

Competencies for Experienced U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Officers

- Confidence in Decision Making
- Critical Analysis
- Everyday Leadership
- Investigative Objectivity
- Proactive Planning
- Resilience
- Role Awareness
- Supervision for Success
- Team Orientation
- Workload Management

CONFIDENCE IN DECISION MAKING

Definition

Confidence in Decision Making is the ability to make and execute well-reasoned case-related decisions even when those decisions are difficult or unpopular.

Associated Behaviors

- Makes individualized recommendations based on law, judiciary policy, and principles supported by research.
- Clearly articulates relevant reasons for recommendations that are grounded in law, policy, research, and individual characteristics.
- Communicates pretrial release, supervision, and sentencing recommendations in a confident, steadfast manner.
- Anticipates and responds to objections to recommendations.
- Adjusts plans to accommodate unexpected circumstances.
- Maintains reasoned position in spite of pressure from competing stakeholders.
- Executes a purposeful, well-considered supervision plan even if unpopular.
- Distinguishes factual information from speculation and opinion.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who show *Confidence in Decision Making* respond to external pressures to influence their recommendations with poise and composure. They are able to distinguish facts from opinion and advocacy. Because they base their decisions on relevant statutory factors, evidence-based practice, and independently verified information, these officers have the confidence to maintain their recommendations even when doing so is unpopular. When called upon to speak in court, these officers articulate the bases and reasons for their decisions clearly, credibly, and with certainty. As a result, these officers are trusted by the court to provide reliable insights that are unavailable from other sources.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Definition

Critical Analysis is the process of examining information to determine its accuracy, veracity, quality, and value to the court. It requires assessment of motivations, assumptions, and beliefs and the ability to organize and combine information to draw conclusions and form new ideas.

Associated Behaviors

- Evaluates information for its accuracy, reliability, and relevance.
- Organizes and presents information in a coherent way that is appropriate to the audience.
- Identifies sources for collateral investigation.
- Identifies and attributes the source of information in reports to the court.
- Recognizes missing and unverified information.
- Creates and executes a plan to obtain missing information.
- Draws conclusions and crafts plans based on evaluation of available information.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who engage in *Critical Analysis* serve the court by thoroughly vetting information for its accuracy and reliability. Their recommendations to the court are based on their independent evaluation of relevant information from multiple sources. Officers who show *Critical Analysis* make carefully reasoned decisions about combining available information into unique, independent recommendations.

EVERYDAY LEADERSHIP

Definition

Everyday Leadership is the ability to motivate and influence others to contribute to achieving the goals of the system and the district.

Associated Behaviors

- Teaches and mentors others.
- Shares information and knowledge.
- Models the use of evidence-based practice.
- Stays up-to-date on the latest research.
- Understands and compellingly communicates the vision of the system and the district.
- Shows enthusiasm for the goals of the system and the district.
- Seeks professional development through training and supervision.
- Sets professional development goals that are aligned with the district's mission.
- Establishes work priorities that are aligned with the values and future goals of the system and the district.
- Demonstrates the ability to manage work-related stress.
- Shares and celebrates success.
- Maintains confidences.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who exhibit *Everyday Leadership* demonstrate through example the highest standard of practice. They are mission-focused officers who strive to act consistently with the values of their district in all of their professional activities. *Everyday Leaders* are deliberate and reflective practitioners. They recognize that learning is ongoing and lifelong, and they proactively seek opportunities for professional growth through regular training and feedback from supervisors and peers. They are well informed about the latest innovations in practice and they share their skills and knowledge with others by teaching and mentoring. Probation and pretrial services officers who exhibit *Everyday Leadership* have the trust of their peers and supervisors and are considered reliable and credible sources of information by system stakeholders and other members of the judiciary.

INVESTIGATIVE OBJECTIVITY

Definition

Investigative Objectivity is the practice of impartiality in the process of gathering facts, evaluating information, and presenting that information to the court.

Associated Behaviors

- Makes recommendations based on independent review of verified facts.
- Grounds pretrial recommendations in relevant factors from policy, law, and risk assessment.
- Articulates sentencing recommendations with supporting justification grounded in relevant factors.
- Responses to violations and recommendations at revocation proceedings are calibrated to the violation type and reflect consideration of the individual supervisee.
- Evaluates the reliability of information provided by stakeholders invested in recommendations.
- Distinguishes factual information from speculation, opinion, and advocacy.
- Uses emotional intelligence in managing reactions to the facts of the case.

Intended Outcomes

Officers who display *Investigative Objectivity* engender the trust of the court by providing reliable information that has been carefully evaluated for accuracy and corroboration. They are the “eyes and ears” of the court. Their recommendations are useful to judges in making decisions and carry great weight in determining the release status, sentence, and violation-hearing outcome. Because of their unique role in the system, these officers provide insights about the case that are not available from any other source. As a result of their reasoned, objective evaluation of the available information, these officers are credible, reliable presences in court. Through their commitment to impartiality, officers with *Investigative Objectivity* demonstrate a commitment to upholding the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

Definition

Proactive Planning is the practice of considering the future impact of case-related decisions and actions on the individual supervisee and on the community as a whole.

