

**ELEMENTS OF SUPERVISORY
PRACTICES: PART II**

MANAGEMENT IN STATE GOVERNMENT

Participant's Manual

Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP)

State of Louisiana

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***ELEMENTS OF SUPERVISORY PRACTICES:
PART II***

Management in State Government

Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP)

Sponsored by the Governor's Office & The Department of Civil Service

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ELEMENTS OF SUPERVISORY PRACTICES: PART II

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This two-day course will aid participants in developing effective supervisory practices in the workplace. This course will address the following topics: setting expectations, teamwork, communication, diversity, motivation, problem solving and decision making, and coaching/counseling.

JOB OUTCOMES

- Communicates ideas and facts verbally in a clear and organized way.
- Thinks about other people's reactions before saying something.
- Gives negative feedback in a helpful manner.
- Understands the importance of having different types of people in a work group.
- Supervises the work group so all employees feel respected and recognized for their contributions.
- Motivates, guides, and teaches others to be better at their jobs.
- Encourages cooperation and teamwork within the work group.
- Builds trust and open communication within the work group.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identifies and implements effective supervisory skills.
- Overcomes communication barriers.
- Uses effective listening skills within work group.
- Understands what diversity is and how it affects work group productivity.
- Apply appropriate methods when confronted with an employee's motivation problem.
- Utilize correct methods in the corrective feedback process.

INTRODUCTION

Most supervisors started out working in the unit they now supervise. Because technical skills are relatively important for first-level managers, the person selected to be supervisor is often an employee with a superior grasp of the technical skills needed to perform well in the unit. The person also might have more seniority than many of the other employees in the unit. Good work habits and leadership skills are also reasons for selecting an employee to be the supervisor.

Unfortunately, none of these requirements for promotion or hiring guarantee that a person knows how to supervise. Sometime new supervisors are unprepared for some aspects of supervising. Instead of receiving formal training in supervision, many are “just dropped off the end of the pier.” Supervisors are sometimes especially challenged by the task of leading former colleagues.

Becoming a supervisor marks a big change in a person’s work life. The new supervisor suddenly must use more human relations and conceptual skills and devote more time to planning ahead and keeping an eye on the work unit’s activities. A change also occurs in the supervisor’s relationships with the employees in the work unit. Instead of being one of the crowd, the supervisor becomes a part of management – even the target of blame or anger when employees resent policies and procedures.

One way to combat the anxiety is to prepare for the job. A new supervisor can learn about management and supervision through books and observation. He or she can think about ways to carry out the role of supervisor. Traits such as consistency and a focus on achieving goals are extremely important for effective supervision. A supervisor can also strive to learn as much as possible about the organization, the unit, and the job.

Once on the job, a supervisor needs to continue the learning process. More important than understanding the layout of the workplace is knowing about the employees in the work unit. Who are the quiet but productive workers, for example, and who are the unofficial leaders? To get to know employees, a supervisor can talk to his or her boss and read performance appraisals, but the most reliable sources of information are the employees themselves. Particularly in the early days on the job, a supervisor should take time to discuss goals with employees and to learn their work habits.

A supervisor may learn that one or more employees had been candidates for the supervisor’s job and therefore may be uncomfortable. One constructive approach that the supervisor might take to the problem is to acknowledge the other person’s feeling to ask for the employee’s support and to discuss his or her long-term goals.

Obtaining and Using Power and Authority

To carry out his or her job, a supervisor needs not only knowledge but also power (the ability to do certain things) and authority (the right to do certain things). It may help to have the new supervisor's boss make an official announcement of the promotion or appointment to acquire power after assuming the role of supervisor. When accepting the job, a supervisor can ask his or her boss to announce the promotion or appointment at a meeting of the employees. There the supervisor can take the opportunity to state his or expectations, desire for the group to work as a team, and interest in hearing about work-related problems.

A new supervisor should not rush to make changes in the work unit, but should first understand how the work unit functions and what employees expect. Making changes quickly and without seeking their input can alienate employees and put them on the defensive. The supervisor can build support for change by introducing it gradually after inviting suggestions where appropriate.

Small Group Activity

What: Case Study

How: Read the following case study and answer the questions below it.

Debra Blanchard and Becky Boudreaux are both supervisors, but their jobs look very different on the surface. Debra is the Customer Service Center Manager at DOTD. She supervises six (6) customer service representatives. Becky is the supervisor for a work group of Facility Services at LSU. She supervises 30 employees in various locations across the LSU campus.

On a typical day, Debra arrives at work at about 7:30 A.M. She begins her day with paperwork such as reviewing call logs for her staff members. When the normal work day begins (at 8:00) and the call lines are opened, she spends much of her time answering questions from customer service representatives and district employees about non-routine customer problems and questions. According to Debra, "Every customer is a new situation," and that variety is what poses challenges to her employees - and what makes her own job interesting. From the time the phone lines are closed (at 4:30 P.M.) until she leaves at about 5:30 P.M., Debra returns phone calls from customers and prepares her unit schedule for the next day. In addition, she trains staff members at weekly meetings and conducts performance appraisals.

THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY

Organizations that effectively draw on the variety of talents available from a diverse workforce are in the best position to deliver high-quality services. Likewise, a supervisor who values diversity is in a position to help all his or her employees develop their full potential. This supervisor appreciates the various strengths of different kinds of people, which boosts employees' morale. In such a culture, working relationships among people are positive.

The supervisor who values diversity also helps to make the organization a desirable place to work, which gives the organization the largest possible pool of available talent from which to recruit. In addition, employee turnover in such an organization is likely to be low.

Small Group Activity

What: Diversity

How: Answer the following questions in your group:

- How have you noticed diversity changing in the work place for the positive or negative?
- What dimensions of diversity do you encounter in the work place?
- What strategies can you use to effectively utilize these various dimensions of diversity in the work place?

