

Hard Times Cafe Training Manual

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Part 1: Program Overview

Hard Times Cafe Mission Statement

The Hard Times Cafe (HTC) views disadvantaged people as a resource to be tapped rather than a problem to be solved. As an empowerment program that is owned and operated by the participants (called patrons), HTC focuses on providing opportunities for disadvantaged people to work together to meet their basic needs while developing the skills, habits, and motivation that lead to regular employment. HTC promotes and supports community economic development and the development of resources that help disadvantaged people to increase their self-reliance, sense of belonging, and involvement in community life.

Values

- The Dignity of Each Person
- Focus on Potential Rather than Deficits
- Community
- Responsibility

Goals

1. To work together to meet our needs and improve our lives.
2. To develop skills and attitudes that will help us to prosper.
3. To create a positive impression in the community that will bring us respect and opportunity.
4. To improve our community.
5. To serve as a positive role model for children.

Part 2: Philosophy and Approach

HTC Principles

Rather than rules, HTC patrons developed a set of principles to serve as a code of conduct and guide for dealing with problems. Unlike rules, HTC principles are designed to take into account the context and history. If a violation occurs, the focus is on how to get back on track in order to follow the principles. Principle violations are an opportunity to help and support someone rather than a need for punishment. The following principles are reviewed and discussed at least once a year by patrons at the weekly meeting. They are part of the bylaws and every patron has agreed to abide by them.

- **Honesty** — We will be truthful, ethical, moral, trustworthy, sincere and dependable.
- **Quality** — We will seek quality in our thoughts, work and relationships. Quality implies value. We want to think, work and relate in ways that are valuable to each other, ourselves and our community.
- **Self-Supporting** — We will do all we can to support ourselves and others. We will not seek handouts but will work to earn what we need.
- **Courteous** — We will respect and show consideration for others no matter how they treat us.
- **Faith in a Higher Power** — We will remain loyal to the religious principles that guide each of us.
- **Perseverance** — We will follow through with our commitments, obligations and responsibilities. We will go the 'extra mile.'
- **Endurance** — We will 'stick with it' and 'won't give up' until our efforts are no longer needed or helpful.
- **Self-Esteem** — We will remember that we all have the potential and capacity to improve. We will build self-esteem by becoming more competent and accomplishing our goals.
- **Ambition** — We will maintain a strong desire to improve ourselves and our community.
- **Positive Attitude** — We will strive to look for positive opportunities in everything that is presented to us.
- **Work Together** — We will listen to each other's needs and cooperate in building something that is greater than each one of us.
- **Sharing** — We will be open to each other with our feelings, ideas, needs and resources. We believe that when we help each other we all prosper.

Focus of the Hard Times Cafe

Hard Times Cafe has traditionally worked with people who have limited resources and opportunities and are often considered to be 'difficult to serve' by traditional human service and welfare-to-work agencies. HTC patrons include those who have:

- Poor motivation, are skeptical of 'the system' or have given up
- Poor work habits
- Low self-esteem
- Limited work skills
- Poorly developed interpersonal and problem-solving skills
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Poorly developed thinking, planning and organizing skills
- No support network
- Very few resources
- Difficulty accepting responsibility
- Problems with commitments and follow-through
- Handicaps that limit employability

What Is Empowerment

Power is the ability to act or produce an effect. The prefix 'em' means them. Empowerment means that a person or group has the ability to act on their own behalf or to have a positive effect on their lives. One of the dictionary definitions of empowerment is 'to give authority.' When I have authority, I am responsible — I have the ability to respond in a way that has a positive effect in my life.

You cannot empower someone by telling or forcing them to do something even if it seems to be in their own best interest. Empowerment involves having choices that make a difference.

Empowerment at HTC is understood as a process of removing obstacles while providing opportunities, resources and support that allow individuals and communities to reach their potential.

Components of Empowerment

There are seven components of empowerment as it is practiced at HTC:

1. **Empowerment involves a way of looking at someone.**

Empowerment focuses on resources and opportunities rather than problems and deficits. Discouragement and hopelessness are common among disadvantaged people. Most human service agencies are required to identify and document problems and difficulties before services can be delivered. Empowerment changes that focus. Rather than ask what's wrong, HTC explores the potential of each patron and works to create opportunities where they can recognize and realize their own unique talents and gifts.

2. **Empowerment is a process of improvement.**

HTC does not expect quick fixes but works to help patrons develop habits that lead to lasting, ongoing improvement. There is no hurry or pressure but the focus is always on how skills, conditions and capabilities can be improved. This requires a supportive atmosphere and open, honest feedback along with the resources and opportunities that allow patrons to take the steps necessary to keep moving forward.

3. **Empowerment happens in relationship.**

People seldom change their perceptions or behavior in isolation. HTC works to develop supportive relationships with open, accepting communication so that patrons can let down their defenses and make improvements that allow them to realize their potential.

4. **Empowerment is a partnership.**

Neither is it possible to empower someone by giving them a recipe to follow or telling them what to do. Empowerment is a partnership where professionals and disadvantaged people each bring their skills, abilities and limitations to work together to accomplish what neither group can do alone. It is a mutual process of cooperation and learning from each other.

5. **Empowerment involves community.**

One of the greatest tragedies of poverty in the USA is the sense of isolation that it brings along with it. A sense of belonging and the experience of contributing and helping others helps patrons to realize their value and worth. HTC takes every opportunity to encourage and stimulate patrons to work together and support each other.

6. Empowerment has a long-term focus.

Although many patrons make a lot of progress over the short term, the main focus of HTC is toward long-term, lasting improvement. This allows us to plant seeds that can be nurtured over time and to stick with someone even when progress seems slow.

