What is a Competency?

Simply put, a competency is an ability or capability that can be associated with the successful performance of one's specific job duties. A competency is often a combination of three factors:

- **Specific knowledge** (Includes information known by the individual and can include both technical knowledge and non-technical knowledge)

- **Acquired Skills** (Examples might include conflict resolution skills, communication skills, business writing skills, phlebotomy skills, etc.)

- **Abilities** (These might include abilities acquired through on the job training and experience or individual talents the individual brings to the job. (Examples could include such things as: the ability to communicate directions, the ability to plan and organize tasks, the ability to conduct research, the ability to draw blood, etc.)

Eight Core Competencies

The VA has identified eight Core Competencies that are associated with successful job performance within the VA and within the VHA in particular:

Personal Mastery

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Organizational Stewardship

Systems Thinking

Flexibility & Adaptability

Customer Service

Technical Expertise

Creative Thinking

Are All Competencies Important for All Jobs?

No, every job within the VHA system does not require the mastery of all eight competencies. Rather, it is more true that some competencies might be essential to perform the job duties of a particular job, while other competencies may be of lesser importance or of no importance at all for a particular job.

Each job within the VHA utilizes a combination of the core competencies. Some positions may require mastery of all eight competencies while other positions may require the mastery of as few as three of the competencies. The important thing to remember is that each job has its own unique requirements. Therefore, it is essential that development efforts for each staff member focus on the competencies that are relevant for that particular job.

Does Mastery of the Competencies Enhance Performance?

Yes, the mastery of the competencies essential to a particular job can often lead to higher levels of job performance. However, mastery of a particular competency must also be accompanied by the practical application of the competency in the performance of the individual's job duties. To accomplish this, the individual must also understand how to utilize their knowledge, skills and abilities in their daily work life. They can do this most effectively by operating proactively in their personal Spheres of Influence.

The Four Spheres of Influence

Within the VHA system, there are four primary spheres of influence.

Similar to the competencies, not all spheres of influence are equally important to each individual job or individual employee. For instance, a receptionist in a service area might need to operate effectively in the Applied Knowledge and Interpersonal and Personal Effectiveness spheres. However, this same individual would not operate within the Organizational Leadership or Team

Leadership spheres. On the other hand, a successful service chief would operate in all four influence spheres.

Integrating Competence and Influence into a Focused Training Plan

The leader's responsibility to develop strong employees is an ongoing effort that must always take at least two factors into account:

1. Competencies necessary to perform the particular job functions
2. Competencies necessary for future job requirements or responsibilities

Successful leaders prepare their employees to perform the current job duties while at the same time developing individuals to perform additional duties in the future. In this sense, employee development is an ongoing effort. It requires the leader to assess the individual employee's current and future development needs. To accomplish this, the leader must consider how the individual employee will apply their knowledge, skills and abilities. In other words, in what influence spheres will this employee (or group of employees) operate?

The On Target VA Leadership Series™ allows the medical center, or individual services within the medical center, to choose the skill-based topics that are most important for their targeted group of employees. Topics can be chosen based upon the chosen competency and/or by the sphere of influence where the competency is most likely to be applied.