Notes:

BUILDING TEAMS

A team is a small group of individuals who are equally committed to a common purpose. When most organizations form a team, someone is appointed to be the team leader. Often the team leader is a supervisor, and the team consists of staff level individuals.

Being an effective team leader requires many of the same skills as being an effective supervisor. The team leader needs excellent communication skills, consistency, and a good rapport with team members. In addition, because the purpose of the team is to draw on the expertise of all team members, the team leader/supervisor will need to rely on a leadership style that encourages involvement.

One of the most exciting opportunities a supervisor will face is the chance to lead a team. This requires some thought and preparation. Some useful tips for building a team are listed below.

1. Communicate effectively.
2. Criticize constructively.
3. Be assertive, but not aggressive.
4. Be open and receptive to diversity of opinion.
5. Support all staff members.

Team building includes several activities: setting goals; analyzing what needs to be done and allocating work, examining how well the group is working, and examining the relationships among team members.

Benefits of Teamwork

A basic benefit of using teams is that the organization can draw more fully upon the insights and expertise of all its employees. Teams can also serve as motivators. Employees who participate in planning and decision making are more likely to take responsibility for the quality of what they do. They also tend to be more enthusiastic about their work. Responsible, enthusiastic employees are more likely to work hard and deliver high quality work.

Ultimately, motivating employees and drawing on their strengths should enhance the performance of organizations that effectively use teams. Employee involvement can help improve customer service, productivity, and the quality of work.

Leading the Team

Many teams fall short of their potential. Whether an organization's teams achieved the benefits of teamwork depends in part on the teams' leaders. Generally speaking, the goal of a team leader is to develop a productive team. Some of the characteristics necessary for enhanced team productivity are:

- openness and honesty
- leadership that does not dominate
- decisions made by consensus (when appropriate)
- acceptance of assignments
- goals that are understood and accepted
- assessment of progress and results
- basic level of cooperation
- involvement and participation
- discussion and debate
- atmosphere of listening
- win-win approach to conflict
- relatively low turnover.

Small Group Activity

What: Building Teams

How: Identify methods for implementing the following team building tips into your workgroup.

1. Communicate effectively.
2. Criticize constructively.
3. Be assertive, but not aggressive.
4. Be open and receptive to diversity of opinion.
5. Support staff members when possible.

Notes:

THE LINK BETWEEN COMMUNICATION & SUPERVISION

The way the supervisor communicates with work group members will impact the success and productivity of the work group. Successful teamwork requires open and positive communication among team members. Effective communication helps to develop positive working relationships with both a supervisor's boss and employees. The supervisor should create a climate of trust and openness, and encourage work group members to work together. Employee communication is a continuous process involving skillful sending and receiving of messages.

Communication refers to the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. In contrast, the term communications is more narrowly used to describe the mechanical and electronic means of transmitting and receiving information, such as newspapers, bulletin-board announcements, telephones, etc. Employee communication has many of the qualities – and limitations – of these means, but is much more subtle and complex. Therefore, employee communication needs to be managed carefully.

Communication provides the link between plans and action. Your employees must know your expectations. You may have a great set of plans and a highly skilled staff, but until something begins to happen, you will have accomplished nothing. Neither motivation nor leadership can bring about action without communication. This is what starts and keeps the whole plan in motion.

The communication process is the series of steps that enables an idea in one person's mind to be transmitted, understood, and acted on by another person. This process is illustrated below. To be effective, the supervisor must establish rapport with employees, be sensitive to how others perceive ideas and information, and minimize the factors that can be distractions in the communication process. Supervisors need excellent skills in verbal communication, written communication, and in understanding the nonverbal signals that the face and body transmit to others. Supervisors must also be skilled at receiving communication from others. They must be good listeners who are receptive to feedback and questions.

Communication is not a one-way street. For organizations to function smoothly, communication must occur in three ways. First, not only must you provide information downward to your employees and upward to your manager, but employees must communicate their ideas upward to you. Since interdepartmental cooperation among supervisors is extremely important, there must be a horizontal flow of information too. Finally, there may also be a need to exchange information with "outside" sources. Thus, the communication process is three dimensional – upward/downward, left/right, and inside/outside.

Small Group Activity

What: Barriers to Communication

- How:*
- Identify common barriers to communication as a supervisor.
 - Develop strategies to overcome these barriers.
 - How can these barriers be used as a tool for supervisory development?

Notes:

Choosing the Appropriate Communication Method

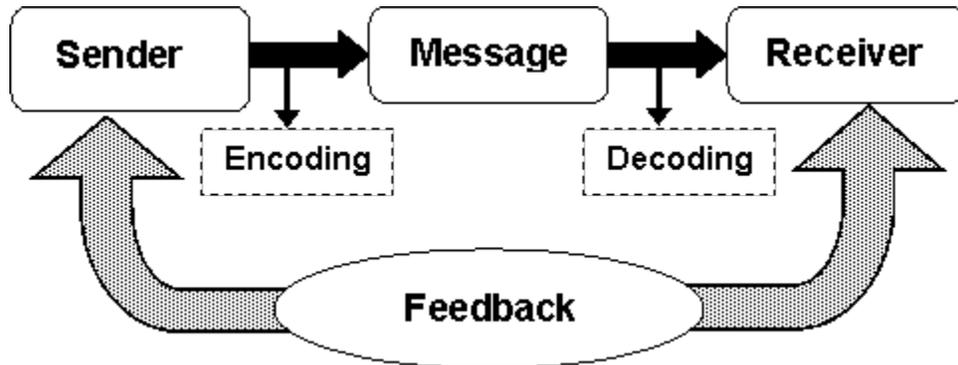
Effective supervisors select their communication methods on the basis of careful analysis and situational factors. The appropriate method depends on the specific task as well as your goals. If the task is a lengthy message, or one requiring a permanent record, you'll want to use the written form. On the other hand, if speed, informality, or personal impact is important, verbal communication may be more effective. Another supervisory choice is whether to communicate with a single employee or the entire group. Person-to-person conversations allow the supervisor to control the flow of information and protect privacy. However, opening up communication among the entire unit invites employee participation, develops commitment, and helps build team spirit. It demands that the supervisor become more of a leader, helping the group explore problems and make progress toward goals.