7. Empowerment is a selfless process.

Working at HTC is a process of listening, accepting and understanding before advising or providing feedback. A person who is self-centered cannot work effectively at HTC. A big or needy ego blocks one's ability to see what is happening from the patron's perspective and to act in the best interest of the program.

The Difference Between Empowerment and Providing Services

Empowerment is a very different process than providing services to someone. It requires a different way of looking at patrons, a different language and a different approach to how and when we intervene.

Traditional Service Model	HTC Empowerment
Do things "for" or "to"	Do things "with" someone
Guided by research	Learn from experience
Fixed perspective	Open perspective
Needs assessment	Listening survey
Experts	Co-learners
Client	Participant
Recipient	Partner
Subordinate	Equal
Focus on deficits, problems	Focus on strengths, potential
Modify behavior	Develop natural gifts
Change individual	Build community
Conform	Adapt
Rules	Principles
Applications	Introductions
Accountability	Responsibility
"Should"	"Can"
Agency directed	Consumer directed
Hierarchy	Shared responsibility
Limited consumer input	Consensus decisions
Charity	Solidarity
Supervisor	Coach
Therapist	Mentor
Case management	Self-management

Auditor	Advisor
Professional knows best	Participant knows best

Obstacles to Empowerment

Hurry

We can only help to empower someone to the extent we understand their needs and potential in the context of their immediate situation. This requires listening and reflection. Hurry puts us into action mode. We miss information when we are rushing. Empowerment requires building a trusting relationship. This involves taking time to listen to individuals and groups and time to think about how they see things, what their potential is, and what steps are needed to help them to realize their gifts and talents.

Stress and Pressure

Stress limits our receptivity and, like hurry, gears us up for action. Since it is usually quicker to tell others what to do or do things ourselves, we tend to miss the perceptions, needs, and potential of patrons when we are under stress and pressure.

Unresponsiveness

Empowerment at HTC is a partnership where staff respond to patron actions and input in a way that communicates acceptance, recognizes potential and provides needed feedback. Not pointing out a mistake or principle violation sends a message that says that behavior is OK. Unresponsiveness communicates a lack of respect and concern.

Inflexibility

Empowerment is a give-and-take process that involves constant openness and feedback. There are many ways to look at the same situation. Flexibility is important so that we incorporate others' points of view into our understanding. Problems and conflicts need to be responded to immediately to prevent them from growing and festering.

Focus on Problems and Deficits

All problems and deficits exist within a context that also includes potential and opportunity. It is easy to miss the positives when we see a person or situation in terms of their problems or deficits. The greatest obstacles in human problems are often perception and focus — not having the confidence and vision to see that improvement is possible.

Need for Control

Empowerment means to give authority. We cannot give authority and maintain control. Control can build frustration which leads to giving up or rebellion. Letting go frees us to see people and situations more clearly and to respond in ways that help patrons learn appropriate authority and responsibility.

Ego

We cannot focus on being helpful to others to the extent that we are focusing on ourselves. Empowerment is a collaborative partnership. Ego says 'me first.' That means others are secondary and less important. Empowerment is a process of adapting and adjusting. We undermine empowerment to the extent we think we 'know what's best' for others without checking it out.

Hard Times Cafe Culture

A culture affects how we do things, what we value and what we are about. HTC has created an intentional culture that attempts to create an atmosphere where disadvantaged people can discover their gifts and talents and work together to improve themselves and their community.

Inclusion

HTC is organized and structured to include everyone who is going through hard times and wants to improve their lives. The consensus decision-making process insures that there are no minority opinions that are discarded when the majority gets its way. Every patron has something to contribute.

Openness

Empowerment requires openness. Every patron has access to information about any part of the program with the exception of principle violations that involve personal matters. Problems, conflicts and mistakes are dealt with openly with an accepting attitude.

No patron has authority over another

This is an unwritten rule that is built into the structure of HTC. It insures inclusion, helps build cooperation and community and prevents a lot of conflicts. The best leaders at HTC have emerged through hard work and commitment that gains the respect of patrons.

Deal with problems immediately

The HTC approach to problems since the beginning of the program has been to deal with them immediately. This keeps them from growing and festering and helps maintain a positive focus in the program. Our experience has been that rumors can spread like wildfire at HTC.

Everyone is responsible

HTC patrons learn responsibility by being responsible. A new patron coming in for the first time has as much say and responsibility as anyone at the meeting. Responsibility also significantly reduces complaints. If a patron does not like something, they can vote against it or offer an alternative.

Avoid blame

When there are mistakes, conflicts or difficulties, HTC avoids looking for who is at fault by immediately focusing on what can be done to fix the problem and to prevent it from happening in the future.

Prevent problems from recurring

HTC takes a systems view in dealing with problems and conflicts. We try to look at the whole picture and explore how problems can be prevented or can be dealt with more effectively in the future.

Learn from mistakes

Learning from mistakes requires us to be humble and courageous enough to acknowledge our limitations. Focusing on the long term allows us to see our problems and blunders as learning experiences and to move forward rather than getting repeatedly stuck.

Incremental Planning

Although HTC has always had a long-term vision of how the program will develop, new developments occur incrementally. Once a new system or project is implemented, we take a look at the program as a whole to get a sense of the next best step.

Hard Times Cafe Approach to Training

- **Hands-on, learn by doing**

There are no classrooms at HTC. Many of our patrons did not do well in school and find it difficult to learn in that type of setting. HTC emphasizes 'hands-on' training where patrons learn by doing.

- **Real work that takes place in real time**

HTC does not use simulations. Teams operate businesses and carry out administrative functions that directly affect the success of the program. This helps build responsibility and lends a seriousness to the decision-making process.

