient. The hope is that this type of training maximizes scarce financial resources, and allows judiciaries to better serve the public.

Prior to setting the agenda for any training session, the council conducts a survey to assess the needs of the jurisdictions. The goal is to ascertain what the priorities of the conferences should be and the types of training the various islands need most. From there the Pacific Judicial Council Education Committee comes up with the venue, the types of speakers, and materials for the programs. The council then recommends the programs to the 9th Circuit Education Committee Director, Ms Sally Pym, who works hard to accommodate whatever requests the council makes.

One of the earlier surveys conducted by the Executive Director of PJC found that out of 200 responses, 86% of the respondents indicated that managers need more training than they have previously received. Two thirds of the responses indicated that managers are generally aware of ethical codes of behavior, and 56% of the administrators cited having first-hand experience in work-related situations involving potential conflicts of interests. Armed with this data, the PJC Education Committee then strived to provide training to reflect the needs indicated by the results of the survey.

During the training sessions, it is always a highlight to be able to hear presentations from all the various jurisdictions in attendance. These types of presentations by the various judicial administrators not only enhance their leadership skills but promote awareness of the various programs in existence in other jurisdictions. Usually, after working together for several days, the participants develop a sense of camaraderie and an enthusiasm to share ideas to take back home for adaptation.

As a valuable consultant, Chief Justice Wallace gives advice from time to time on how to strengthen the education committee, and how to ensure that all island jurisdictions are represented and their needs are taken into consideration. This is usually accomplished by setting up a contact person in one of the jurisdictions who is available to answer questions posed by other court administrators. This designated person strives to ensure that the purpose of the training is achieved. This

person also suggests topics to the council that may be appropriate for future training sessions.

The year 2005 was a critical point in the training program for the PJC court administrators. That was the time when the "Train the Trainer" program was first implemented. Initially, many people thought that such a program was overly ambitious considering the geographical size of the area that we encompass. The other concern we had about the "Train the Trainer" project was whether the participants would be able adequately fulfill the stated objectives of the program by sharing what they learned with their colleagues who were not able to attend.

The presenters of this conference taught techniques and strategies which spurred the creation of a strong regionally-based peer network system among court administrative officers. This initial conference, conducted in 2005, focused on ethics, leadership, and caseload management.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. The council received encouraging feedback, and even suggestions on how to improve the program to make it more effective in the future.

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Out of the 10 Pacific jurisdictions that participated, we enrolled 20 participants. The cost to set up the program was about \$57,000, but the impact these participants have made by returning home and sharing their knowledge has been tremendous. A total of 173 participants benefited from the follow-up training provided by the initial participants, which dropped the individual cost of training from \$3,000 to \$325 per person.

The venue of the first PJC Court Administrative training took place on Guam, and five training programs have taken place since then. The first program also accepted 24 self-paying participants sponsored by their courts. Over 239 court staff have since attended follow-up training.

Due to the success of our "Train the Trainer" program, the PJC will move forward and follow the core competencies curriculum which the Chief Justices and Presiding Judges have been studying since 2004. In other words, we have reached the point where the chief justices and court administrators are ready for the same training and are now capable of working together in their courts.

In March of 2007, the PJC provided additional training for PJC court staff. This session focused on evaluating employee performance, customer service, and ethics. Ethics seems to be a topic that is in high demand; we receive numerous requests for additional training in this area following each conference survey. Everyone has also profited by examining a variety of performance evaluation systems and by

participating in the hands-on practice of writing specific goals for problem employees.

One of the ways to tackle ethical issues is for the participants to attempt to resolve a hypothetical dilemma in a group setting. The group is guided by a professional brought in from training institutions in the United States.

Another training session that we provided to our court administrators was in the area of customer service. A professional was brought in to work with the administrators to help them understand how to achieve higher standards of service, to understand why customers get upset, and how to better deal with these upset customers. At the end of the lecture sessions, there were presentations from each jurisdiction. Participants were able to practice teaching what they had learned, and were able to observe how their other colleagues would go about teaching the material. This was videotaped for easy review and critique.

In March of 2008, we sponsored another training session in Palikir, Pohnpei. There were 44 clerks and administrative officers in attendance. The presenters covered a variety of topics during this conference, such as leading versus managing, dealing with difficult people, case flow management, developing contingency plans for disaster preparation, and again, ethical issues. Each of the jurisdictions was tasked to develop and submit a Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP) – something that is quite useful in light of the recent swine flu epidemic or pandemic.

In February of 2009, the PJC, Chief Justices and Presiding Judges, and Court Administrators met in Koror, Palau. The idea was to bring the justices together, for the first time, with their court administrator counterparts to strengthen the leadership teams and the judge-administrator relationships. We brought into Palau two professionals from the US mainland. The objective of this training was to promote a partnership between the justices and administrators. This program was not intended to create parity or equality, but to enhance the quality of working relationships and, in turn, to help further effective and efficient court administration. The aim was to focus more on the administrative process rather than the individual administrator, for only then can the partnership be better understood and appreciated.

In June of 2009, the court administrators again met in Colonia, Yap and were exposed to the "Core Competencies" which the Chief Justices and Presiding Judges have been studying since 2005. These 10 "Core Competencies" were developed by the National Association for Court Management (NACM) and provide an invaluable foundation for court administrators' professional development. The two topics covered in Yap were Court Community Communication, and Budget and

Finance. This was the first conference where we used some of our own court staff to teach the others in the region about their own expertise in the field.

Court Staff Follow-up Training 2005-2006

Jurisdiction	Participants	Program
Palau	22	Ethics
Guam	35	Ethics
CNMI	68	Caseflow Mgt
Am Samoa	14	Ethics
RMI	12	Ethics
FSM	88	Ethics & Caseflow Mgt
	239 Staff	

Purposes and Responsibilities of Courts

- Caseload Management
- Leadership
- Visioning & Strategic Planning
- Essential Components
- Court Community Communication
- Resources, Budget, & Finance
- Human Resource Management
- Education, Training, & Development
- Information Technology Management Thank you very much for your time.