Although spoken and written words are generally the most visible elements in communication, information exchange is greatly influenced by nonverbal factors. Nonverbal behaviors – actions, body language, and active listening – are vitally important communication skills. The messages transmitted by your actions could be louder than your words. Talking and writing are the communication methods most frequently used. But regardless of what you say, employees will be most affected by what you communicate to them by your actions. What you do – how you treat them – is the proof of your real intentions. Going to bat for an employee who needs help provides concrete evidence of how highly you value that person's contributions to your team.

Listening should make up a significant portion of your communications. It is an active process that requires good eye contact, alert body posture, and the use of frequent verbal encouragement. It is a skill that must be continually practiced to be maintained. But it can provide great satisfaction both to you and the speaker. Here are four basic suggestions for improving your listening skills.

1. Don't assume anything.
2. Don't interrupt.
3. Try to understand the need or the real reason the employee wants your attention.
4. Don't react too quickly.

Communication Model



There are many errors that supervisors make when communicating with employees. Many of these can be prevented by staying informed, being sensitive to employee feelings, and anticipating what employees are interested in hearing. Similar guidelines apply to communication relationships with one's superior.

Giving instructions and assignments is a fundamental part of most supervisors' jobs. Assignments are more likely to be effective if they are clear, delivered confidently, repeated, and followed up to make sure action has occurred. But much employee cooperation can be obtained by phrasing most assignments as requests and providing explanations for them.

Sometimes employees may refuse to follow instructions or directives. The need for disciplinary action can often be prevented by following proven guidelines that help employees understand and accept assignments and instructions. Avoiding power struggles and assumptions, keeping assignments simple, and using consistency in job assignments are good examples of effective supervisory guidelines.

Small Group Activity

What: Rate the Listener

How: Read the scenario on the following page. For each statement, put a check mark in the column that matches your opinion of Jacob's action.

Jacob, a 24-year veteran of Louisiana State Police, is the Captain of one of the regional troop areas. At the request of upper management, he agreed to have a consultant interview with the Troopers to obtain their perceptions of his managerial actions. One set of questions focused on his communication practices, specifically his listening skills. The following statements reflect the Troopers' typical response to each question. Your assignment is to determine whether each of Jacob's actions, as perceived by Troopers in his unit, represents a good practice or a bad practice or needs some improvement. For each statement, put a check mark in the column that matches your opinion of Jacob's action.

Jacob's Listening Behaviors	Good Practice	Bad Practice	Needs Some Improvement
1. If you have an appointment with Jacob, he carefully set his other work aside: if you interrupt him or talk to him without scheduling in advance, he acts distracted.			
2. He often jumps ahead to reach a personal conclusion regarding the case being discussed before the Trooper can finish reporting the circumstances.			
3. Jacob occasionally plays with his cell phone while listening to others in meetings; he turns it over and over in his hands and repeatedly checks for new email messages.			
4. He asks a lot of questions during any conversation, many of which are difficult to answer.			
5. Jacob stares intently at the Trooper who is speaking.			
6. He checks his watch frequently and visibly during conversations; in meetings he sets his wristwatch's alarm to buzz at ten-minute intervals.			

Jacob's Listening Behaviors	Good Practice	Bad Practice	Needs Some Improvement
7. Frequently, Jacob's conversations take sudden dramatic turns when he jumps to a different topic, often preceded by the transitional comment, "That reminds me of another case I worked on..."			
8. While listening to a lengthy report on a case, Jacob sometimes leans back in his chair and closes his eyes until the presentation is finished.			
9. Jacob's face is highly expressive when he is listening; some officer's report, "You can read him like a book."			
10. Whenever the phone rings, Jacob answers it: if the mail is delivered Jacob opens it immediately; if other officers poke their heads into the office, Jacob turns his attention to them.			

Scoring: Give Jacob 2 points for each item that you marked as good listening practice and 1 point for each item that you marked as needs some improvement. Give him no points for items that you marked as bad listening practices.

Interpretation: Applying principles of effective listening to Jacob's behavior would give him a total of only 9 points. Here's how it should be scored: Good for items 4 and 9; needs some improvement for items 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9; and bad for items 2, 6, and 10. If you interpreted the items differently, explain your opinion.

Listening Guidelines

1. Remove distractions and give the speaker your full attention.
2. Look at the speaker most of the time.
3. When the speaker hesitates, give a sign of encouragement such as a smile or a nod.
4. Try to hear the main point and the supporting points.
5. Distinguish between opinion and facts.
6. Control your emotions.
7. Be patient: do not interrupt.
8. Take notes (if appropriate).
9. At appropriate times, ask questions to clarify your expectations.
10. Restate what you think the speaker's point is and ask if you heard correctly.

MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

Motivation involves giving employees incentives that cause them to act in desired ways. Among other things, supervisors must motivate their employees to complete assignments on time and to maintain a good attendance record. When employees are motivated and also have the necessary skills, equipment, supplies, and time, they are able to perform well. Thus, the goal of motivating employees is to lead them to perform in ways that meet the goals of the unit and the organization.

Individual Activity

What: What Motivates You?

How: Rank the following job factors from 1 to 12. Assign 1 to the factor that you consider most important and 12 to the factor you consider least important.

- _____ Work that is interesting and important
- _____ Good wages or salary
- _____ Authority to make important decisions
- _____ Comfortable work environment, such as a clean, modern laboratory or attractive office
- _____ Likeable co-workers
- _____ Clear understanding of the agency's and work unit's goals performance requirements
- _____ Appreciation and recognition for doing a good job
- _____ Opportunities to learn new skills
- _____ Prestigious title or occupation
- _____ Chance for advancement
- _____ Job security

Motivational Methods

Some motivational strategies or methods are listed below.