- **Immediate, direct, and ongoing feedback**

HTC coaches provide oversight and feedback for all program operations. Patrons receive regular feedback on work habits and job skills through the POI rating system.

- **Individualized instruction, facilitation, and oversight**

The amount a coach intervenes in a patron's training depends on what is needed at that time. Training approaches will vary with individual patrons and depending on the needs of the situation.

- **Clear, immediate incentives**

HTC patrons have clear, immediate incentives for improving work habits and job skills through the POI rating system. POI ratings are calculated weekly — patrons do not have to wait until the end of a training program to receive feedback or awards.

- **Opportunities to be immediately productive**

Patrons who have skills in specific areas have opportunities to be immediately productive. They do not have to complete a sequential training program that teaches skills they have already mastered.

- **Peer decision making and support process**

HTC patrons do not work or learn in isolation. They immediately become an integral part of a strong peer support process. The consensus decision-making process insures a sense of inclusion and belonging.

- **Opportunities for peer training**

Often the best way to learn something really well is to teach it to someone else. HTC takes advantage of every opportunity for patrons to learn from other patrons.

- **Participants have clear choices and responsibility for outcomes**

HTC patrons choose how, where and when they participate on work teams and are responsible for the performance of that team. Every patron has a say in decisions that affect the program as a whole.

- **Individualized learning pace**

HTC patrons decide what they want to learn and when they want to learn it. Patrons can drop out of a team or the program and return according to their needs and situation.

- **Emphasis on building and sustaining basic work habits**

The foundation of HTC training is to develop the basic work habits that every employer is looking for. Patrons are rated on these skills every week and often receive daily feedback on their performance.

- **Opportunities to develop thinking, planning and organizing skills**

People who have been out of work for long periods have limited reason or opportunities to plan, organize or think things through. The HTC decision-making and self-managing team process stimulates thinking, planning, discussion and problem solving.

- **Each participant learns teamwork and organization skills**

All patron activities are organized around the self-managing team process. Since teams make decisions by consensus, patrons learn to listen to and work with others.

- **Reinforces work ethic and commitment to continuous improvement**

The one word that best summarizes what HTC is about is 'improvement.' Every part of the program exists in order to help disadvantaged people make lasting improvements in their lives.

- **Opportunities to learn communication, problem solving and conflict resolution**

Many patrons have significant ongoing stressors in their lives. When problems do arise, patrons are responsible for working it out with coaches and, at times, elders assistance.

- **Opportunities to gain experience in leadership and public speaking**

The self-managing team process and weekly meeting provide a lot of opportunities for patrons to express their opinions and concerns. The most effective leaders and speakers among the patrons have tended to emerge from those who were quiet and withdrawn when they first joined the program.

HTC Standing Ovation

Every HTC general meeting begins with a standing ovation to recognize the gifts and potential that tend to be forgotten or hidden during hard times. Patrons then show their appreciation to the volunteers who prepared the meal and to children with separate standing ovations.

The standing ovation sums up what HTC is all about in many ways. Its function is to recognize and energize. The ovation helps patrons to realize their own strengths and the power of coming together. It gives them an opportunity to show appreciation for those who work to help them and those who they care for.

Usually the facilitator gives a brief introduction and one of the patrons who has a loud voice counts to three when all patrons jump out of their chairs and make as much noise as possible. A reminder that this ovation is an indication of their worth, and that they will be asked to do it again if it's not loud enough to match their worth, helps free patrons to make as much noise as possible.

Sample Introduction to the Standing Ovation

"It's easy to lose track of something really important when we're under hard times. When trouble is pressing in on us all we tend to see is trouble. When frustration and loss tug at our hearts we can start to think that frustration and loss ARE our lives. HOWEVER, each person walked in here with something special. Many of you might not be aware of it — that happens during hard times. But each person here has a special gift that is their potential. Everyone has something to offer, but the only way to uncover that is to recognize it. HTC is all about working together to bring it out in everyone. Hard times also strengthen us. Hard times can help us realize what is really important in life. We need to celebrate and appreciate this special part of every person here. Push your chairs back a bit, make sure no one gets knocked over and that your coffee is in the middle of the table. Because this is going to be a rip-roaring, roof-raising standing ovation. It's got to be, to match the worth and potential of all you people. Is everybody ready? ... Is anyone not ready? ... Count it out!!!"

Part 3: Structure

Hard Times Cafe Elders

Nine Elders are elected by consensus of the patrons (at least 4 must be male and 4 female). HTC Elders have been given authority by the patrons to set the agenda for the weekly meeting and to deal with violations of HTC values and principles. The Elders have this authority only when they meet as a group — no individual Elder has any more authority than any other patron. Elders also serve on the HTC Board of Trustees which has legal responsibility for the corporation.

Elders serve the patrons.

Elders do not run HTC. Their job is to represent the patrons in setting the agenda and dealing with serious principle violations. The most important thing for an Elder is to listen to the patrons and be in touch with their needs and concerns. The Elders serve the weekly meal as a reminder of their role.

Elders are leaders.

HTC Elders are NOT leaders who tell others what to do. They lead by example — volunteering when help is needed and being a model for the principles and values. HTC uses the term 'elder' because the term implies wisdom and experience.