Associated Behaviors

- Considers the impact of supervision and sentencing recommendations on the community as well as the supervisee.
- Considers long-term implications of supervision and sentencing recommendations.
- Calibrates supervision intensity to risk and needs.
- Regularly reevaluates supervisee risk and needs.
- Conducts release-based pretrial interviewing.
- Writes presentence reports with an eye toward their multiple possible uses after sentencing.
- Crafts pretrial recommendations, supervision plan, and presentence report with an eye toward community reentry.
- Incorporates reentry planning throughout the life of the case, including at the pretrial phase.
- Establishes supervisee goals on a case-by-case basis.
- Adjusts supervision plan to accommodate new information.
- Uses a deliberate interviewing structure to obtain useful information and guide change.
- Leads supervisees to understand available options and the consequences of their decisions.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who engage in *Proactive Planning* make future-oriented case decisions that address the needs of both individual supervisees and the wider community. These officers consider the future impact of case-related decisions at all points throughout the life of the case. They work to preserve pro-social connections to the community during the pretrial phase, prepare presentence reports that aim to inform multiple users of the report after sentencing, and plan for the supervisee's successful transition back into the community after a period of incarceration. Officers who demonstrate *Proactive Planning* display skill in thinking ahead to anticipate challenges and show agility in adjusting plans to accommodate changes in circumstances. Their ultimate goals are reduced recidivism and better outcomes for supervisees.

RESILIENCE

Definition

Resilience is the ability to maintain purpose, effectiveness, and mission-focus in challenging situations.

Associated Behaviors

- Recognizes maladaptive coping behaviors and signs of chronic stress, secondary trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue in self and others.
- Maintains appropriate boundaries with supervisees.
- Plans proactively to anticipate supervision, investigation, and workload challenges.
- Establishes priorities that are consistent with the district's mission.
- Sets goals that are reasonable considering workload and identifies actions to move closer to achieving established goals.
- Maintains fluency in officer safety, use of force, and critical-incident protocols.
- Reflects on past experiences to devise useful strategies for future challenges.
- Seeks assistance from mental health and substance use treatment professionals when appropriate.
- Consults mission-driven peers and mentors for support.
- Responds to critical incidents in ways that are consistent with judiciary policy and office procedure.
- Maintains physical fitness and is physically capable of defending self if necessary.
- Maintains optimism in challenging situations.
- Communicates with colleagues, supervisors, and stakeholders about strategies for managing and reducing stress.
- Takes breaks and uses leave when appropriate.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who demonstrate *Resilience* model pro-social behavior through their commitment to safety, health, and wellness. These officers equip themselves with knowledge about the health and safety risks associated with the probation and pretrial services profession and demonstrate their readiness by proactively planning their response to both critical incidents and everyday challenges. Because of their preparation, practice, and education, these officers respond to crisis situations effectively. They aim to reduce case-related anxiety and workload pressure by anticipating case-related challenges and manage competing demands by setting priorities that are aligned with the district's mission. Even when emotions run high, they execute planned actions and communicate their needs with composure and self-control. Through regular practice and reflection on challenging experiences, these officers accumulate a set of practical skills in preparation, response, and recovery that preserve their longevity as effective officers.

ROLE AWARENESS

Definition

Role Awareness is the commitment to the deliberate, intentional performance of all pretrial services and probation activities in a way that is consistent with the values of the system, the district, and the ethical canons that apply to probation and pretrial services officers.

Associated Behaviors

- Understands the mission and function of probation and pretrial services within the larger criminal justice system.
- Recognizes the individual officer's role in the organization and considers how that role impacts the district and broader community.
- Understands the statutory authority for probation and pretrial services.
- Exhibits fluency in the ethical canons in the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees.
- Applies a systematic approach to investigation and supervision that is grounded in evidence-based practice.
- Considers ways to translate research into practice.
- Reflects on performance.
- Incorporates supervisor feedback into everyday practice.
- Considers the impact of decisions and recommendations on the community as a whole.
- Communicates the role of probation and pretrial services clearly.
- Communicates the goal of supervision clearly.
- Recognizes the officer's role in influencing supervisee behavior.
- Demonstrates a belief in the possibility of change.
- Engages in mission-driven decision making.
- Communicates effectively across cultures.
- Responds to the cultural needs of supervisees.
- Demonstrates commitment to the equal administration of justice.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who demonstrate *Role Awareness* engage in critical self-reflection about their role and the role of probation and pretrial services within the larger legal system. They are committed to the independence and integrity of the federal judiciary and make decisions with the deliberate intention of acting ethically and in a manner consistent with their role and the values of the system and their district. They are fluent in the scope and authority of their role and the ethical standards governing their conduct. They are culturally competent and their supervision reflects awareness of the cultural background of their supervisees. Because they are actively engaged in reflection about their work, they are positioned to identify unmet needs and recognize early opportunities for innovation. They are committed to professional growth and adjust their performance in response to feedback.

SUPERVISION FOR SUCCESS

Definition

Supervision for Success is the practice of guiding supervisees toward successful pretrial and post-conviction outcomes.