Making Work Interesting

When employees find their work interesting, they are more likely to give it their full attention and enthusiasm. In general, work is interesting when it has variety and allows employees some control over what they do. Work can be made interesting through job rotation, job enrichment, and increased customer contact.

Job Rotation

Job rotation involves moving employees from job to job to give them more variety. Job rotation requires that employees have broad skills. As a result, a supervisor or agency must provide cross-training, or training in the skills required to perform more than one job. The opportunity to learn new skills through cross-training can in itself motivate some employees.

Job Enrichment

Job enrichment is the incorporation of motivating factors into a job. Generally, an enriched job gives employees more responsibility to make decisions and more recognition for good performance. Thus, enriched jobs are more challenging and, presumably, more rewarding.

When modifying jobs to make them more interesting, the organization and supervisor must remember that not all employees are motivated by the same things at the same time. Thus, while some employees may eagerly accept the new variety in their jobs, others are likely to be less enthusiastic. Some workers think jobs are being redesigned simply to get more work out of people for the same amount of money. A supervisor must be careful to emphasize the advantages of the new arrangements and to listen to employee reactions.

Having High Expectations

Effective motivation can lead to performance beyond employees' own expectations of themselves. When someone expects a lot of us, we often find that we can do a lot. When little is expected, we tend to provide little. In other cases, the expectations are self-fulfilling. (Additional information regarding setting expectations will be provided later in the course.)

Providing Rewards that are Valued

The content theories of motivation indicate that a variety of rewards may motivate, but that not all employees will value the same rewards at the same time. The supervisor's challenge is to determine what rewards will work for particular employees at particular times. This involves appreciating the needs people are trying to meet and the variety of ways a supervisor can provide rewards.

Of course, there are limits to a supervisor's discretion in giving rewards. Policy often dictates the size of raises and the degree to which raises are linked to performance or some other measure. However, supervisors can identify rewards over which they have some control. For example, a supervisor has great freedom to administer rewards such as praise and recognition. Many supervisors have some discretion in job assignments. Employees who have a high need for achievement or are trying to meet esteem or self-actualization needs may appreciate opportunities for additional training. Employees who have a high need for affiliation or are seeking to meet social needs may appreciate being assigned to jobs where they work with other people.

Relating Rewards to Performance

The rewards that a supervisor uses should be linked to employee performance. Unfortunately, many employees are unable to see a clear link between good job performance and higher pay. If there is a connection, employees should be aware of it and understand it. Linking rewards to the achievement or realistic goals is a way to help employees believe they can attain desired rewards.

Treating Employees as Individuals

Most of the theories of motivation emphasize that different things motivate individuals in different ways. A supervisor who wishes to succeed at motivating has to remember that employees will respond in varying ways. A supervisor cannot expect that everyone will be equally excited about cross-training or overtime pay. Some employees might prefer an easier (or more challenging) job or fewer working hours. To the degree possible, a supervisor should respond to individual differences. When a particular type of motivation does not seem to work with an employee, a supervisor should try some other motivator to see if it better matches the employee's needs.

Encouraging Employee Participation

One way to learn about employees' needs and to benefit from their ideas is to encourage employees to participate in planning and decision making. Employees tend to feel more committed when they can contribute to decisions and solutions. They are also likely to cooperate better when they feel like part of a team.

Providing Feedback

People want and need to know how well they are doing. Part of a supervisor's job is to give employees feedback about their performance. When the supervisor tells employees that they are meeting or exceeding expectations, the employees know they are doing something right. When a supervisor tells an employee that they are falling short of expectations, the employees know that they need to improve. Most people will try to improve when given a chance to do so.

Praise is an important kind of feedback. In monitoring employees, a supervisor should look for signs of excellent performance and let the employees know, in specific terms, that the good work is appreciated.

There are many ways to deliver praise. For example, a nursing supervisor might write a memo to an LPN, in which the supervisor comments on the LPN's courteous manner with patients and how it gives patients a good impression of the hospital, or a police lieutenant might remark to a trooper that the trooper's paperwork is always complete and legible.

A supervisor does not have to use a dramatic approach to praising a behavior. Praise is so easy to give and its potential rewards are so great that the supervisor can and should use it routinely, as long as it is sincere.

Small Group Activity

What: Motivational Strategies

How: Identify three of the strategies listed below that you will incorporate into your supervisory strategies for employing motivational strategies in your workgroup. Provide methods for how you will incorporate these strategies.

- Making Work Interesting
- Job Rotation
- Job Enrichment
- Having High Expectations
- Providing Rewards that are Valued
- Relating Rewards to Performance
- Treating Employees as Individuals
- Encouraging Employee Participation
- Providing Feedback

Notes:

Small Group Activity

What: Motivation

How: Anna Adams supervises LPNs. She expects each LPN to submit a progress report at the end of each work week.

- Name at least one way Anna can use reinforcement to motivate employees to submit their reports on time.
- Name at least one way Anna can use negative reinforcement or punishment to motivate employees to turn in their work on time
- Which of these approaches do you think would be most successful? Why?

Notes:

Class Activity

What: Motivational methods

How: This activity will help you develop a comprehensive list of motivational methods on which to draw when faced with employees whom you feel are not performing to the full potential.

1. The table below shows five examples of motivational methods and provides examples of each. Using what you have learned about motivation in this course and elsewhere, list methods, techniques, and strategies that can serve as a source of ideas on how to motivate employees.
2. For purposes of this course, do not be concerned with the cost of your ideas or a plan for carrying them out. For example, if you suggest offering a monetary incentive for completing a pre-selected group of CPTP training courses, there is no need to provide documentation as to the impact of this incentive pay on your annual operating budget. At the same time, however, do not make ridiculous suggestions that would not make good business sense, such as suggesting that you reward all employees and their families with a two-week all-expenses-paid vacation to St. Croix.
3. Working with the participants at your table, develop a list that can be copied by each participant at the table, and be prepared to share your ideas with the entire class. There will undoubtedly be many days in your management career when you will be able to use this list to help you generate some ideas on how to motivate an unmotivated employee. You can also improve the list over time as you develop greater expertise as a motivational leader.

