



insidetrack<sup>®</sup>

RETENTION TOOLKIT

# 6 best practices for building staff capacity and resilience





## Stronger student outcomes begin with more empowered support staff

In a higher education landscape where burnout has become the norm, building internal capacity is essential to helping overwhelmed staff move beyond transactional interactions and reconnect with the “why” behind their work. By prioritizing the wellbeing and professional growth of teams, institutions do more than just ease workloads — **they build a sustainable foundation for learner resilience and persistence.**

Over the past 25 years, InsideTrack has worked alongside student support teams to understand their specific barriers and pain points. We’ve partnered with more than 150 organizations to train their staff in our coaching methodology, helping them move to a developmental and holistic student-centered approach that [sees real results](#).

By scaling [our coaching methodology](#) across teams, institutions can turn individual staff success into a sustainable culture of excellence for all students. Our partners help their staff rediscover the knowledge, skills and beliefs necessary to support their students efficiently — while giving them their sense of purpose back. And when student supporters feel empowered, they can move beyond surface-level interactions to provide the human-centered engagement that learners need to stay on the path toward degree completion. Supporting the staff who support your students is not just about efficiency, but about building the collective resilience required to move every learner forward.

### Empower your teams with these six best practices to improve staff capacity and resilience:

- 1** Make “doing more with less” actually possible by investing in evidence-based professional development and capacity-building programs
- 2** Meet your staff — not just your students — where they are by supporting them with a trauma-informed, healing-centered approach
- 3** Embark on new projects, initiatives and changes with clarity by implementing a change management methodology
- 4** Reinvigorate your team’s purpose and potential by making space for reflection and 1:1 development
- 5** Mitigate frustration and create a continuity of care by offering cross-departmental learning opportunities
- 6** Cultivate a lasting culture of curiosity, community and candor through ongoing communities of practice

# 1 Make “doing more with less” actually possible by investing in evidence-based professional development and capacity-building programs

With student support staff navigating heavier caseloads, what they *don't* need is another training program where skills fade after a few weeks. What they *do* need is a methodology that actually works in complex, real-world interactions and helps staff stay student-centered. But not all programs are created equal.

To identify training that is truly impactful, leaders should look for programs that:

- Have been certified, accredited or acknowledged by reputable 3rd-party entities
- Are facilitated by skilled instructors who have gone through rigorous training themselves
- Allow for staff to integrate new techniques into existing workflows over time
- Include one-on-one, human development — a key to long-term success
- Are *not* entirely self-paced or promise immediate results



By shifting from [transactional to transformational interactions](#), staff can support students more efficiently while rediscovering their own professional purpose.

**BONUS:** When leaders also participate, they let staff know that these programs are a long-term investment in their career and development. By using a proven methodology, student supporters can rest assured that what they're learning works, while leaders can trust they've made a sound investment.

# 2 Meet your staff — not just your students — where they are by supporting them with a trauma-informed, healing-centered approach

High caseloads and heavy administrative burdens are impacting staff stress and burnout, with Tyton Partners finding that [less than 20% of student supporters](#) report that their caseload is “always manageable.” This perspective, paired with the high emotional demands of supporting students through various challenges, leads to rates of anxiety and stress among staff that often mirror those of the students they serve.

To improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of staff, consider using a trauma-informed, healing-centered approach. As Dr. Shawn Ginwright explains, “**The term *healing-centered engagement* expands how we think about responses to trauma and offers a more holistic approach to fostering wellbeing.**” This type of supportive engagement from leadership can include:

- Creating safe spaces for staff to disclose challenges without fear of repercussions
- Proactive communication across multiple channels to give staff a genuine sense of ownership
- Making self-care check-ins a standing agenda item to ensure staff feel valued
- Allowing staff to influence organizational decisions and manage tasks in ways that work for them
- Practicing cultural humility to ensure the workplace respects diverse backgrounds and understands the conditions shaping staff lives

By following these practices, you can improve the psychological safety of your staff, ensuring they have the emotional bandwidth to provide the transformational care all students need to persist and complete.

### 3 Embark on new projects, initiatives and changes with clarity by implementing a change management methodology



Taking on any new initiative, even welcome changes, can feel overwhelming to staff who are already stretched thin. This is where a strong change management approach makes the difference — and organizations that apply effective change management practices to their new initiatives are [seven times more likely to see results](#).

Implementing a solid approach means *putting people before the plan*. This looks like prioritizing clear communication and bringing stakeholders into the conversation early. When staff understand the rationale behind a change and how new expectations will help their learners thrive, they view the initiative as a positive change rather than a burden.

InsideTrack utilizes the [Prosci Change Management Methodology](#) to empower leaders and teams to take ownership of new initiatives. Key aspects of this methodology include sustaining highly visible executive support and ensuring staff have the time and space to ask questions and get on board. By informing staff of what's expected and providing the necessary training on a clear and manageable timeline, you can ensure that training initiatives blossom into the internal capacity needed to sustain long-term transformation — for staff and students.

