

A VALUABLE RESOURCE

The HR Academy is your source for learning, collaboration and support.



Your Feedback is Essential!

If you have yet to complete the annual Competency Assessment Questionnaire, there's still time. Your participation in the survey is important to HR Academy's overall success. We use your input on the questionnaire to determine the upcoming year's training priorities based on how you rate yourself in the listed skills. Please click [here](#) to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation and for helping HR Academy continually improve.

NEW HR Academy Program!

The HR Academy is excited to announce the launch of HR Academy Boot Camp. Boot Camp has been designed around VA's HR core, technical, and strategic competencies and its primary goals are to ensure that our new hires have a solid foundation as they start their careers at VA, and to serve as a refresher for our existing staff. Boot Camp is a series of twelve courses which will be delivered via virtual web-based instruction, culminating in a classroom session, and will combine individual and group work. Our Boot Camp pilot begins February 25 and runs through June 7. Stay tuned for registration information, which will be coming within the next few weeks.

THE HR ACADEMY CONNECTION

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HR HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome to HR Academy Connection's newest feature, HR Highlights. HR Highlights helps keep you abreast of the latest news and trends in the HR community. It contains timely and relevant information that you can use in your role as an HR professional. This month, our focus is on the performance management (PM) cycle and ways to support staff during the process.

The Performance Management Cycle – Keys to Success

We are a few months into the new PM cycle. As HR professionals, now is a good time to review the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff and remind them of what's expected.

Remind managers to approve their employees' objectives, if they haven't done so already. Managers should also ensure that each of their employees has a clear understanding of their objectives and what they need to accomplish during the PM cycle before approving the objectives.

You should also remind staff members that it's their responsibility to make sure their objectives are clear and achievable. If they think their objectives are unclear, stress the importance of

having a conversation with their managers. By talking to their managers, employees can clarify their objectives and gain confidence in their ability to achieve them.

In addition to finalizing their employees' performance objectives, here are some other things for managers and staff to keep in mind as they move through the PM cycle:

- **Communication** – Having open and honest dialogue is the most important thing managers and employees need to do. Managers shouldn't be afraid to give feedback and staff members shouldn't be afraid to receive or give it.

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HR Academy and You: VA HR Specialist Erick Walton

Each day, Erick Walton arrives at what he calls his "dream job" at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Service Center in Cleveland and starts his day as a VA HR specialist. As a Veteran of the Desert Storm and Desert Shield operations, Erick feels closely tied to VA's mission and has been driven to serve his fellow Veterans since his days on the battlefield. Working for VA now allows him to pursue this passion professionally.

"Serving Veterans is something I've always wanted to do," he said. "And now, I'm able to do that every day."

Erick gained experience in HR in both the private and public sectors prior to joining VA, including at the Department of Defense (DoD). While he enjoyed the work, he continued to look for ways to link his career in HR with his commitment to helping Veterans. He got his first opportunity to do so when he worked as a contractor helping disabled Veterans find government jobs. Erick thrived in this role, drawing on his personal experience to better relate to and build trust with the Veterans he helped. When his contract ended, he jumped at the chance to apply for an open position at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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ADVANCE
TRANSFORMING POTENTIAL INTO PERFORMANCE

ADVANCE is an HR&A initiative to invest in people development, workforce engagement and talent management for the delivery of high-quality health care, benefits and other services to Veterans and their families.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

The Performance Management Cycle – Keys to Success ...continued

o *Managers*

- In order for feedback to be effective, it must be specific and timely. Managers should share an employee's strengths and weaknesses with him or her as soon as they are noticed. Doing so will help raise an employee's awareness and create more success.
- Remind managers that employees are encouraged to provide feedback on their performance. It might be difficult for some employees to let managers know how they are doing, so the manager should encourage feedback when it's appropriate.

o *Employees*

- Remind employees to be open to feedback from their managers and to have a positive attitude.
- Open dialogue with their managers isn't just about receiving feedback on their performance. It's also an opportunity for them to ask questions, share their thoughts regarding their personal performance, and provide feedback on their manager's performance and what managers can do to help employees succeed.