Notes:

Things I can do to be a motivational leader	Characteristics of motivating work environment	Ways to reward employees for good performance	Strategies I can use to improve the way work is performed	Organizational policies of benefits
Example: Help employees set challenging yet achievable goals	Example: Goods and services that employees believe in	Example: Publish achievements in agency or work unit newsletter	Example: Communicate clear performance standards	Example: Flexible work schedule to accommodate personal and organizational needs

SETTING EXPECTATIONS
Goals, Objectives, & Action Plans

Planning requires setting goals and objectives. Objectives specified the desired accomplishments of the organization as a whole or a part of it. Goals are much broader and typically relate to the overall goals of the agency. In addition, goals are usually centered around specific perspectives of the agency (i.e., financial, human capital, processes, and customer service.)

The objectives for work groups should support the goals developed in strategic planning. The objectives specify how the group will help make the organization achieve its goals. Supervisors usually set objectives that will enable their unit to contribute to the unit and program goals as well as the overall organization.

Objectives serve as the basis for action plans. An action plan is a plan indicating how the goal will be achieved. If you think of objectives as statements of where you want to go, then an action plan is a map that tells you how to get there. For a successful trip, you need both types of information.

The supervisor can create an action plan by answering the questions what, who, when, where, and how.

- What actions will need to be taken? What are the specific steps involved?
- Who will take the necessary steps? The supervisor may perform some tasks, but many activities will be assigned to specific employees or groups of employees.
- When must each step be completed? With many types of processes, certain steps will determine when the whole project is completed. The supervisor should be particularly careful in scheduling those activities.
- Where will the work take place? Sometimes this question is easy to answer, but a growing operation may require that the supervisor plan for additional resources.
- How will the work be done? Are the usual procedures and equipment adequate, or does the supervisor need to be innovative? Thinking about how the work will be done may alert the supervisor to a need for more training.

Small Group Activity

What: Performance standards

How: If failure to meet a performance standard indicates some type of underlying problem, how might the supervisor attempt to solve the problem?

What are the long-term implications of not addressing a performance problem for the following groups: supervisor, workgroup, and employee with the performance problem?

Notes:

- Where will the work take place?

- How will the work be done?

OVERVIEW OF PROBLEM SOLVING & DECISION MAKING

The ability to solve problems is one of the top qualities that employers want. One of the major roles of managers and supervisors is to solve problems and make decisions. Making bad decisions can have serious implications for any organization. Some decisions affect the health, safety, and well-being of employees and the community. Some researchers claim that a manager makes about 80 decisions daily, or one every 5 or 6 minutes, and other claim that the total is in the hundreds. No one can say with certainty how many decisions you will make as a supervisor, but you should realize that your problem-solving and decision-making skills will affect your career success. As with all the supervisory skills, problem solving and decision making skills can be developed.

Group Discussion

What: Problem Solving and Decision Making

How: Explain the relationship among the supervisory functions, decision-making, and problem solving.

Notes:

The Relationship among Objectives, Problem Solving and Decision Making

As a supervisor, you and your boss may set objectives or performance expectations together or your boss may simply assign objectives for you to achieve. When you do not meet your objectives, you have a problem. When you have a problem, you must make decisions. The better you can develop plans that prevent problems before they occur, the fewer problems you will have and the more time you will have to take advantage of opportunities. Seeking opportunities to continuously improve performance or customer service requires the same consideration as solving existing problems.

A **problem** exists whenever objectives are not being met. In other words, you have a problem whenever a difference exists between what is actually happening and what you and your boss want to happen. If your objective is to process 45 LACHIP applications per day, but the department produces only 30, a problem exists. The system causes 85 percent of the problem, not its people. (ADD FOOTNOTE _SSN). **Problem solving** is the process of taking corrective action to meet objectives. **Decision making** is the process of selecting an alternative course of action that will solve a problem. Decisions must be made when you are faced with a problem. The first decision concerns whether or not to take corrective action.

Some problems cannot be solved, and others do not deserve the time and effort it would take to solve them. However, your job requires you to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, you will have to attempt to solve most problems.

Group Discussion

What: The Relationship among Objectives, Problem Solving and Decision Making

How: Give an example of when a job objective was not met. Identify the problem created and the decision made in regard to the objective not being met.

Notes:

The Relationship among Managerial/Supervisory Functions, Decision Making, and Problem Solving

All supervisory and managerial work requires planning, organizing, leading, and directing. While performing these functions, supervisors must make decisions. In fact, any action that a supervisor makes requires decisions. For example, when planning, supervisors must make decisions about objectives and when, where, and how they will be met. When organizing, supervisors must make decisions about what to delegate and how to coordinate the unit's resources. To lead and direct employees, supervisors must decide how to influence employees. There are typically fewer problems to solve when supervisors are skilled in decision making.

Group Discussion

What: The Relationship among Managerial/Supervisory Functions, Decision Making, and Problem Solving

How: Give an example of when a supervisor made a poor decision. Explain the supervisory function and the problem created by the poor decision.

Notes:

Individual Activity

<i>What:</i>	Personal Decision Making Style
<i>How:</i>	Determine your decision-making style by answering the eight questions below. Rate each statement between 1 and 5 based on the scale below. After applying a rating to each statement, add up the total number to determine your style.

This behavior is common for me *This behavior is not common for me*
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- _____ Overall, I make decisions quickly.
- _____ When making decisions, I go with my first thoughts or hunch.
- _____ When making decisions, I don't bother to re-check my work.
- _____ When making decisions, I gather little or no information.
- _____ When making decisions, I consider very few alternative options.
- _____ When making a decision, I usually make it well before the deadline.
- _____ When making a decision, I don't ask others for advice.
- _____ After making a decision, I don't look for other alternatives or which I had waited longer.

