

Tips for Effective Supervision and Employee Motivation

Introduction

Occasionally, executives face the task of putting a new man in a supervisory job. His qualifications naturally have been found adequate. But a personal “message” from you can help him approach his responsibility with more understanding—both of his job and your expectations. So its time to learn some tips for supervision and superior employee performance. Also, following suggestions probably won’t be made in one sitting, but over a period of time. These “principles of supervision” have helped many a starting manager make the grade:

- **Be Firm, But Fair**

You can lead, direct, coach. You can—and should —speak and act with strength and conviction. But it’s also important to realize that circumstances change people; people change situations. What works in one instance, won’t in another. What’s fair for one person may be all wrong for someone else. A good supervisor knows how to be flexible, in order to be fair.

- **Take Advantage of The Experience and Abilities of Other People**

No one is so much of a genius that he knows everything. Be receptive to the ideas and advice of others: your subordinates, your boss, staff people, other department heads. Being interested in what they have to say can provide a twofold benefit: they’ll be stimulated by your interest; their ideas may save you many a headache.

- **Don’t Show off Authority**

Make suggestions, but issue few orders —you get a lot more out of people by direction than by command. Assume that others are working with you, not for you, for the mutual benefit of the group—and the organization.

- **Admit Your Mistakes**

Even the greatest executive can’t always be right. When you goof, don’t alibi, don’t try to shift the blame to someone else. Just admit that you were wrong and offer a brief explanation, if you think it’s pertinent. This applies whether the mistake covers one person or all the people in your group.

- **Be Truthful**

Even when it hurts. Don’t be afraid to tell someone he’s doing a poor job—it’s for his own good—but at the same time point out how he can improve. That way, you make him feel that even though he’s low now, there’s no reason why he can’t move up. Remember the reverse side of the coin, as well—give credit where and when it is due. Everyone welcomes a word of praise and appreciation for a job well done.

- **Be Consistent**

People won't willingly follow a leader who goes from mood to mood, who flatters one day and frightens the next, who talks a blue streak in the morning and won't open his mouth in the afternoon. They simply end up confused and unsure. Maintaining an even disposition isn't always easy. Sometimes you have to bite down hard on your tongue so you won't say something you'll regret. Or it may take a colleague's blunt, "What's the matter with you?" to alert you to your attitude. Accept such comments in good faith—and snap back to normal.

- **Don't Be Afraid to Train Assistants**

Recruit the kind that can serve as good right hands, take over when you're not there, move into your spot when you go higher. The executive who "runs scared," who holds onto each bit of his job and authority lest someone else prove smarter than he is, is missing the boat. A good assistant can make a good manager look even better.

- **Be a Self-Starter**

Don't wait for someone else to set the rules and the pace. Be open to inspiration, learn to translate thought into action, dramatize action with salesmanship. To sell an idea, stress its good points, tell people what it can do for them, and for you as well. And . . . when you start something, see it through to the finish. Don't be disheartened when something doesn't run smoothly. Give it time, patience, and some enthusiastic follow-through. It may work.

- **Keep People Informed**

Don't try to put things over on your group, to keep them in the dark. If you expect them to work as a team, you have to treat them like a team, one that is in the know about what's going on and why. This builds their confidence in you as a leader—and keeps morale high.

- **Keep Reading and Learning**

Moving from supervisor to executive demands new knowledge, new techniques, almost a new way of thinking. You progress with experience, from reading and listening. A course in labor relations can prove invaluable. The same holds true for books and magazines dealing with various phases of management. One part of management is common sense, but another is knowledge and know-how. Both are available—if you know where to look for them.

Learning to Manage Teams

No executive has ever complained that he had too many volunteers. Complaints, if any, are usually: you need help, but no one comes forward. To make sure you can count on helping hands when you need them-

1. Clarify What You Want Done. That includes how long the job will take. "I need someone to stick around with me for an hour or so Wednesday night," says the head of the Computer Room. You can cross Johnny's name off the list for all future volunteering, if he gets stuck till midnight.

2. Stand Ready To Pitch In. Where a job's being carried through on a voluntary basis, the manager should be prepared to lend a hand himself. "You inventory the first aisle, I'll take the second," is the attitude that gets lasting cooperation.

3. Highlight Your Appreciation. That's a time-honoured rule, but it's too often disregarded in the rush to get home. Whether you're dealing with one volunteer or twenty, it's always good practice to make a curtain speech: "Thanks a lot for the way you've all pitched in to clean up this job."

4. Reward Their Efforts. They'll like that best of all. And they'll give you the most in return. Be sure to include their record of cooperation in merit rating and progress reviews. "I'm putting in a pitch for you," is sweet music to any man's ears. Follow these rules, and you'll be much surer of seeing the hands go up, rather than the thumbs down when there's a call for volunteers.

Leadership Challenges

Occasionally, and for a variety of reasons, an executive may find his leadership rejected or evaded by his group. Even the most seasoned executive may run into trouble. The important thing is to recognize the development in its early stages, and eliminate causative factors before the virus spreads. Here are some of the symptoms:

- **Excessive Need For Discipline**

You find increasing instances of people bypassing regulations, becoming negligent, even acts of insubordination.

- **Grievances Galore**

Complaints of all kinds begin to pile up. The trivial matter that's passed unnoticed for months suddenly becomes a major issue. A grievance you considered settled flares up again.

