Supervisors: Skills for Success

Guide for Employers

HELPING THOSE WHO HATE HR.

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Contents

Introduction

Effective supervisors are necessary in all settings where employees need guidance and supervision to complete tasks, serve customers and meet deadlines.

A supervisor's job is to establish goals and lead a team of people to achieve those goals. It takes a certain set of skills to become a successful supervisor. A skilled supervisor is an effective communicator, problem-solver and employee motivator.

In order to become a good leader and get the most out of all of your employees, you need to have insight into their strengths and developmental needs.

Leadership requires stepping out in front with new, creative ideas that save money, increase productivity and establish credibility and respect from employees.

This guide will help you improve in these areas of supervision.

Communication

Successful supervisors develop effective communication skills and trust. When employees come to a supervisor who welcomes their ideas or listens to their concerns, there is a feeling of mutual respect. Supervisors that regularly communicate with their employees may be more successful in meeting work goals.

- Supervisors should get to know all of their employees, and let them know they are available to talk with them whenever necessary. Empathy is something that is really important in a leadership role. You can do everything else right, but if you come across un-caring, you may still not be successful.
- LISTEN! Be open to listening to whatever input employees may have. When supervisors strictly give orders without listening, it can erode worker commitment and enthusiasm.
- Avoid lecturing workers or sending directives by way of wordy emails. Think about the most important messages that need to be conveyed and communicate them face to face or over the phone. Put thoughts into an email communication and check for "tone" to ensure they are clear, concise and respectful.
- Regular meetings with employees will give supervisors the opportunity to ask them about the projects they are working on, hear worker grievances and triumphs, discuss team success and brainstorm solutions to new problems.
- Always be responsive by answering employee's emails and calls promptly.
- For more advice on handling difficult conversations and/or managing employee performance, please see our guide titled Performance Improvement Plans and Employee Evaluations

Planning & Delegating

Supervisors are responsible for planning and delegating the work. Learning to set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-based) objectives may be helpful in achieving corporate goals. Identification of incidents that steal valuable time and managing priorities are important skills for supervisors to learn and to teach their employees.


- Set realistic expectations. Be careful about over-criticizing or setting goals that are

  beyond reach. This will only discourage employees.

- Take the time to talk to employees about the expectations and get their feedback. If an honest discussion is encouraged, employees are more likely to let the supervisor know

  if the expectation seems unrealistic. Getting buy-in from the employee is essential.

- Supervisors should have a good understanding of the volume of work that already exists and the amount of time it will take the employees to finish specific projects before setting deadlines. If supervisors do not have the right information, they risk over-committing their team.

Demonstrate Authority

Supervisors must demonstrate that they are in charge and are competent to lead a team. Setting high (but attainable) standards in the beginning sends a message that quality standards are important. Getting to know each employee on an individual basis is important in establishing the personal relationship that is needed for success. Is it also important to show employees a good example of model behavior. If supervisors are hard-working, committed and ethical, employees are more likely to share those characteristics.
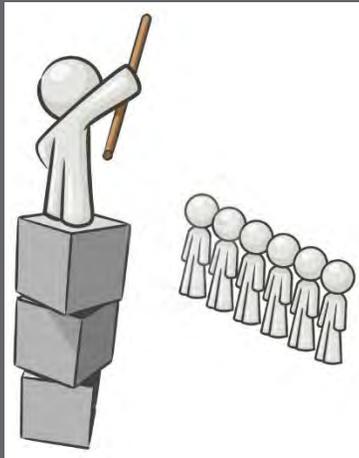
- Attitude is just as important as actions. Always be friendly and professional.

- Keep emotions under control as much as possible.

- Always treat employees fairly, don't favor one over another.

- Be accountable. Supervisors are responsible for their entire teams. If a deadline is missed or a client is lost, don't point fingers or blame others. Instead, evaluate the role the supervisor played, admit the mistakes and come up with a plan to avoid making the same mistake again in the future.

- Take notes as you go, both positive and negative.

Training and Development

Good supervisors recognize the need to train and develop their employees. One of the ways some companies demonstrate their commitment to their employees is through provision of continuous training and development. Identification of each employee's strengths and weaknesses is a critical supervisory skill. In order to achieve corporate goals, strengths should be highlighted and utilized, while weaknesses should be identified and corrected through training and development.

- When an employee does a good job, it is important to acknowledge it. Give employees credit, not just at review time, for a job well done and let them know their work is appreciated.
- Some supervisors feel threatened by successful employees, but this will only hinder the ability to be an effective supervisor. Be proud of high-performing employees, not jealous.
- Encourage growth. A responsibility of a supervisor is to unlock the potential of their employees. This can be done by offering constructive criticism and looking for ways to allow them to take on new roles or responsibilities within the organization.
- Pay attention to the unique talents and skills of each worker and utilize those strengths for the benefit of the project or company.
- Whenever possible, offer training to employees to help them learn new skills.
- Consider preferred learning styles.
- Create a checklist for diagnosing development needs.
- Create a checklist to ensure training transfers.

Problem Solving Practice

Supervisors need to be talented problem solvers. The supervisor needs to be able to step in and help the team problem solve whenever necessary. Make sure the team knows that if there is ever a problem with a project, the supervisor is available to help them figure it out. If the work environment becomes unpleasant due to negative employees, failure to follow company policies and procedures, betrayal of trust (breaking confidence with needless gossip) or the perception of favoritism, a supervisor must gain control of these situations in the most productive and professional manner possible. It is important to practice fair and consistent supervision with all employees and address any issues that may interfere with teamwork and productivity.

- Streamline processes. Create systems to save employees time on a task and/or eliminate errors. Create documents or checklists that outline employee responsibilities and who is responsible for each task.

- Keep in mind that long term solutions are always better than short term solutions, even if they are harder to implement.

- Being an effective problem solver means staying focused on the facts of the situation and thinking of creative solutions.

- Avoid emotions and blame. Think of the necessary steps for helping employees regain composure and resume the task at hand.

- The importance of feedback cannot be overstated. Make sure to let employees know how they are doing, whether good or bad, on a regular basis.

Employment Laws

All Supervisors should be aware of some employment laws that could impact their everyday conversations with employees. Nearly every employee you come across could be in a protected class of people, and the conversation could potentially be perceived as discriminatory. If you find yourself in a conversation regarding any of the following topics, it may be in your best interest to talk with an HR Consultant or your HR Manager before proceeding with the conversation.

- Age
- Pregnancy Status
- Religion
- Race
- Disabilities - Including perceived ones that have not been diagnosed.
- National Origin
- Arrest Record

We also recommend familiarizing yourself with the following, at the very minimum…
- American's with Disabilities Act
- Fair Labor Standards Act
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Your company's Anti-Harassment Policy

Employee Recognition

It's been said that a little gesture can go a long way. That is also true when recognizing employees. While it is important to have private conversations with the employee when they are not meeting expectations, it is just as important to praise employees in public. Here are a few ideas for recognizing employee's for doing a great job…

- Buying them lunch or ice cream/ a treat
- Giving them a gift card
- Thanking them in a team meeting or in front of a group
- Letting them end their workday a little early, or come in a little late/ Extra PTO