_____ **Total**

To determine your style, add up the numbers 1 through 5 that represent your answers. The total will range from 8 to 40. Place an X on the line that represents your score.

Reflexive Consistent Reflective
 8-----20-----40

Following is an explanation of each style. A group also has a preferred decision-making style, based on how its members make decisions. You could answer the eight questions by changing the "I" to "we" and referring to a group rather than to yourself.

Reflexive Style

A reflexive decision maker likes to make quick decisions (shooting from the hip) without taking the time to get all the information that may be needed and without considering all alternatives. On the positive side, reflexive decision makers are decisive; they do not delay. On the negative side, making quick decisions can lead to waste and duplication when the best possible alternative is overlooked. Employees view a reflexive decision maker as a poor supervisor if the supervisor consistently makes bad decisions. If you use a reflexive style for important decisions, you may want to slow down and spend more time gathering information and analyzing alternatives.

Reflective Style

A reflective decision maker likes to take plenty of time to make decisions, gathering considerable information and analyzing several alternatives. On the positive side, the reflective type does not make hasty decisions. On the negative side, the reflective type may procrastinate and waste valuable time and other resources. The reflective decision maker may be viewed as wishy-washy and indecisive. If you use a reflective style, you may want to speed up your decision making.

Consistent Style

Consistent decisions makers tend to make decisions without rushing or wasting time. They know when they have enough information and alternatives to make a sound decision. Consistent decision makers tend to have the best record for making good decisions. When appropriate, they tend to follow the decision making steps in the model presented below.

Used with permission.

Lussier, Robert. Management Fundamentals. 2000. South-Western College Publications.

The Decision-Making Model

The Problem Solving Process

Four steps are involved in problem solving:

- Step 1:** Define the problem.
- Step 2:** Generate alternative solutions.
- Step 3:** Evaluate alternatives and select one (**decision making**).
- Step 4:** Implement and follow-up on the solution.

SUPERVISING PROBLEM EMPLOYEES

When a supervisor does a good job of leading, problem solving, communicating, and motivating, most employees will perform well. Even so, a supervisor occasionally faces the challenge of a “problem” employee, one who persistently is unwilling or unable to follow the rules or meet performance standards. In general, problem employees fall into 2 categories:

1. employees causing problems – for example, being confrontational
2. employees working with problems such as an employee whose financial worries create a distraction from work.

By handling these troubled employees appropriately, a supervisor can help resolve the problem without hindering the morale or performance of other employees.

Counseling/Coaching

If a supervisor responds to problem behavior immediately, he or she will sometimes be able to bring the problem to a quick end without complex proceedings. For example, a supervisor can respond to each complaint from an employee who is constantly complaining about the way things are done by calmly asking the employee to suggest some alternative.

Often the most constructive ways that a supervisor can address problem behavior is through coaching or counseling. Counseling refers to the process of learning about an individual’s work-related issues and help the employee resolve them.

Coaching and counseling are almost universal supervisory activities and important techniques for motivating employees. The skills of coaching and counseling apply to a broad array of activities such as handling employee and customer complaints, passing critical or negative information upward, handling conflicts, negotiating for a certain position, etc.

Skillful coaching and counseling are especially important in:

1. rewarding positive performance and
2. correcting problem behaviors or attitudes.

Coaching and counseling are more difficult to perform effectively when employees are not performing up to expectations, when their attitudes are negative, when their behavior is disruptive, or when their personalities clash with others in the organization. When managers or supervisors have to help their staff members change their attitudes or behaviors, coaching or counseling is required. In providing negative feedback to staff members or getting them to recognize problems that they don’t want to

acknowledge. Supervisors and managers must criticize and correct staff members, but in a way that causes positive work outcomes, positive feelings, and positive relationships.

What makes coaching and counseling so challenging is the risk of hurting feels of staff members. That risk is so high that managers and supervisors ignore completely the feelings and reactions of employees by making a stern directive, a “shape up or ship out” approach to correcting behavior or changing attitudes. Supervisors can also “soft-pedal,” avoiding confrontations for fear of hurting feelings and destroying relationships – the “don’t worry, be happy” approach. The principles described below not only make for accurate message delivery in sensitive situations, but their effective use can produce higher levels of motivation, increased productivity, and better interpersonal relationships.

Of course, coaching and counseling skills are also required when negative feedback is not involved, such as when staff members ask for advice, need someone to provide work-related guidance, or want to make formal complaints. Sometimes just listening is the most effective type of coaching or counseling. Although the risk of damaged relationships, defensiveness, or hurt feelings is not as likely as when negative feedback is given, these situations still require competent communication skills. Guidelines for how to implement supportive communication effectively in both negative and positive coaching and counseling are discussed below.

Small Group Activity

What: Coaching/Counseling

How: Read the two cases on the following page. Answer the questions that follow.

Tom is the first-line supervisor of the accounting division of your agency. He reports directly to you. Tom's unit consistently misses deadlines for monthly and quarterly reports. You make an appointment with Tom to discuss this issue after receiving the latest monthly report two weeks later than its due date. However, Tom is not in his office when you arrive. His administrative assistance tells you that one of Tom's employees dropped by a few minutes ago to complain that some employees are coming in later for work each morning and take extra-long lunch breaks. Tom has gone to meet with his staff to give them a "pep talk" and to remind them of performance expectations. You wait for 15 minutes until Tom returns.

Beth has recently joined your staff as a first-line supervisor. She came with great recommendations and credentials. However, she seems to be trying to improve her reputation at the expense of others in her group. You have heard increasing complaints lately that Beth acts arrogant, is self-promotional, and is openly critical of other group members' work. In your first conversation with her about her performance in the group, she denied that there is a problem. She said that, if anything, she is having a positive impact on the group by raising its standards. You schedule another meeting with Beth after hearing this latest set of complaints from her coworkers.