- **Cooperation Down, Goldbricking Up**

Tom, Dick, and Harry, the faithful three you could always count on to stick out a job till it's finished, beg off on staying overtime. You find you've got to do more arguing and explaining, to keep your group on their toes.

- **Performance Records Skidding**

"Look at the errors made last month!" That may be the soundtrack on your first picture of leadership trouble. Or maybe the mail is accumulating in the correspondence department, and the typists are falling behind, with no increase in the workload.

- **Leadership Ignored**

They stop asking questions. And no longer look to you for advice. They make their own decisions on matters that normally require your okay. Anyone of those situations calls for a two-dose treatment: Keep your head. Start out by dealing with individual cases. Don't use any single case as a test of strength, to show you can crackdown. Resist the temptation to "make an example" of the latest offender. That may be the spark that

sets off the explosion. Instead, look for the underlying cause of the trouble. Check up on the answers to the questions in this self-examination:

- Firstly, have you been failing to make decisions when they were called for?
- Secondly have you been getting all the facts before making a decision?
- Next have you been selling your decisions by explaining the “why”—or have you been relying on your authority?
- In running your “shop,” have you been influenced by personal feelings—friendships, animosities?
- Have you been getting your staff in on the solution of group problems?
- Have you been taking positive steps to underline the group nature of the workgroup goals, group achievements?

Three types Of Motivation

Why do people do things? For example, what makes an employee get out of a comfortable bed to brave the problems and ordeals of a job? What makes an executive apply himself to a task, work over-time to complete a particularly challenging project? In general, people are moved to act by three types of motives:

1. External Motivation. Many people do what they do because they're told to do it. A parent tells a child he must get high marks in school. A teenager mows a lawn because his father orders him to do so. Or, a young man goes to college because his parents believe it's essential for his future. On the job, an employee “obeys the boss.”

2. Social Pressure. Many people are motivated by social or group pressures. For example, 90 out of 100 people work because our society expects them to. Similarly, many people get married when they do because society expects them to. Or, on the job, individuals seek advancement because it's expected by their employers or colleagues.

3. Self-motivation. Occasionally, we find people who take action on their own. They do something because they want to do it. The self-motivated individual in many cases lives where he wants to, in the manner he prefers, and works toward objectives that he has decided are desirable for him. For the executive, it's important to understand these three basic types of motivation.

The executive who is most effective in motivating his subordinates is the one most able to get them to act not because they are commanded to by a superior, not because they are pressured by the expectations of those around them, but because they are aware of the desirability of attaining the objectives of their efforts defined by their superiors. What self-motivation comes down to, finally, is the individual's conviction that he desires the fruits of success, that he wants them so badly that he's willing to strive for them with all his heart and mind.

Tips to Motivate your Team

You're explaining a new policy to your group, and you want to get their full support. Or you give an individual an assignment, and he very properly seems to hesitate, because he's not clear on his stake in the success of the effort. In cases like these, the key to effective motivation may be in explaining to the individual, or group, the benefits they stand to gain. Perhaps the most crucial specific application of this approach lies in the cost-cutting area.

You, as a representative of management, know the importance of holding the cost line. Some of your people may be reluctant to “knock themselves out” to save the company “a few bucks.” A considerable amount of insight into this problem is gained when you hear the answers given to a probing question: “If your company announced a cost-cutting drive, what would it take to get you to cooperate?” The answers given here provide the key to effective motivation, not only in cost cutting, but in any other job project where the employee may be unclear as to what he stands to gain:

- **Personal Payoff**

“I’d want to feel,” said a New York City insurance office clerk, “that my boss would notice me if I did a good job. And I’d expect him to remember my cooperation when it came time for a promotion or a raise.”

- **Dollars and Cents**

A Connecticut bakery employee said he’d want to know the dollars and cents of the matter. “Let my boss show me figures. If I saw figures showing, say, that \$1,200 went down the drain every month on unnecessary electricity, wow! I’d sure turn off lights. But if my boss just talks about ‘waste’ or ‘high costs,’ that’s too abstract for me.”

- **Necessity**

Says a California aircraft worker: “I’d want the company to tell me they’re in financial trouble. Or if they told me my job depended on it, yes sir, I’d try to cut costs. And I’d want to be kept informed of the progress made: how we improve each week after the drive goes into effect.”

- **We’re all in the Same Boat**

Said a Chattanooga factory worker: “Why me? That’s what I’d ask my boss. I’ve got a sense of responsibility like everyone else, but I’d want it appealed to honestly. If I thought that somebody higher up was just passing the buck down to me, I wouldn’t do anything. But if I felt that everyone above me was getting into the act, sure I’d help out.” Should this hard-headed attitude be discouraging? Not at all. Notice that each employee indicated that he would be perfectly willing to participate in cost-cutting efforts if—the reasons behind the activity were made clear, his position was given some consideration and justification, and so on.

If your company and your department plan to do any belt-tightening, try to think what each man in your department would react to—then spur that interest. For some employees it will be involvement—just asking for help, getting them into the act. For others it will be the carrot—or the stick. Chances are, you’ll have to use all of the techniques at your disposal. Your flexibility with these techniques—the aptness with which you satisfy each employee’s “What’s in it for me?”—will determine how your staff cooperates.