What Makes a Good Elder?	What Gets in the Way?
✓ Good listener, easy to talk to	✗ Likes to be the center of attention
✓ Team player; thinks about what's best for the whole program	✗ Talks more than they listen
✓ Serves as a model for HTC values and principles	✗ "Know-it-all"
✓ Asks questions, wants to know what other people think	✗ Reactive or short-tempered; acts without thinking
✓ Seeks others' opinions even when different from their own	✗ Has a big ego; seeks praise and special attention
✓ Believes everyone can improve	✗ Makes assumptions
✓ Open-minded and humble	✗ Labels others
✓ Speaks up clearly and respectfully even when uncomfortable	✗ Likes to have authority and power
✓ Takes a long-term view; is patient	✗ Impatient, always in a hurry

✓ Can separate personal feelings from what is best for HTC	✗ Holds onto strong opinions; never changes their mind
✓ Sets an example — volunteers and helps	✗ Likes to tell others what to do

Elders Meetings

There are two elders meetings held on Thursday afternoon before the weekly meeting. The first meeting sets the agenda for the weekly meeting. The second deals with principle violations. Occasionally, there is a separate meeting scheduled to deal with particular issues.

Setting the Agenda

1. Facilitator records attendance, brings in alternate elders if needed and opens the meeting. Go around the table with each elder in turn giving their input. This includes: names for the moment of silence, announcements, discussion topics, proposals and elder discussion items.
2. Facilitator adds their own input.
3. Facilitator reviews announcements and gets consensus (unanimous support) for putting them on the agenda.
4. Review of discussion topic and vote.
5. Elder discussion: Elders choose which item to discuss first. Proposals need exact wording and must be thought through thoroughly before being added to the agenda. The facilitator's role is to ask questions that help elders see cost/benefit, long-term consequences, and how each proposal fits with past decisions.

Principle Violations

The elders were designated as the disciplinary committee by the patrons in the first months of the program. Staff are the first point of contact for dealing with principle violations as they occur. However, only the elders have the authority to set consequences for violations of the HTC values and principles. This meeting is confidential.

1. Facilitator asks each elder in turn around the table to add items to the agenda.
2. Elders determine which item is first/next by consensus.
3. Elder or staff who brought the issue up describes the concern.
4. The focus in dealing with these concerns is NOT to determine an appropriate punishment. The focus is on what can be done to help the patron follow the principles in the future.
5. There is a limited general discussion. If not moving toward a solution, the facilitator asks elders to go around the table and offer options.
6. The principles that were violated are listed.
7. The Elders may or may not decide to bring the patron in to discuss the concern. The issue is to provide evidence to the elders that the identified principles will be followed in the future. Concepts of guilty or innocent are not part of the discussion.
8. Elders choose an appropriate response to the principle violation.
9. Elders choose how best to inform the patron of the decision.

HTC Self-Managing Team Process

The HTC self-managing team process has been tested and fine-tuned for over five years. The same structure and process is used for all HTC teams.

Types of Teams

There are three programs within HTC: Operations includes teams that carry out the basic activities of the program; Business teams operate HTC businesses; and Service teams are designed to assist patrons in responding to needs such as housing, transportation, jobs, or returning to school.

There are three levels of teams within each program: Program planning teams make decisions involving more than one team; Individual planning teams set policies for specific operations; and Daily work teams are made up of whoever is working on a given shift.

Decision Making

All HTC team decisions must be unanimous. This means that a proposal is only passed if no member opposes it. If one member opposes the proposal they are asked to state their reasons and to offer a counter proposal.

Team Meeting Agenda Structure

1. Coach records attendance on notebook computer template, saves in team folder.
2. Set Agenda: Coach asks each team member for input ('going around the table'). Coach offers suggestions and adds to the list.
3. Team members choose first agenda item by consensus.
4. Discussion / Proposals / Amendments: Team members raise hands to speak. Coach calls on first hand raised. Coach records brief summary of discussion points.
5. Coach asks if anyone is opposed to the proposal.
6. Coach asks all in favor to raise their hand (consensus needed to pass). Result of vote is entered in minutes.
7. Team members choose next agenda item.
8. Assignments are recorded in the minutes as agreed upon.

Daily Work Team Meeting Structure

1. Evaluation and review: Team evaluates the work area and tasks to be done. Team members share ideas, needs, problems, concerns.
2. Decisions are made about goals and priorities for the day/shift.
3. Assignments are entered on the team form.
4. Accomplishments are listed on the planning form throughout the day.

HTC Self-Managing Teams

Business Teams

- **Partners (Business Planning Team)** — Not currently active. Responsible for starting new businesses and making decisions that cross businesses. Elected by patron consensus at weekly meeting.
- **Togg Shoppe** — 7 members responsible for Togg Shoppe policy and procedures. Meets weekly. Elected by Togg Shoppe workers at monthly meeting.
- **Automotive** — Planning for auto business — currently under OPT; will operate under Partners or Business Planning Team.
- **Used Tool Business** — No team established yet.

Operations Teams

- **Operations Planning Team (OPT)** — Makes decisions that cross teams. Made up of 2 representatives from each team.
- **Accounting** — Responsible for all accounting operations.
- **Office Support Team (OST)** — Responsible for all office operations not carried out by other teams.
- **Maintenance Team** — Responsible for building maintenance and projects. Coach must approve all projects before work begins.
- **Store** — Operates HTC store; meets weekly.
- **Membership** — Greets new members, handles registration and name tags.
- **Share** — Meets to explore ways of helping patrons meet food costs.
- **Fundraising/Activities** — Plans fundraising events and HTC activities.
- **Kitchen** — Assists in preparing weekly meal — coached by kitchen volunteers.
- **Fun with Friends** — Assists in the children's program that meets during the HTC weekly meeting.
- **Clean Up** — Cleans church after weekly meeting.

Lines of Authority at HTC: Who Decides What

From the beginning of the program, the patrons present at the weekly meeting have final authority over all decisions at HTC. Authority has been delegated to teams and staff so the program can operate more smoothly and efficiently.

