

Being A Supervisor

Mara is a carpenter with Walls Construction Company. She works on a team that does interior woodwork on custom-built homes. She's proud of her work, and her supervisor, Ryan, frequently praises her efforts.

One morning she gets a message to report to the firm's vice president, and this worries her. Did she do something wrong?

If there's a problem, why didn't she hear about it from Ryan?

She enters the office of Mr. Algozzine, who is standing behind his desk. "Yes, sir?" Mara says softly. "You wanted to see me?"

Encouragingly, the vice president motions her to a chair. "I hear you do a nice job," he tells her. "I've looked at your work myself, and I like it. Your jobs are done on schedule, and the customers are happy. What I want to know is, could you turn out a whole house like that?"

"An entire house? Well, I've done all kinds of woodwork—cabinets, baseboards—and with enough time, I'm sure I—"



"I don't mean by yourself," Mr. Algozzine interrupts. "I mean as crew chief. We're transferring Ryan to another project, and he says you're the one to take over, even though you're the youngest on the crew."

Mara is amazed and pleased, but still very nervous. Herself a crew boss? Her head spins.

"Since you don't have supervisory experience, you'll have to learn fast," Mr. Algozzine goes on. "But we believe you can do it. You'll get a 15 percent raise, by the way."

Mara pulls herself together and expresses her thanks for the confidence the firm has shown in her. But as she leaves the vice president's office, she is thinking, "Wow! How am I going to handle this?"

Workshop
1

What's Inside

Here, you will learn to

- ◆ appreciate the reasons for being a supervisor
- ◆ describe the functions of a supervisor
- ◆ improve your time management skills

A Step Up

Like Mara, people who are good at their jobs often find themselves being promoted to supervisory positions. But even when you've been expecting it, the new position can seem daunting. Some of the employees under your leadership may be older and more experienced than you are. Moreover, you will now be judged not just by your own performance, but by the performance of all the people you are overseeing.

Given the complexities of a supervisory position, some people decide they don't want the promotion. They'd rather do more limited jobs, take the paycheck, and go home without extra worries. The first issue to address in this workshop, then, is why you should want to be a supervisor.



Why Be a Supervisor?

There are some obvious advantages to being a supervisor:

- ◆ **Higher salary and better benefits.**

By long-established practice, those who manage other people are paid more—often considerably more—than those who manage only tasks or machines. They may also receive superior benefit packages—better insurance, for example.

- ◆ **Increased status.** Supervisors have higher status in the company than base-level workers. They are treated with greater respect. Perhaps they have “perks”, such as extra vacation.

- ◆ **Power.** Supervisors have power over others—over their jobs they do, how they spend their time at work, and over whether they are promoted or fired.

- ◆ **Career advancement.** A supervisory position is typically the first step in a rise up the corporate ladder.

Most people enjoy increased status and power, and everyone likes a higher salary. If these are your only reasons for becoming a supervisor, however, you may be ill suited to the job. Good supervisors enjoy their positions for more subtle reasons, such as these:

- ◆ **The joy of meeting challenges.** Successful supervisors take pleasure in facing and solving new problems. They enjoy jobs that aren't routine.

- ◆ **The chance to help the organization meet its goals.** As a supervisor, you can have a major impact on your firm's success.

- ◆ **A greater sense of accomplishment in one's work.** As your job becomes more significant to the overall success of the firm, you feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. This feeling can raise your self-esteem and influence your entire attitude toward life.

You've probably known one or two supervisors who didn't care much about meeting challenges and helping the organization reach its goals. They focused only on selfish benefits such as money and power. What did you think of them as supervisors?

ACTIVITY 1.1

NAME _____

A Supervisor You Have Known

Think of a person you consider a successful supervisor. This could be someone for whom you have worked, or it could be a school or training leader. Once you have identified such a person, answer the following questions about him or her.

1. Why do you think this person was given a supervisory position by the organization? Was it just seniority, or did the person have special qualities and talents?

2. Do you think this person enjoys being a supervisor? Why or why not? That is, what aspects of the job does the person especially like or dislike?

3. