When an Independent Contributor Becomes a Manager: Four Principles of Successful Management

Part 3 in a 12-Part Series on Helping First-Time Managers and Seasoned, But Untrained, Supervisors Transition to Effective Leaders

About the Supervisory Basics Article Series

The transition from an individual contributor to a supervisory or managerial role is one of the most critical and difficult career moves. Representing the largest pool of management talent in most companies, supervisors prove critical to an organization's success. Companies that develop superior leaders in these supervisory positions can execute more effectively than their competition.

"The boss makes the difference!"

– Rick Tate and Dr. Julie White, authors of the book *People Leave Managers... Not Organizations!: Action Based Leadership*

Research about employee engagement provides evidence that frontline supervisors play a crucial role in the productivity and morale of their employees. The link to customer loyalty is equally significant. When untrained supervisors are in charge of frontline employees with direct or indirect customer contact, the impact on customer relationships can be devastating. Based on negative or ineffective interactions with supervisors, frontline employees may exhibit negative attitudes, resolve problems incorrectly, or take other actions that damage goodwill, the brand and profits!

This article, *When an Independent Contributor Becomes a Manager: Four Principles of Successful Management,* is based on Module #3 from The Supervisory Basics Series, which introduces first-time managers to these four universal principles and offers a framework for managing the performance of others. The Supervisory Basics Series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats, helping managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success. More information on The Supervisory Basics Series can be found at the conclusion of this article.

Listen to the Supervisory Basics Podcast Series: *Tips for Managers and HR Professionals on Helping Individual Contributors Transition to Effective Leaders.* Available on iTunes.

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Introduction

The one characteristic in the workplace that has the most significant influence on employee discretionary effort and loyalty to the organization is the quality of the relationship between individual employees and their direct boss or supervisor. Failing to develop a respectful and professional relationship with direct reports can lead to loss of talented employees because they either quit or, worse, they quit and stay—creating a real management challenge. High-performing direct reports display superior performance and excellent attitudes. They give their discretionary effort. This benefits everyone, from the customer to the entire organization.

...just being a well-intentioned supervisor is not good enough.

Human resources can support the retention of top talent by understanding that managers and supervisors have the most profound impact on talent management and that just being a well-intentioned supervisor is not good enough.

There are four basic performance management principles that dramatically increase the effectiveness and success of any supervisor or manager. By teaching these four principles and the skill sets new supervisors need to execute them effectively, human resources can develop effective and even inspiring supervision/management skills in their new hires.

The four basic principles of effective performance management are:

1. Align behavior
2. Time and influence
3. Motivational assumptions
4. Consistent accountability

The research is clear, and it can't be said enough, performance, discretionary effort, and retention are all most affected by the relationship the employee has with his or her boss. All aspects of an employee's job are pervaded by their direct supervisor. Good bosses = good jobs. Bad bosses = bad jobs. Good bosses provide a combination of challenge and support by skillfully executing on these four principles of effective performance management.

Align Behavior

First and foremost, they align their behavior. Effective supervisors and managers make sure that their words and actions are congruent. When words and actions are congruent, integrity, credibility and trust in the supervisory relationship is established. Nothing causes more frustration and cynicism in the workplace than the "values gap"—the difference between espoused values of the organization and the actual behavior of supervisors and managers that doesn't support those values.

When a supervisor's behavior aligns with his/her words, there is no confusion on the part of the employee when it comes to performance expectations, performance priorities, what is important to the supervisor, and accountability.

Time and Influence

Like any resource that is invested—a desirable return is needed.

When it comes to managing the performance of others, every supervisor or manager has only two resources—the time spent with direct reports and their influence potential with those direct reports. Like any resource that is invested—a desirable return is needed. To maximize the highest return on these two limited resources, the successful supervisor invests these resources with the "right" people.

The "right" people are the 80 percent of employees who are what we refer to as "reactive," that is, they react to the time, energy and leadership provided by the manager. It is this "reactive" group that can benefit from the supervisor's time and influence and provide them with the highest return for the investment of their time and influence.