Group or Team	Areas of Authority
Patrons at Weekly Meeting	Overall authority for all program operations. Approve proposals for activities, policies or procedures. Decide what to do with program income. Approve budgets. Elect elders, board members, partners. Approve new teams and systems. Can overturn decisions made by the board or teams.
Elders	Authority only during scheduled meetings as a group. Set the agenda for the weekly meeting. Respond to violations of HTC values or principles.
Board of Trustees	Legal responsibility for HTC corporation. Supervise Program Administrator. Set Personnel Policy. Make changes in bylaws.
Program Administrator	Cancel weekly meeting in bad weather. Write grants and seek funding. Hire, supervise and train staff. Facilitate meetings. Prepare annual budget and handle financial management. Program evaluation. Communicate and collaborate with community agencies.
Staff and Coaches	Facilitate meetings. Provide advice and feedback to teams. POI ratings. Approve supply and equipment purchases (with 3 team members). Approve plans for maintenance team.
Operations Planning Team (OPT)	Approve proposals affecting more than one operations team. Set office budget. Approve purchases by operations teams. Set office policy.
Individual Operations Teams	Set policy and procedures for team operations. Set long-term priorities and assignments. Choose team secretary and OPT representatives.
Togg Shoppe Team	Set policy and operating procedures for store. Determine prices, sales, promotions. Plan advertising. Approve purchases within approved budget.
Daily Work / Shift Teams	Determine needs and priorities for each shift. Make work assignments for each shift.

HTC Weekly Meeting

The HTC weekly meeting is where everything begins and ends. Every Thursday, HTC patrons meet to share a meal, exchange POI for food and personal needs items at the HTC store, sign up for work, celebrate accomplishments, exchange information and make decisions that affect the program. New patrons join HTC by attending the weekly meeting where they are greeted by the Membership team and given a brief orientation.

Weekly Meeting Schedule

2:30 PM — Elders meet to set agenda.

3:30 PM — HTC store opens.

4:30 PM — Meal served by elders. Brief prayer said by patron before meal. Children must stay with parents until meetings begin.

5:00 PM — HTC store closes.

5:15 PM — Fun with Friends program for children (ages 3–15) begins.

5:20 PM — Meeting begins: Welcome new patrons and visitors. Standing ovations. Recognition and celebration (jobs, school, birthdays, anniversaries). Jokes (1 POI for a clean joke that gets a laugh). Announcements. Proposals. Discussion topic.

6:30 PM — Meeting ends. Clean-up crew cleans area. Vouchers handed out.

Decision Making at HTC

Decision-Making Process at the Weekly Meeting

1. Proposal from agenda set by elders is read to the patrons.
2. Discussion on proposal, with opportunities for amendments. If an amendment is offered, only the amendment is discussed first.
3. Anyone can postpone a vote for 1 meeting (one time only).
4. Facilitator asks if anyone is opposed.
5. If two patrons are opposed, the proposal does not pass.
6. If one patron is opposed, they offer reasons or an amendment.
7. Vote again on original proposal.
8. If one still opposed, they can offer a counter-proposal.
9. If counter-proposal fails, the original proposal passes.
10. All in favor raise their hands to indicate support.

Changing Proposals That Have Already Passed

Proposals that have already passed cannot be brought up for another vote. Once a proposal has passed it can only be changed if a new proposal that changes it is passed by consensus. It takes consensus to put a proposal into place and consensus to change it.

Open Meetings

During open meetings there is no agenda. Whoever raises their hand first has access to the floor. They can make an announcement, ask a question, make a comment or offer a proposal. The elders try to schedule an open meeting at least every six to eight weeks.

Elder Decisions

Elder decisions can only be made at scheduled elders meetings. Elders have no authority outside of these meetings. Elder decisions must be unanimous — if any elder opposes the proposal, it does not pass.

HTC Election Process

The HTC election process is used primarily to elect elders, with 3 positions filled every 4 months. The process is designed to make sure that each person is elected by consensus of all patrons without minority opposition and insures that all patrons have opportunities to get involved.

Prior to the Election

1. Nominations are requested at least one week before the election. All nominees are given handouts to use in preparing a speech. Any elder who has served 30 consecutive months is not eligible for re-election.
2. Electing three positions usually takes the whole meeting. Most often there are no other proposals on the agenda on election nights.
3. Before elections, patrons are reminded of the duties and expectations of the position. New nominations are added to the chalkboard list. Elders whose terms are ending are thanked.
4. Each nominee is asked to respond to: (a) How have you improved since coming to Hard Times Cafe? (b) What have you accomplished that has helped HTC? (c) What would you like HTC to be like next year at this time?
5. Patrons are given time to ask questions of the candidates.

The Election Process

One position is filled at a time. All names are written on the board. Patrons vote once each round. Starting from the top name, patrons vote for the candidate of their choice by raising their hand. The candidate(s) with the lowest total of votes has an X placed by their name and is removed from the voting. Another round of voting takes place starting from the bottom of the list. This process continues until there is one name left on the list.

Two names can be removed from the list if their combined total does not add up to the next highest vote total. Patrons are then asked if anyone is opposed to the person remaining on the list becoming an elder. If no one is opposed, all patrons in favor raise their hands and the patron is elected and congratulated.

Part 4: Points of Improvement System

Overview: HTC Points of Improvement System

HTC patrons earn Points of Improvement (POI) at an hourly rate based on their performance. All items are rated on a 5-point scale based on the expectations of performance in a work setting:

- 5 — Outstanding, exceptional performance.
- 4 — Very good performance — employer might be thinking about a raise.
- 3 — Employer would be generally satisfied.
- 2 — There is room for improvement.
- 1 — There is a definite need for improvement.
- 0 — Serious problems were evident.

