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Ten critical steps to supervisory success

Though the economy has been poor and many workers have experienced widespread layoffs during the past several years, instances of supervisory promotions still exist. If you recently moved up the career ladder to a first-line management position, then the 10 steps discussed in this article should prove to be helpful.

So, now you're a supervisor. Where do you begin? Let's take it from the top.

1. Learn the "lay of the land." Start slowly. Reassure your new staff that it will be "business as usual" at least until you have a clearer idea of what is needed. Be sure to get their input for any changes. Though you will need to establish your authority, you also need to empower your employees as members of the team. In this same vein, while instituting your new influence, be yourself and avoid trying to be like your predecessor.

2. Project credibility. Research continues to point out that credibility is a key attribute employees want from their supervisors. Credibility is a status that is earned through being competent, having a clear sense of where the team is going, caring about the team, being honest, possessing a high level of integrity and "practicing what you preach."

3. Communicate. Communication is a key to every effectively functioning team as well as a great strategy for building relationships that lead to trust and respect. Observe, ask questions, solicit input and actively listen. Encourage your staff to seek clarification whenever

necessary — be approachable and open to questions. Finally, make sure you keep your staff informed of organizational changes and how they fit into the big picture.

4. Create a listening comfort zone. Recognize that staff can be intimidated by supervisors. So, demonstrate to your employees that you are willing to listen to what they have to say. When people believe they are being listened to, they feel valued, that you care and that they are worthy of your time.

5. Establish clear expectations. It is your responsibility to ensure that the staff understands what is expected of them. Clear expectations also are quite valuable in the performance management process. Keep in mind that setting expectations can be a collaborative process. Consider asking employees for their thoughts regarding personal performance expectations.

6. Be visible. MBWA — manage by walking around. This is a classic concept worth implementing. Build relationships with your new staff. Get to know them and what's important to them. Establish good two-way communication.

7. Treat your staff with respect. A solid strategy for earning respect as a supervisor is to show respect for your staff. Those who work for you are valuable human beings who deserve respect. Since a definition of management is "getting things done through others," it is crucial for team success that you treat your staff respectfully and courteously.

8. Acknowledge your staff.

When a team member performs exceptionally well, make sure you notice and acknowledge the efforts with praise and recognition. One of the greatest needs we have as human beings is to be appreciated for a job well done.

9. Commit to continuous self-improvement. Effective supervisors are competent because they are committed to a high level of learning, growth and improvement. Spend 15-30 minutes each day devoted to learning something new. Read resource materials, acquire a mentor, join a professional organization and attend conferences.

10. Maintain a positive attitude. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's book, "The Power of Positive Thinking," is still one of the most read books in the world because most of us want to be inspired to think positively. Recognize how to generate the power within yourself, and then transmit it to your team.

As a supervisor, you will need to wear many hats. As you wear those hats, you'll develop a leadership style that will evolve as you grow into the position. To inspire you to consistently put forth your best effort, I'd like to leave you with the words of one of the great motivators of our time, Jim Rohn: "A good objective of leadership is to help those who are doing poorly to do well and to help those who are doing well to do even better."

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