

White Paper

November 2006



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Solution Focus Areas:

Engagement / Morale
Turnover / Retention
Productivity
Leadership / Supervision

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Critical Issues Facing Supervisors: An Initial Look

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As suggested in an earlier White Paper (see “The 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™: A Developmental Approach”), 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 both research and personal experience in providing both training and supervision to employees, Rising Sun’s approach to supervision takes a very different perspective – defining supervision from a coaching and mentoring perspective rather than from a managerial perspective.

More often than not, employees are promoted to the role of supervisor because of their strong technical/clinical expertise. However, an effective supervisory relationship requires more than being a content expert, it also requires that the individual accept the enormous responsibility of mentorship as well. Unfortunately, without proper training for the role of supervision, most supervisors face issues and concerns they are ill prepared to deal with it.

What are these issues?

Rising Sun Consultants recently conducted a series of 10 public seminars entitled “The 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™” to 142 professional supervisors in the Central Pennsylvania area. As part of the seminar, participants were each asked to identify the 1 or 2 most critical issues facing them as supervisors on a day-to-day basis. Using a consensus building process, participants were asked to narrow their lists down to the top five most critical issues facing them as a group.

What follows is the consolidated data from all ten seminars:

1. **Communication Issues** - identified by 91/64% of the participants
2. **Staff Motivation/ Commitment/Dedication** - identified by 86/60% of the participants
3. **Accountability Issues** - identified by 74/52% of the participants
4. **Time/Scheduling Factors** - identified by 51/38% of the participants
5. **Lack of Teamwork/Collaboration** - identified by 44/31% of the participants

Additional critical issues included:

- Employee Burnout/Turnover/Retention (30/21%)
- Trust (29/20%)
- Lack of Leadership/Support (26/18%)
- Finding Quality Employees (22/15%)
- Low Employee Morale (21/14%)

- Lack of Respect (20/13%)
- Negative/Undermining Attitude (19/12%)
- Resistance to Change (16/11%)
- People Who “Quit & Stay” (13/9%)
- Delegation Issues (12/8%)
- Lack of Basic Employee Skills (12/8%)
- Lack of Follow-Through (12/8%)

- Disorganization (10/7%)
- Lack of Ongoing Training (10/7%)
- Lack of Agreeing on Goals (9/6%)
- Lack of Consistency (8/5%)
- Friend vs. Subordinate (7/4%)
- Gossip (7/4%)

- Encouraging Creativity (6/3%)
- Corporate Culture (6/3%)
- Lack of Policies and Procedures (5/2%)
- Employee Workload (5/2%)
- Helping Employees Improve (5/2%)
- Personal Issues (4/1%)
- Poor Work Ethic (4/1%)
- Disengaged Employees (4/1%)
- Growth/Recruiting (4/1%)

Implications

Although not designed as a highly control scientific study, the results presented above do offer some interesting implications. For example, there was relatively strong agreement among the supervisors who attended the public seminars as to the top five most critical issues facing them on a day-to-day basis. Clearly, communication issues make up the most significant challenges facing our professional supervisors - identified as one of the top five most critical issues by 64% of the participants. This finding is consistent with the research shared by Leigh Branham in his book: “The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave.” According the Branham, the number one cause of performance problems in 60% of the companies he surveyed was poor or insufficient communication between supervisor and employee.

In a similar fashion, 52% of the participants in the public seminars identified motivation, commitment or dedication of staff as among the top 5 most critical issues facing them as supervisors. According to Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS), 66% of workers do not identify with or feel motivated to drive their employer's business goals and objectives. What's more, according to the Gallup Organization, 71% of workers in the United States rate themselves as either "Not Engaged" or "Actively Disengaged."

In addition, according to Branham, 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. Once again, these findings were supported by the participants in the public seminars when they identified dealing with accountability issues, time/scheduling factors and lack of team work/collaboration as the remaining factors among the 5 most critical issues facing professional supervisors on a day-to-day basis (52%, 38% and 31% respectively).

The Good News

According to the Gallup Organization, the number one reason employees leave their jobs is a poor relationship with their immediate supervisor. According to Branham, 70% of the reason employees leave their jobs are related to factors that are controllable by the direct supervisor.

The good news is, like all skills, supervision can be taught. However, unlike many simple or basic skills, supervision is best understood as a "process" – requiring knowledge, character and experience.

Perhaps even more important, however, developing effective supervision skills requires the availability of effective supervision and training. 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/or mentored in the role of effective supervision.

Borrowing from the field of counselor supervision (Cal Stoltenberg, Brian McNeill, & Ursula Delworth) the role or responsibility of the supervisor is to create a safe environment in which the employee can work through the developmental issues or challenges they face in order to gain the necessary motivation, autonomy and self-awareness they need in order to successfully move to the next level of development.

Working Strategies:

With this developmental perspective in mind, Rising Sun Consultants recommends the following 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™ as a strategy to effectively develop and improve the skills of supervisors at all levels of an organization. Although certainly not an exhaustive list, the following examples may serve as specific strategies which can be used within each of the 10 Keys™. However, it is important to note that it is not the order, nor the specific strategies which is most important, but rather it is a combination of balancing the 10 Keys with the developmental needs of the individual and/or group which is most critical in creating a healthy and productive organizational culture.

“The 10 Keys to Effective Supervision™”

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