Items Rated

The sixteen rated items are organized into four categories:

Personal Skills (Items 1–2)

- Early for work or appointments
- Has good hygiene, is clean and appropriately dressed for the job

Interpersonal Skills (Items 3–8)

- Is friendly, courteous and cooperative
- Open to input, listens to others
- Good public relations
- Expresses thoughts and ideas clearly
- Teamwork
- Follows HTC principles

Work Habits (Items 9–13)

- Plans and organizes work
- Can start work on own, works independently
- Works at a steady pace — appropriate speed for the job
- Follows through, finishes job or shift
- Quality of work

Work Attitude (Items 14–16)

- Follows directions well, asks questions if needed
- Is aware of safety concerns, works carefully
- Proper documentation

POI can be exchanged for food or personal needs items donated to the HTC store or for products available through HTC businesses. They can also be exchanged for vouchers for necessities including housing, transportation, food, medical needs, etc.

What POI Ratings Mean

You Earn What You Learn

There is no base rate or minimum rate for earning POI while working at HTC. There is no minimum wage in POI like in a regular job. In fact, POI are not a wage at all. They are points that are awarded for making improvements. You earn POI for whatever part of a work habit you have demonstrated during that week.

Every Rating Starts at 0

Scores of 1 or 2 point out areas where there is room for or need for improvement. A rating of 3 is what you would earn if you were doing the same work at a regular job and the boss was generally satisfied with your work habits. A rating of 4 means your boss would be very happy, and 5 means what you did was outstanding. 3 is simply the middle number; it is not a base rate you are rated down from.

The Purpose of the Ratings Is Improvement

HTC exists to help people get back on their feet so they can get and keep a good-paying job. POI are awards for making improvements in work habits. The purpose of ratings is not to downgrade but to help patrons upgrade work habits. What you get depends on how you do.

POI Ratings Process

Schedule

Thursday — Patrons pick up ratings forms for each team they will work on during the next week. Previous week's forms are turned in at the weekly meeting.

Friday – Monday — Staff complete ratings for each patron on each team they coach.

Tuesday – Wednesday — Office Support Team (OST) enters ratings and POI exchange for previous week on computer spreadsheets and prints new totals for Thursday's meeting, HTC store and HTC businesses.

Sharing Ratings with Patrons

It is best to complete the ratings form with individual team members and is often helpful to ask the patron to rate their own performance. The most effective way to handle ratings is to give patrons feedback (both positive and negative) throughout the week and make notes on the ratings form. A ratings session usually takes 3 to 7 minutes. It is important to set a hopeful, optimistic tone and to be very specific about what the patron can do to improve their score.

POI Exchange Options

HTC Store

The exchange value for personal needs items is set by the Store team. The team checks retail prices in the area and sets the exchange value at the average non-sale retail price rounded to the nearest 5 cents. The HTC Store is open from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM on Thursdays when there is a regular weekly meeting.

HTC Businesses

POI can be used at both the Togg Shoppe and the HTC automotive business. POI can only be exchanged for items that are considered necessities — defined as necessary for health or employment.

Vouchers

POI can be exchanged for vouchers for approximately 60 goods and services available in the community. Each item approved for voucher use has passed by patron vote at the weekly meeting. The bylaws state that vouchers can only be used for goods and services that are necessary for health or employment. Patrons sign up for vouchers at the weekly meeting and receive them after the meeting.

Emergency vouchers can be written on days other than Thursday if approved by a coach. 'Emergency' has been defined as 'an unexpected crisis that affects health or employability.' Emergency vouchers are not given out for overdue bills or for the same item two weeks in a row.

How Voucher POI Are Calculated

- Up to 20 hours may be used for vouchers; remaining hours are kept as POI.
- Voucher hours = total hours worked minus hours to be kept as POI (up to 20).
- Hourly rate earned = total points awarded on 16 items rated from 0 to 0.5 points per item.
- Voucher hours × hourly rate earned = total POI earned for vouchers that week.

Exchange Rate Calculation

Exchange rate = total voucher POI earned for week ÷ dollars available that week for vouchers. Patrons voted to create a stabilization fund that helps keep the exchange rate stable. If the exchange rate is less than 2:1, the excess is put into the fund. If the rate is over 3.5:1, the amount needed to bring it down to 3.5:1 is taken out of the fund.

Example:

If a patron earns 100 voucher POI and the exchange rate is 2:1, they are awarded \$50 worth of vouchers ($100 \div 2$). If the exchange rate is 2.5:1, they are awarded \$40 worth of vouchers ($100 \div 2.5$).

POI Tracking Procedures

Individual ratings sheets are calculated by the Office Support Team and entered on a computer spreadsheet that totals the POI earned for each patron. These totals are entered on a second spreadsheet that tracks all earnings, transfers and exchanges for each patron. Summary sheets that indicate each patron's balance in both POI and vouchers are printed for patron inspection at the voucher table at the weekly meeting.

Patrons are encouraged to track their POI awards themselves. Patrons must notify the Office Support Team of errors in calculations within 30 days. Patrons who have not been heard from for six months and have given no prior notification that they are returning will have their names taken off the POI records and their points forfeited.

Part 5: Conflict Resolution

HTC Approach to Conflict Resolution

Patrons come to HTC because they are experiencing hard times. At any given time a large number of patrons are under significant stress. HTC is also open to anyone, including patrons who suffer from chronic mental illness and who have never had the opportunity to learn or practice conflict resolution in a healthy way.

HTC Principles — The Core of the Conflict Resolution Process

Instead of predefined rules and consequences, HTC patrons voted in the first months of the program to define a set of principles that serve as a guideline for behavior and decision making. Whenever there is a conflict, one of the principles has been violated and the response is always focused on how we can help the patron understand and respect that principle in the future.