1. What are the basic problems in these two cases?
2. How would you approach them so that the problems get resolved and, at the same time, your relationships with your staff members are strengthened?
3. What would you say, and how would you say it, so that the best possible outcomes result?

The two cases above help identify two basic kinds of interpersonal communication problems faced by managers and supervisors. In the case with Tom, the basic need is for coaching. Coaching situations are those in which managers and supervisors must pass along advice and information or set standards for staff members. Staff members must be given advice on how to perform their jobs better and be coached to achieve higher performance. Coaching problems are usually caused by lack of ability, insufficient information or understanding, or incompetence on the part of staff members. In these cases, the accuracy of the information passed along by managers and supervisors is important. The staff members must clearly understand what the problem is and how to overcome it.

In the case with Tom, Tom was accepting upward delegation from his own staff members, and he was not allowing them to solve their own problems. Upward delegation can be one of the major causes of ineffective time management. By not insisting that his staff members bring recommendations of solutions to him instead of problems, and by intervening directly in the problems of his lower level staff members, Tom did not exercise effective supervisory techniques. Tom became overloaded himself. He didn't allow his staff members to perform their jobs. Productivity almost always suffers in cases where one person is trying to resolve all the problems and "run the whole show." Tom needs to be coached regarding how to avoid upward-delegation and how to delegate responsibility as well as authority effectively.

The case with Beth illustrates a counseling problem. Supervisors need to counsel staff members instead of coach them when the problem stems from attitudes, personality clashes, defensiveness or other factors tied to emotions. Beth's competency or skill is not a problem, but her unwillingness to recognize that a problem exists or that a change is needed on her part requires counseling by her supervisor. Beth is highly qualified for her position, so coaching or giving advice would not be a useful approach. Instead, an important goal of counseling is to help Beth recognize that a problem exists and to identify ways in which that problem might be addressed. Coaching applies to ability problems, and the supervisor or manager's approach is, "I can help you to do this better." Counseling applies to attitude problems, and the supervisor's approach is, "I can help you recognize that a problem exists."

Although many problems involve both coaching and counseling, it is important to recognize the difference between these two types of problems because a mismatch of problems with communication approach can aggravate, rather than resolve, a problem. For example, advising Beth about how to do her job or about the things she should not be doing (such as criticizing others' work) will probably only magnify her defensiveness because she doesn't perceive that she has a problem. Similarly, counseling in a situation that calls for coaching simply side-steps the problem and doesn't resolve it. Tom knows that a problem exists, for example, but he doesn't know how to resolve it. Coaching, not problem recognition is needed.

The question that remains, however, is “How do I effectively coach or counsel another person? What behavioral guidelines help me perform effectively in these situations?” Both coaching and counseling rely on the same set of key supportive communication principles summarized in the table below.

Supportive communication fosters feelings of support, understanding, and helpfulness. It helps overcome the two main obstacles resulting from poor interpersonal communication.

Defensiveness

- One individual feels threatened or attacked as a result of the communication.
- Self-protection becomes a priority.
- Energy is spent on thinking of a defense rather than listening
- Aggression, anger, competitiveness, and avoidance are common reactions.

Disconfirmation

- One individual feels incompetent, unworthy, or insignificant as a result of the communication.
- Attempts to reestablish a self-worth becomes important.
- Energy is spent trying to portray self-importance rather than on listening.
- Showing off, self-centered behavior, withdrawal, and loss of motivation are common reactions.

Small Group Activity

What: Coaching/Counseling

How: In your small groups, choose one participant to assume the role of supervisor. Another group member is to assume the role of the problem employee.

Before the role play begins, the group should discuss what the supervisor should do. Based on the information given, should Ed use counseling, discipline, both or neither? Once the group agrees on a general strategy, the two volunteers should act out the situation.

After the role play is complete, the group should discuss the questions on the next page.

REFERENCES

Adapted from Gary W. Hobson, "Eliminating Managerial Blind Spots." Supervision, August 1990, pp. 16-17.

Job Aids

Team Building Tips

One of the most exciting opportunities a supervisor will face is the chance to lead a team. This requires some thought and preparation. Some useful tips for building a team are listed below.

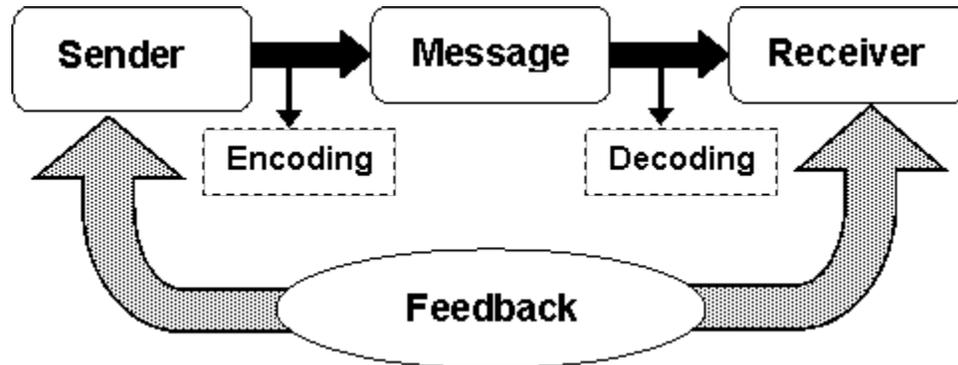
1. Communicate effectively.
2. Criticize constructively.
3. Be assertive, but not aggressive.
4. Be open and receptive to diversity of opinion.
5. Support all staff members.

