

White Paper

January 2006



Authors:

Richard A. Pierce, Ph.D.
Co-Founder &
Senior Consultant
Rising Sun Consultants

James S. Rowell, M.S.Ed.
Co-Founder &
Senior Consultant
Rising Sun Consultants

Solution Focus Areas:

Leadership / Supervision
Engagement/Morale
Turnover/Retention
Productivity

For more information about Rising Sun Consultants, contact Lynn Lehman at:
717-512-7531
or
Lynn@RisingSunConsultants.com

Visit our website at
www.RisingSunConsultants.com

The 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™: A Developmental Approach



The 10 Keys To Effective Supervision™: A Developmental Approach

“Most of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get their work done.”

- Peter F. Drucker

Traditionally, when business leaders talk about “supervision,” they are usually referring to the managerial or leadership function of overseeing the productivity and progress of employees – typically those employees who report directly to the supervisor. However, stemming from our experiences in providing both training and supervision to employees, Rising Sun’s approach to supervision takes a very different perspective – defining supervision more from a coaching and mentoring perspective than from a managerial perspective.

As such, for our current purposes, we will define supervision as:

A developmental process designed to support and enhance an individual’s acquisition of the motivation, autonomy, self-awareness, and skills necessary to effectively accomplish the job at hand.

Why is Supervision so Important?

All too often, employees are promoted to the role of supervisor because of their strong technical expertise. However, an effective supervisory relationship requires that the supervisor not only be a content expert, but that they also accept the enormous responsibility of mentorship. Unfortunately, as suggested below, poor supervision has an enormous impact and cost for both the individual employee, as well as the organization as a whole:

- 89% of managers believe employees leave for more money, while 88% of employees actually leave for reasons having to do with the job, the culture, the manager or the work environment. (“The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave”)
- 43% of workers report that they do not feel valued by their employers. (CareerBuilder.com)
- 71% of workers in the United States rate themselves as either “Not Engaged” or “Actively Disengaged.” (The Gallup Organization)
- 70% of the reasons employees leave their jobs are related to factors that are controllable by the direct supervisor. (“The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave”)
- 66% of workers do not identify with or feel motivated to drive their employer’s business goals and objectives. (Taylor Nelson Sofres - TNS)
- Only 12% of employees leave for compensation issues. (“The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave”)
- The #1 reason employees leave jobs is a poor relationship with their immediate supervisor. (The Gallup Organization)

Once again, so why should we care why employees leave or what impact supervision has on employee morale and turnover?

- The national voluntary turnover rate is 20.2% and is on the rise. (Bureau of Labor Statistics for 03-04)
- The cost of turnover in the United States is estimated to be \$187 billion a year. (The Gallup Organization)
- The average turnover figure for companies is the cost of the employee's yearly salary and benefits; however, it can vary depending on the industry. (Saratoga Institute 2004)
- Employee turnover’s greatest cost is lost business and productivity. (Talent Keepers 2003)

As research clearly demonstrates, it is not only in the best interest of the employee, but also the business to pay close attention to the supervisor/supervisee relationship. This relationship is critical to the success of an individual and ultimately the organization. We need to have well trained supervisors who are prepared to provide the necessary and appropriate guidance, structure, and encouragement to their staff. What follows is a discussion regarding a developmental approach to supervision and 10 Keys to Effective Supervision.

A Development Approach

Like all skills, supervision can be taught. However, unlike many simple or basic skills, supervision is best understood as a “process” – requiring both knowledge **and** experience.

Perhaps even more important, however, developing effective supervision skills requires the availability of effective supervision. In other words, in order for an individual to develop the knowledge and skills to become an effective supervisor of others, they must first go through the process of effective supervision themselves – particularly in terms of being supervised and mentored in the role of supervision.

As suggested earlier, one of the most common approaches to supervision is to view the process simply in terms of knowledge and/or skills acquisition. Unfortunately, this assumes that all individuals learn new information/skills in the same way and at the same pace. However, years of developmental research in the area of human learning has shown that learning typically occurs in spurts and is influenced by any number of individual, as well as contextual factors. As such, it is important to keep in mind that employees may very well be functioning at different levels of development for different aspects of their job responsibilities. This is particularly true in terms of their level of prior experience, training and supervision within each of the various aspects of their job. Naturally, the range of variation across job responsibilities will be less for those who are new to the job than for those who are more experienced overall.

The role/responsibility of the supervisor, therefore, is to create a safe environment in which the employee can work through the developmental issues or challenges of each level in order to gain the necessary motivation, autonomy and self-awareness to successfully move to the next level of development. Successful supervision of the entry level employee will lead to a greater sense of self-confidence in their ability to both understand and complete the responsibilities of their job. Supervision of the developing employee, on the other hand, requires a greater level of skill and flexibility to help these employees negotiate the difficult challenges of this developmental stage. As such, these employees may present a greater challenge for the inexperienced supervisor. For the experienced employee, most of the structure of supervision is provided by the employee themselves, rather than by the supervisor, as they typically know more about what they need from supervision and how they learn best.

Based on this critical understanding that supervision is learned and performed in various levels and varies from supervisor to supervisor, it is important to explore necessary skills and characteristics of supervision. In the following section, we will explore the 10 Keys to Effective Supervision.

The 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™:

With this developmental perspective in mind, we recommend the following 10 keys to effective supervision:

1. **Support Growth** - Provide support for employees professional development through:
 - Professional Development Plans
 - Strength Based Performance Appraisal Systems
2. **Unite With Your Team** - Be available/accessible to employee by maintaining:
 - Open door policy
 - Regular one-on-one supervisory meetings
3. **Praise Others** - Provide praise and encouragement through:
 - Formal recognition systems
 - Informal compliments - Catching them doing things right
4. **Expect Excellence** - Set high expectations for employees through:
 - Clear position descriptions
 - Regular feedback sessions with staff
5. **Require Accountability** - Uphold individual responsibility by:
 - Creating a culture where staff hold each other accountable
 - Creating a culture where staff hold themselves accountable
6. **Verify Potential** - Develop an atmosphere of hope and confidence by:
 - Providing staff opportunities to succeed
 - Having high expectations for employees
7. **Instill Independence** - Allow autonomy of employee through:
 - Appropriate delegation
 - Encouraging risk taking
8. **Share Continuously** - Establish two-way communication through:
 - Active listening
 - Being transparent
9. **Optimize Ownership** - Create opportunities for employees to contribute by:
 - Participatory strategic planning sessions
 - Encouraging risk taking
10. **Reinforce Relationships** - Share with and care about employees by:
 - Getting to know what motivates individual employees
 - Creating opportunities for staff to share personal/family accomplishments

Summary/Conclusion

Taken all together, the information presented above describes a more positive and strength based approach to supervision. From this perspective, supervision has less to do with teaching and evaluation and more to do with establishing an environment which encourage individual growth and development. This discussion on the 10 Keys to Effective Supervision just begins to scratch the surface on this topic. We will be discussing this topic in more detail in future white papers to come.