Key Conflict Resolution Principles

- **Promote a preventive atmosphere** — HTC works to build an atmosphere of openness, acceptance, respect and trust. When successful, most conflicts can be prevented and those that do occur can be worked out openly.
- **Deal with everything right away** — Problems and conflicts tend to get bigger the longer we put off dealing with them. Dealing with conflicts right away sends a message that every patron is important.
- **Avoid judgement, blame, and 'why' questions** — The first step in working out a conflict is for those involved to feel accepted and respected. Focusing on who is at fault tends to feed the flames. The question 'why?' looks for motivation which is never totally clear and is always negative if something has gone wrong.
- **Keep the focus positive** — Focus on solutions, HTC principles, the needs of the program, and positive aspects of the relationship. At some point early in the conflict resolution, there needs to be a shift in perception away from what is wrong toward what can be done about it.

Steps for Dealing with Patron Conflicts

Staff Are First Point of Contact

It is the coach's responsibility to enforce patron decisions including following the HTC values and principles. Coaches are in a position to deal with most conflicts as, or shortly after, they occur. The immediate goal of the staff intervention is to pull the plug on the tension and keep things from escalating, then to help the patrons involved take a step in a positive direction.

Staff do not have authority to set consequences for disruptive behavior except when it is clear that the tension is increasing. If the patron cannot settle down enough to continue working without disrupting others they are usually asked to leave for a period of time to cool off.

Elders Have Authority to Set Consequences

HTC patrons have designated the elders as the discipline committee to deal with violations of HTC values and principles. They have the authority to respond to disruptive behavior up to and including suspension from the program. The elders only have this authority when they are at a scheduled meeting as a group. Individual elders have no authority on their own.

There are no precedents for elder decisions. Every situation is seen as unique. The focus of the elders' discussion is always on how to be helpful to the patron. The issue of punishment is not considered.

Guidelines for Elders When Dealing with Principle Violations

1. Being an Elder is the most difficult and challenging job at the Hard Times Cafe. The Elders as a group are responsible for making sure that all HTC patrons follow the principles included in the bylaws.
2. Elders need to make decisions that help patrons who may have violated the principles to make improvements so they follow the principles in the future. A helpful question: is the patron moving toward or away from the principles?
3. The Elders are not investigators, prosecutors, or judges. Their job is simply to make sure that the HTC principles are followed.
4. Each situation brought to the Elders is unique. There are no precedents for Elder decisions.
5. For the Elders, the word 'justice' means 'restoring the right relationship' rather than 'punishment fits the crime.'
6. When deciding how to respond, do not consider personal relationships, threats, how much the person is needed, or fears about the situation. Consider only how to be helpful so that all patrons follow the HTC principles.
7. It is absolutely necessary that Elders respect the privacy of patrons whose concerns are dealt with in Elders meetings. Strict confidentiality must be respected at all times.
8. The Elders as a group must reach consensus before any decision can take effect. Every Elder must listen to each point of view with an open mind. If there is disagreement between a harsher or more lenient approach, it is often best to err on the side of being too lenient, especially if there is not a pattern of principle violations.

How to Intervene When There Is a Conflict

1. Acknowledge and clarify emotions

Make sure each person understands what the other is feeling without getting into why they are feeling that way. Questions like 'What are you feeling right now?' are helpful. It is very important to set and keep the focus on the immediate present.

2. Insure that participants feel understood and accepted

Separate the problem from the participants. Often staff can draw on a reserve of trust based on an ongoing relationship with one of the patrons.

3. Find a perceptual shift — move from the problem toward a solution

Normalize the experience. Find an aspect of the relationship that was positive in the past. Communicate confidence that it can be worked out. Use stories, metaphors, or humor to distract and enlighten. Appeal to the larger good — point out that HTC will only survive if we all learn to work things out. Remind participants of the HTC principles and their commitment to them.

4. Initiate a first positive step

This can often be an apology or handshake. It does not matter if they 'mean it' at this point. Emotions are temporary and a response to our immediate perceptions. The gesture helps to ease the emotions and invariably leads to working it out.

5. Recognize and strengthen even small improvements

It is important to follow up with each of the participants and thank them for their strength and wisdom in working it out. Recognize continuing improvements in following the principles.

Part 6: Staff and Coaches

Role of Staff and Coaches at HTC

Staff and coaches play a unique role in an empowerment setting. They have significant responsibility and limited authority. Staff are responsible for insuring that the teams operate appropriately and complete tasks that keep the program operating, yet they cannot tell patrons what to do. We refer to this process as leadership without authority. While staff have limited authority (basically that granted to them by patrons), they can have significant influence based on competency and the respect and trust of patrons.

Enforce patron decisions

HTC focuses on teaching responsibility. The coach's job is to remind patrons of past decisions. They can make a proposal to change those decisions but until that passes, they are expected to follow the policies set by the team or patrons.

Provide weekly POI ratings

POI ratings provide important feedback for patron improvement and determine the awards that patrons use for basic necessities. It is very important that these ratings be accurate and consistent. Giving scores that are too high limits growth and teaches irresponsibility. Giving scores that are too low can lead to discouragement and frustration.

Facilitate team meetings

The primary tasks in facilitating team meetings are to insure each patron has input and keep the focus on the topic at hand. When the discussion strays, it is helpful to ask if that item needs to be added to the agenda, then return to the topic.

Help patrons make good decisions

Empowerment is not doing whatever the patrons want. It is the coach's responsibility to provide input and feedback that helps patrons make effective decisions. Coaches are most helpful when they are responsive rather than pro-active — responding to patron ideas with questions that stimulate thought and problem solving rather than simply stating what needs to be done.

Provide clarifying advice and feedback

It is important for staff and coaches to recognize their limitations in terms of training and experience in counseling. The safest and most effective role of staff is to help patrons clarify their concerns and priorities by asking questions that help them see the larger picture and options they may have.