Associated Behaviors

- Applies concepts of risk, need, and responsivity throughout the supervision process.
- Understands the applications and limitations of different risk assessment instruments.
- Accurately assesses pretrial risk and post-conviction risk/needs.
- Identifies specific drivers of dynamic risk factors and develops strategies to address them.
- Adjusts supervision plan to account for changes in circumstance.
- Uses positive reinforcement, disapproval, and authority effectively.
- Listens actively to supervisees and maintains empathetic patience.
- Coaches supervisees to engage in problem solving and make pro-social decisions.
- Anticipates potential obstacles to supervision and devises strategies to address them.
- Responds to violations of release conditions quickly and proportionately with consideration for the community as well as for the individual characteristics of the supervisee.
- Clearly communicates officer role, expectations, supervision plan, court process, and goals to supervisees.
- Shows enthusiasm for positive change in supervisee behavior.
- Responds to supervisee resistance with composure and resolve to guide change.
- Endeavors to understand supervisee motivations.
- Teaches skills for post-supervision success in the community.
- Proactively plans for reentry by preserving positive community connections, preparing supervisees for incarceration (when appropriate), and planning early for transition following a period of incarceration.
- Crafts presentence reports that facilitate appropriate services while incarcerated and successful transition to the community after a period of incarceration.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who demonstrate *Supervision for Success* are committed to making case-related decisions that promote successful outcomes at all stages of the criminal case process. Balancing the needs of the community and supervisee, these officers incorporate evidence-based practice at all phases of supervision. They craft presentence reports and recommendations that balance the needs of the individual with the interests of the community and that promote the ultimate goal of preventing future contact with the criminal justice system. Officers who *Supervise for Success* facilitate change in their supervisees by modeling the desired decision-making process and teaching skills for success in the community after supervision ends. These officers are effective communicators able to influence supervisees who are considered “difficult to reach.” They listen with empathetic patience, identify individual motivations driving behavior, and use reinforcement strategies tailored to their individual supervisees. Probation and pretrial services officers who *Supervise for Success* adjust their supervision style to the needs of their supervisees. Keeping the needs of the community in mind, they respond promptly and

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proportionately to behavior in violation of conditions. As a result of active listening, these officers obtain more complete information from their supervisees and are thus able to provide comprehensive, useful information to the court.

TEAM ORIENTATION

Definition

Team Orientation is commitment to combining efforts with others in furtherance of the district's goals.

Associated Behaviors

- Coordinates activities with other staff of the office and, when appropriate, with other stakeholders.
- Shares information, knowledge, and resources with others.
- Anticipates the needs of others and contributes assistance.
- Graciously accepts the assistance of other team members.
- Delivers thoughtful, candid feedback to peers in a constructive way.
- Responds to critical feedback with poise.
- Routinely seeks feedback from peers.
- Thoughtfully incorporates mission-focused feedback into performance.
- Recognizes signs of work-related stressors in colleagues and intervenes where appropriate according to district procedure and judiciary policy.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers with *Team Orientation* understand the role and mission of their district and look for ways to collaborate with fellow officers and other stakeholders to further that mission. Officers trust one another with feedback and information. These officers are sustained by their positive interactions with others and feel supported in making tough decisions and performing under pressure. As a result of collaboration, the quality and efficiency of the work of the individual officer and the entire team are improved.

WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

Definition

Workload Management is the delivery of high-quality performance on assigned tasks in a timely, efficient, and complete manner.

Associated Behaviors

- Sets priorities based on circumstances, available information, and resources.
- Allocates the time, effort, and resources necessary to complete tasks within statutory time requirements.
- Creates and adheres to a schedule.
- Adjusts schedule and work plan to new information and changing priorities.
- Submits timely and accurate reports.
- Communicates with supervisor about needs related to workload complexity and case quantity.
- Arranges for workload coverage when necessary in accordance with office policy.
- Aligns workload priorities with the mission and values of the system and district.
- Prioritizes tasks, allocates limited resources, and manages time by considering supervisee risk level.
- Memorializes case activity in an accurate, timely, and complete manner.
- Effectively uses technology to manage workload.
- Delegates to others where appropriate.
- Uses wellness strategies to manage case-related stress.

Intended Outcomes

Probation and pretrial services officers who demonstrate *Workload Management* take personal responsibility for their individual assignments by accurately assessing tasks for priority and allocating sufficient time for completion. Their reports, risk assessments, case plans, and case assignments are accurate and timely. Officers exhibiting *Workload Management* plan ahead to anticipate fluctuations in work volume. They look for opportunities to increase overall efficiency in their offices by volunteering to help others and consolidating efforts where possible. These officers keep their supervisors informed of important case-related issues and seek workload assistance from their supervisor when needed. As a result of their planning, the work of these officers is thorough, complete, and accurate. Because they are prompt and thorough in documenting case-related events, they possess valuable information for court appearances and are able to recognize patterns in supervisee behavior. Officers who demonstrate *Workload Management* preserve their longevity in the field by taking advantage of wellness resources and using healthy coping strategies to manage case-related stress.