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What basic skills should a court technologist have?

Why is this important?

Most court technologists have backgrounds in IT, network development, and desktop support. However, to meet the needs of a court's business model, further development of specialized AV technological skills should be managed and directed.

Research

Many courts hire IT specialists as court technologists and assign them to maintain AV equipment as one of their primary responsibilities. However, problems arise when these technologists are required to diagnose, configure, and test AV equipment, as this troubleshooting and testing often falls outside of their technical expertise. Without more in-depth product knowledge, technologists are forced to rely on AV vendor support teams for assistance with advanced issues, which can cause major delays and yield prohibitive cost increases for courts.

Recommendation

A court technologist should have a basic understanding of AV technological principles and the ability to diagnose, test, and evaluate AV equipment and software without completely relying on vendor support. Without this fundamental knowledge, they are at a disadvantage in conducting their routine tasks (i.e., operating equipment and fixing common problems).

Further, court technologists should also be able explain equipment operation and communicate technical issues to both technical and non-technical personnel. They will often serve as advocates for their courts, relaying complicated problems and how those complications impact operations within court business models to AV vendors and manufacturers.

Accordingly, technologists should receive specialized AV training shortly after being hired. Additionally, if possible, the technologist should have in-court experience that provides them with working knowledge of how technology is applied in the courtroom.

How much AV training should courts provide staff?

Why is this important?

Court operating staff should understand how AV systems work and have problem-solving skills that allow them to address the issues they commonly experience. However, the amount of training the courts require of and provide to their staff can be set and adjusted to complement court business processes and administrative requirements.

Research

Fundamental knowledge of existing AV equipment is almost universally required by today's courts. However, AV training programs must complement a court's individual equipment and needs, which will frequently vary by jurisdiction or court. Vendor-supplied support diagnostics and communication should involve training tailored to specific courts' needs and equipment.

Recommendation

Court operating staff should understand how court AV systems and their components interact with one another and have basic diagnostic expertise. They may not be required to fix a problem, but they should understand enough to communicate issues and ancillary information (e.g., error messages) to support personnel.

AV and diagnostic training can be accomplished through a two-tier training program. Tier 1 should explain the normal operation of courtroom systems, how to train new users, and how to resolve obvious problems—such as powering devices, plugging in cables, etc. Tier 2 should provide information regarding recognition and resolution of more advanced problems to allow staff to identify functional components and restore functionality when technical issues arise.

Technical support staff, depending on court needs and goals and the equipment and software they regularly use, will typically need more advanced training.

Where should court personnel get additional AV training?

Why is this important?

Personnel who regularly work with AV technology need training to adequately resolve issues without necessarily contacting vendor support teams or asking for help from the often-limited number of experienced technical staff available to service the court. Adding to the court cadre of AV-trained personnel spreads demand for technical support more evenly across all available staff and leads to faster resolutions and reduced costs from delayed proceedings.

Research

Training can come from many sources. While federal courts do not allow their staff to participate in free training courses offered by AV manufacturers, many state courts still do. Topics covered during manufacturers' training courses may be restricted to those pieces of equipment the manufacturers have provided.

Additional training options are provided through the Center for Legal and Court Technology, trade associations, self-study books, and technical school certification courses. An effective training regimen may combine hands-on activities, online modules, and mobile applications.

From the standpoint of employee retention, training may be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a well-trained employee will perform his or her job duties with fewer difficulties, feel empowered to support the court more effectively, and often be more satisfied in his or her work. On the other hand, providing an employee with specialized training makes him or her significantly more valuable in other job sectors; it then becomes more likely that the employee will leave the court and pursue another career.

Recommendation

Vendor-supplied training programs frequently do not consider the specific needs of the court personnel they train and focus on irrelevant material. Courts looking to train their staff should discuss their needs and limitations with vendors to optimize the utility of vendor-supplied training programs.

Advanced training courses should be customized to fit a given court with a clear understanding of how the training will equip court personnel to more adeptly use, support, and evaluate the court's AV systems.

Court technology managers should also participate in training to better understand available AV systems.