Leading the Team

Many teams fall short of their potential. Whether an organization's teams achieved the benefits of teamwork depends in part on the teams' leaders. Generally speaking, the goal of a team leader is to develop a productive team. Some of the characteristics necessary for enhanced team productivity are:

- openness and honesty
- leadership that does not dominate
- decisions made by consensus (when appropriate)
- acceptance of assignments
- goals that are understood and accepted
- assessment of progress and results
- basic level of cooperation
- involvement and participation
- discussion and debate
- atmosphere of listening
- win-win approach to conflict
- relatively low turnover.

Communication Model



Listening Guidelines

1. Remove distractions and give the speaker your full attention.
2. Look at the speaker most of the time.
3. When the speaker hesitates, give a sign of encouragement such as a smile or a nod.
4. Try to hear the main point and the supporting points.
5. Distinguish between opinion and facts.
6. Control your emotions.
7. Be patient: do not interrupt.
8. Take notes (if appropriate).
9. At appropriate times, ask questions to clarify your expectations.
10. Restate what you think the speaker's point is and ask if you heard correctly.

Motivational Methods

Some motivational strategies or methods are listed below.

Making Work Interesting

When employees find their work interesting, they are more likely to give it their full attention and enthusiasm. In general, work is interesting when it has variety and allows employees some control over what they do. Work can be made interesting through job rotation, job enrichment, and increased customer contact.

Job Rotation

Job rotation involves moving employees from job to job to give them more variety. Job rotation requires that employees have broad skills. As a result, a supervisor or agency must provide cross-training, or training in the skills required to perform more than one job. The opportunity to learn new skills through cross-training can in itself motivate some employees.

Job Enrichment

Job enrichment is the incorporation of motivating factors into a job. Generally, an enriched job gives employees more responsibility to make decisions and more recognition for good performance. Thus, enriched jobs are more challenging and, presumably, more rewarding.

When modifying jobs to make them more interesting, the organization and supervisor must remember that not all employees are motivated by the same things at the same time. Thus, while some employees may eagerly accept the new variety in their jobs, others are likely to be less enthusiastic. Some workers think jobs are being redesigned simply to get more work out of people for the same amount of money. A supervisor must be careful to emphasize the advantages of the new arrangements and to listen to employee reactions.

Having High Expectations

Effective motivation can lead to performance beyond employees' own expectations of themselves. When someone expects a lot of us, we often find that we can do a lot. When little is expected, we tend to provide little. In other cases, the expectations are self-fulfilling. (Additional information regarding setting expectations will be provided later in the course.)

Providing Rewards that are Valued

The content theories of motivation indicate that a variety of rewards may motivate, but that not all employees will value the same rewards at the same time. The supervisor's challenge is to determine what rewards will work for particular employees at particular times. This involves appreciating the needs people are trying to meet and the variety of ways a supervisor can provide rewards.

Of course, there are limits to a supervisor's discretion in giving rewards. Policy often dictates the size of raises and the degree to which raises are linked to performance or some other measure. However, supervisors can identify rewards over which they have some control. For example, a supervisor has great freedom to administer rewards such as praise and recognition. Many supervisors have some discretion in job assignments. Employees who have a high need for achievement or are trying to meet esteem or self-actualization needs may appreciate opportunities for additional training. Employees who have a high need for affiliation or are seeking to meet social needs may appreciate being assigned to jobs where they work with other people.

Relating Rewards to Performance

The rewards that a supervisor uses should be linked to employee performance. Unfortunately, many employees are unable to see a clear link between good job performance and higher pay. If there is a connection, employees should be aware of it and understand it. Linking rewards to the achievement or realistic goals is a way to help employees believe they can attain desired rewards.

Treating Employees as Individuals

Most of the theories of motivation emphasize that different things motivate individuals in different ways. A supervisor who wishes to succeed at motivating has to remember that employees will respond in varying ways. A supervisor cannot expect that everyone will be equally excited about cross-training or overtime pay. Some employees might prefer an easier (or more challenging) job or fewer working hours. To the degree possible, a supervisor should respond to individual differences. When a particular type of motivation does not seem to work with an employee, a supervisor should try some other motivator to see if it better matches the employee's needs.

Encouraging Employee Participation

One way to learn about employees' needs and to benefit from their ideas is to encourage employees to participate in planning and decision making. Employees tend to feel more committed when they can contribute to decisions and solutions. They are also likely to cooperate better when they feel like part of a team.

Providing Feedback

People want and need to know how well they are doing. Part of a supervisor's job is to give employees feedback about their performance. When the supervisor tells employees that they are meeting or exceeding expectations, the employees know they are doing something right. When a supervisor tells an employee that they are falling short of expectations, the employees know that they need to improve. Most people will try to improve when given a chance to do so.

Praise is an important kind of feedback. In monitoring employees, a supervisor should look for signs of excellent performance and let the employees know, in specific terms, that the good work is appreciated.

There are many ways to deliver praise. For example, a nursing supervisor might write a memo to an LPN, in which the supervisor comments on the LPN's courteous manner with patients and how it gives patients a good impression of the hospital. Or a police Lt. might remark to a trooper that the trooper's paperwork is always complete and legible.

A supervisor does not have to use a dramatic approach to praising a behavior. Praise is so easy to give and its potential rewards are so great that the supervisor can and should use it routinely, as long as it is sincere.

Expectations

The supervisor can create an action plan by answering the questions what, who, when, where, and how.

- What actions will need to be taken? What are the specific steps involved?
- Who will take the necessary steps? The supervisor may perform some tasks, but many activities will be assigned to specific employees or groups of employees.
- When must each step be completed? With many types of processes, certain steps will determine when the whole project is completed. The supervisor should be particularly careful in scheduling those activities.
- Where will the work take place? Sometimes this question is easy to answer, but a growing operation may require that the supervisor plan for additional resources.
- How will the work be done? Are the usual procedures and equipment adequate, or does the supervisor need to be innovative? Thinking about how the work will be done may alert the supervisor to a need for more training.

The Decision-Making Model

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Four steps are involved in problem solving:

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