### 4 Reinvigorate your team's purpose and potential by making space for reflection and 1:1 development

According to the [Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve](#), individuals lose an average of *90% of new information* within just seven days if it isn't reinforced — which is often why one-off trainings or workshops rarely lead to lasting change. To help staff feel truly empowered in their roles as student supporters, institutions must embrace and encourage dedicated time for regular practice and feedback.

The ability to have 1:1 development sessions is often a revelation for staff members who are used to being spread thin. When staff [are coached themselves](#), it provides a safe space to work through challenges and identify sticking points. This personalized attention allows burned-out professionals to reflect, prioritize self-care and rediscover how to support students impactfully. These types of sessions are critically important for helping coaches advance in their craft.

By experiencing the power of a human-centered, inquisitive approach firsthand, staff can better apply those same techniques to their learners. This shift allows them to move beyond the tasks they may feel required to talk about — like course registration — to dive deep into the real issues affecting students. This might mean uncovering a lack of reliable childcare, transportation hurdles like a broken-down car, or even work-schedule conflicts that make a degree feel out of reach for some students.

Ultimately, investing in individualized coaching sessions and customized feedback ensures that professional development drives measurable improvements in both staff performance and student outcomes.



## 5 Mitigate frustration and create a continuity of care by offering cross-departmental learning opportunities



Breaking down institutional silos is essential for creating a collaborative team culture — and a seamless student experience. While the rise of holistic coaching is a powerful step forward for student success, its impact is often localized within a single department — creating a silo where students may still find themselves repeating their stories or navigating disconnected advice across different campus offices. To truly mitigate cross-departmental confusion and frustration, institutions should consider extending coaching and trauma-informed training to every student-facing team — including financial aid, the bursar, the career center, etc. When all staff share a common methodology, they can better communicate with each other, ensuring students receive consistent support at every turn.

[Peirce College](#) serves as a prime example of this impact. By training both their advising staff and career center staff in a unified coaching approach, they created a continuity of care that allowed their teams to assess the whole student and identify underlying issues — such as financial anxiety or undefined career aspirations — regardless of where the student first sought help.

By equipping cross-functional teams with an evidence-based, holistic coaching methodology, you can ensure that a student's sense of safety and support is reinforced on every corner of campus. This collective capacity doesn't just ease departmental tension; it empowers staff to work together to get students exactly what they need.

## 6 Cultivate a lasting culture of curiosity, community and candor through ongoing communities of practice

Once formal professional development ends, it's common for staff to feel invigorated, only for those new skills to slip away as daily priorities take over. Institutions that cultivate communities of practice — judgment-free zones where staff can ask questions, be vulnerable, and collaborate on what is or isn't working in their student interactions — are more successful at helping learnings truly stick, and ultimately, students persist and thrive.

At InsideTrack, we facilitate this through our [Coaching and Trainer Networks](#), which provide InsideTrack-certified professionals exclusive access to a nationwide community of peers, updated resources and exclusive workshops. By providing these ongoing development opportunities, we ensure that the journey doesn't end at certification. Instead, we help create a dedicated space where professional growth and learning continue to evolve alongside the needs of your students.

By institutionalizing a culture of curiosity and candor, you create a network of support that reinforces learning and prevents the forgetting curve from setting in. When staff have a dedicated community to lean on, they remain invigorated and committed to driving long-term transformative value for their learners.





## Real-world results for building staff capacity

When you invest in your people, the impact is felt across the entire campus. Partners who utilize our evidence-based coaching methodology to close the gap between staff capacity and student needs have found measurable success. By prioritizing the professional growth and resilience of student support teams, these organizations have realized a stronger return on investment through increased persistence and retention.

### RESULTS SHOW THAT EMPOWERED STAFF DRIVE LEARNER SUCCESS

**+30% pts.**

increase in staff retention after completing InsideTrack certification



**+10%**

increase in overall student retention as a result of coach training



**+14.7% pts.**

increase in student satisfaction after advising redesign



**+21.4%**

higher retention for coached Pell-eligible students vs. non-coached peers



**89.6%**

fall-to-spring persistence rate — nearly 3% higher than non-coached students



***Providing staff with the tools, training and support to grow in their roles has improved our capacity to deliver personalized guidance, while also boosting staff retention and morale.***

- Susan Hawkins-Wilding,  
Vice President of Student Success,  
University of Maryland Global Campus

## When your staff thrives, your students do too

At the heart of every successful retention strategy is a team that feels seen, skilled and supported. When you build internal staff capacity, you ensure that student supporters have the true bandwidth needed to offer the transformational care students require to overcome barriers and persist. A fully supported staff is one of the most powerful tools you can have for closing equity gaps and boosting student success.

Ready to transform your staff support through Coaching Development and Training?

[GET STARTED >](#)