Our experience has shown that most often, supervisors spend the majority of their time with the lowest performers, representing only about 5 to 10 percent of direct reports. Research has shown that this investment pays little in the way of positive dividends, as these individuals don't respond well to any manager or supervisor, despite the quality of performance management practices. That does not mean that low performance should be ignored—these people require structure and accountability—but not a lot of wasted time.

Then there are the 5 to 10 percent of direct reports who are superior performers, and they will be high performers under any conditions, no matter the quality of performance management practices. While they are fun and enjoyable to work with, spending significant time with superior performers does not provide a significant return. For these employees, providing autonomy, delegation and responsibility—which communicates trust and respect in the process—is appreciated. Time spent with these top and bottom performers is time not spent where the highest return is: those "middle 80%" employees who will truly react to and benefit from a supervisor or manager's time and influence.

Motivational Assumptions

Effective supervisors and managers turn the myth of employee motivation on its head. They don't operate from a premise that "happy employees are productive employees." They don't get caught in the "bribe" for performance game. Instead, they operate from a "productive employees are happy employees" mindset. They know that morale is a by-product of success, contribution and productivity, not the other way around.

Effective managers and supervisors realize their job is to provide clear performance expectations, resources to do good work, opportunities that match talent, a nurturing, caring relationship, respect for the opinions of others, acknowledgment of others' contributions, high expectations for quality work, and a concern for the development of direct reports. These supervisory controlled factors influence discretionary effort and loyalty to the organization more than any other factors.

Consistent Accountability

...holding employees accountable for poor performance can be one of the most difficult situations for supervisors.

Accountability is the foundation of any high-performing organization. However, holding employees accountable for poor performance can be one of the most difficult situations for supervisors. The unpleasantness of these situations can often create procrastination and tolerance of poor performance. Historically, though, procrastination and tolerance damages productivity by lowering motivation. High-performing and solid-performing employees don't like working side-by-side with those who don't carry their weight, and they don't like having supervisors who tolerate poor performance. The supervisor's role in the accountability process can't be overlooked. Performance expectations are altered with performance conforming to the tolerance level of the specific supervisor or manger. Without specific training in skill sets relevant to the accountability process, performance levels drop as issues of fairness and distrust increase.

Conclusion

By training new managers and supervisors in the four basic principles of performance management, human resources can create confident, respected, able leaders. Retaining top talent becomes easier through the consistent use of the four principles of performance management and the continued development of the skills necessary for practicing them.

The next article (fourth in our 12-article series), *Working With Your Boss*, discusses the importance for new managers to develop a relationship with their boss, how to go about doing that, and how to effectively use that relationship to eliminate obstacles in their growth as a supervisor or manager.

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If you enjoyed this article please visit our website to access other articles in this 12-part series on Supervisory Basics.

About the Supervisory Basics Series

The Supervisory Basics Series is based on extensive analysis of the competencies required of transitioning individual contributors and seasoned, but untrained, supervisors. This series provides the knowledge, tools and skills to immediately establish a leadership role and helps participants understand how to avoid the typical traps of new supervisors and managers.

The Supervisory Basics Series helps managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success. The result is managers establishing themselves in a legitimate position of power, inspiring superior performance and promoting open, effective communication. Supervisory Basics also helps beginning managers avoid common new manager traps—lack of clarity in expectations, ineffective communications, not establishing personal power and failing to move from "doer" to leader. Such negative behaviors lead to absenteeism, low morale, lost productivity and customer loyalty, as well as increased attrition.

The series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats. Companies can choose flexible implementation, including an integrated 3-day series, stand-alone sessions, mix and match, and external facilitator or train-the-trainer options. Participants will learn to build credibility, establish legitimate position power, earn personal power, "manage up," understand legal basics and conduct purposeful workplace discussions. Download the brochure.

About Impact Achievement Group

Impact Achievement Group is a training and performance management consulting company that provides assessments, coaching, story-based interactive workshops, and simulations for managers at all levels of organizations worldwide. Impact Achievement Group helps companies dramatically improve management and leadership competency for bottom-line results. Company experts Rick Tate and Julie White, Ph.D. are internationally recognized authorities in leadership development, human performance, customer-focused business strategies and workplace communications. Visit the website.