- **Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** – Managers and employees should regularly review and revise their IDP to make sure it accurately reflects where they are right now and where they want to go in the future.
- **Career Mapping** – In addition to an Individual Development Plan, you should encourage managers and employees to take advantage of the HR Academy Career Mapping tool. If an employee is new to VA, make sure they are aware of the tool and work with their manager to create a career map at the appropriate time to address their training and development needs.
- **Document Your Work** – As we move through the PM cycle, managers and employees should document their achievements on a regular basis. Documenting is a good way for employees to demonstrate what they've achieved and what they need to accomplish, to better write their self-assessments. Journaling, saving emails and keeping hard copies of work products are just a few examples of how employees can keep track of what they've accomplished during the cycle.

By helping managers and staff through the performance management cycle, you are helping our internal clients succeed, and helping our nation's Veterans succeed.

HR Academy and You: VA HR Specialist Erick Walton ...continued

With nearly 10 years of DoD experience, Erick transitioned smoothly into VA in 2007.

Today, Erick focuses on employee development and training. He coordinates training for all HR staff at his facility, projects future training needs, and is an instructor for certain courses. Erick is enthusiastic about his current role, which gives him a unique perspective on the importance of training and development at VA. "It's very gratifying to help new employees develop into skilled HR professionals for VA."

Erick believes that all VA employees should take advantage of the opportunities the Department provides to improve and advance their skills. "Ongoing professional development can help employees thrive in the Department's dynamic work environment," he said. "As VA employees, we owe it to Veterans to be at our best."

Erick is excited about the career possibilities available to him at VA and is glad he found his way here. "My fellow Veterans really inspire me to keep doing what I'm doing," he said. "As both a customer and an employee, I think VA is a perfect fit for me."



VA HR Specialist Erick Walton



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HR Academy Provides Overview of Virtual Learning Tool Through Demo Video

The HR Academy offers a wide variety of virtual courses that you can take anytime, anywhere, giving you the flexibility to take courses whenever it is convenient for you. If you are new to online learning, the demo video is designed to familiarize you with the tools used to deliver virtual courses. You can view the video on the [Virtual learning page](#).

The demo video gives you an overview of Blackboard Collaborate™, the virtual learning application used to deliver online courses. Blackboard Collaborate™ offers audio and video tools through a Web conferencing platform so instructors and participants can interact in a virtual learning environment. The short, six-minute video discusses each of the learning tool's features and describes how those features interact to maximize your learning experience. It also provides links to additional resources to help answer your questions and to increase your understanding.

[Watch](#) the video today to learn more.



Blackboard Collaborate Overview

HR Academy Releases Early 2013 Courses

We are just a few days into the new year, but the 2013 curriculum is already in full swing.

Visit the [Course Calendar page](#) to view upcoming courses being offered in 2013. Classes fill up fast, so don't miss your opportunity, register ASAP!

Registration for Winter 2013 virtual courses is almost full, but don't worry, we plan to release the course curriculum for Spring 2013—which will feature even more new courses—in early March.



HR2U Virtual

HR2U Update

The HR Academy is pleased to announce that HR2U is going virtual, allowing more people the opportunity to take advantage of this great learning opportunity at their desks, with no travel involved. We are currently converting the Career Mapping course—a course designed to help identify formal training and education, developmental activities and experiential learning you can pursue to address skills improvement and prepare for future assignments—to the virtual format. Once we've completed the conversion, we will conduct a pilot, refine the course based on feedback provided and then release the final version. Our goal is to convert the entire HR2U workshop over time. Check the [HR2U webpage](#) for more information and updates on the conversion.

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Calling All HR Subject Matter Experts!

The HR Academy is constantly seeking to improve its programs and hearing from Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) is a great way to do that. We strive to provide meaningful course content and your SME knowledge can help us to continue to do so. If you are interested in becoming a SME, please contact:

training_administrator@sra.com.

We Want to Hear From You!

If you have a success story to share about your Virtual Learning experience, we want to hear from you! Sharing your success stories helps to promote the virtual learning program and encourages your colleagues to participate. To hear about others' positive experiences, visit the HR Academy [Website](#); or email training_administrator@sra.com to share your own feedback today.



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