



Reprinted from the October 2014 issue of BIC

First-time supervisor: A road map to success

You've just been promoted to supervisor. As you may discover within a short period of time, this new experience can be quite unnerving. You may feel as though you've been dropped in the middle of a deserted land where your team is expecting you to lead them to civilization yet no one has given you a map or, at least, some guidance as to the direction in which you should move forward.

I've been training and working with supervisors for more than 25 years, so the following signposts may be helpful:

- **Project credibility** — Research continues to point out credibility is a chief attribute employees want from their supervisor. 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.

- **Communication** — This is the 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.

- **Learn the "lay of the land"** — Start slowly. Reassure your new staff 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. Recognize early on there will be staff members who probably know more about things than you do. 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.

- **Be visible** — Manage by walking around. Build relationships with your new staff. Get to know them and what's important to them at work and in their personal lives. Establish good two-way communication.

- **Establish clear expectations** — It is your responsibility to ensure your 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. Ask employees for their thoughts regarding personal performance expectations.

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

- **Treat everyone with respect** — One 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.

- **Acknowledge your staff** — When a team member does an outstanding job, 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.

- **Commit to continuous self-improvement** — Great supervisors are highly 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. Acquire a mentor, someone you admire who can help show you the ropes.

- **Maintain a positive attitude** — Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's "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. John C. Maxwell's "Leadership 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know," Simon Sinek's "Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action," and Douglas Stone's and Sheila Heen's "Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well" are three other leadership books I would recommend to new supervisors. Recognize how to generate the power within yourself and then to transmit it to your team.

As a supervisor, you will need to put on many hats. Based on my experience, I am confident if you effectively apply the guidelines discussed in this column, you will begin to productively wear most of your hats. Best wishes for much success!

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