Provide training

HTC emphasizes hands-on training — learning by doing. This often involves working with patrons to provide step-by-step instructions and immediate feedback. It is very important to catch patron errors and help them learn to correct and prevent them.

Support and encourage patron improvement

A large number of patrons come to HTC feeling hopeless and discouraged. It is important to normalize struggles and difficulties by pointing out that others have had similar experiences. Sometimes patrons need reminding of their strengths and accomplishments.

Insure accuracy of patron work

HTC training takes place in real time in the real world. There is no simulated work at HTC. Coaches need to insure that tasks are completed appropriately both for the continued effectiveness of the program and to help patrons develop skills in accuracy and follow-through.

Deal with patron conflicts

Preventing and quickly responding to patron conflicts is one of the most important responsibilities of coaches. Dealing with conflicts immediately keeps them small and manageable and saves significant time in the long run.

Insure HTC values and principles are followed

HTC values and principles form the foundation for the program. Keeping these ideals in front of patrons and always dealing with even small deviations from them is probably the single thing most responsible for the success of the program.

Qualities of Effective Staff

✓ Tactful	✓ Acknowledges mistakes
✓ Patient	✓ Keeps balance as a priority
✓ Consistent	✓ Maintains a calm confidence
✓ Respectful	✓ Works as a team with other staff
✓ Knows limits	✓ Commitment to personal improvement
✓ Well organized	✓ Genuine concern for patron's well-being
✓ Open to feedback	✓ Commitment to patron's long-term improvement
✓ Accepting attitude	✓ Maintains a professional relationship with patrons
✓ Open communication	

ABC's of Empowerment

ABC stands for Accept, Balance and Clarify. These principles sum up the HTC model of empowerment and what staff and coaches need to be doing to help patrons make lasting improvements in their lives. When in doubt, think ABC and apply these principles to the situation at hand.

Accept

Acceptance is freedom — it leads to a clearer understanding of problems and gives us the flexibility to respond according to the needs of the situation. Acceptance means letting go of assumptions and expectations and opening our minds and hearts to the situation at hand. It is simply saying 'This is what is happening' and dealing with it. There are two parts to acceptance: accepting the reality of a situation without bringing in previous judgement, fears, or expectations; and separating people from what they do. When we don't feel accepted, we become defensive — trust, communication and improvement are blocked. Acceptance leads to patience, respect, understanding and sharing.

Balance

Balance keeps our feet on the ground, our minds clear and our emotions appropriate. It brings ease and receptivity to each situation. Stress, hurry, power, ego, tension and loss throw relationships out of balance. Our ability to be receptive to people and situations decreases to the extent that we hurry or are under stress — we react instead of respond. Balance frees us to participate in building community and developing responsibility. We need balance in our perceptions, our sense of control, our support systems and our work. Responsibility and challenge need to be in balance with support and capabilities.

Clarify

Clarifying means to sort out what is true from various perspectives. We see the larger perspective and the relationship between detailed components. We understand what is important and what is possible. Clarifying is essentially a process of asking questions: What are they feeling right now? What do they need right now? What are the long-term effects? What are the options? What are the priorities? How else could we do this? When we clarify words, intentions, feelings and perceptions, we communicate in a way that allows others to understand and respond appropriately. Small misunderstandings can lead to big conflicts.

Part 7: Keys to Success

The Hard Times Cafe has been growing and improving for over eight years despite few resources and a lot of obstacles. After reflecting on the accomplishments, failures, lessons and mistakes, the following list sums up what is most important in keeping HTC alive and well.

Balance

We have tried to never be in a hurry but to take time to respond to patron's needs and input and to fix problems for the long term. We also try to keep things in perspective and balance work demands with personal needs. The times that have been most difficult for HTC are times when the facilitators have been trying to do too much.

Strong commitment to HTC values and principles

We strive to keep the values and principles in front of everybody all of the time. We have worked through especially difficult times by investing time in reviewing what the program stands for and what is important to us.

Person-to-person interaction

The bottom line is: when people feel accepted and respected, they are much more likely to recognize and realize their potential and responsibility. This requires investment in one-on-one and small group interaction — taking time to listen and to simply walk around and be available.

Each patron is valued and important

Inclusion is an important part of what HTC is about. Making an extra effort to include a patron who is withdrawn, resistant or negative helps not only that patron but helps others feel that everyone is valued. The greatest resource HTC has is the patrons, and every one has something to offer.

Shared commitment to improvement

HTC is about making improvements. We all grow and prosper to the extent that both staff and patrons are committed to improving. This helps us see obstacles as opportunities and setbacks as learning experiences.

Open discussion of ideas and concerns

Empowerment cannot be anything but open. Consensus decision making requires that everybody knows what's going on. Withholding information builds suspicion and feeds rumors. Openness builds trust and respect.

Clear, honest feedback given respectfully

This is one of the most difficult challenges for staff. We want patrons to like us and they will like us if we tell them nice things. However, we are only helpful to the extent we focus on the long-term growth and improvement of patrons. This means being up front in an open and respectful way. Patrons know where they stand and what they need to do to improve.

Dealing with even small conflicts and rumors immediately

Rumors and conflicts grow, spread and join if they are allowed to. From the beginning we have stopped whatever we were doing to deal with conflicts when they arose. Sometimes it takes a while to get things settled but getting an early start makes everything much easier.

Being well organized and efficient

HTC is a complicated program in many respects. Disorganization and inefficiency lead to discouragement and frustration. Chaos expands and spreads quickly but can require hours and hours of drudgery to sort out. It is very important to have well-designed systems that allow patrons to work and learn efficiently.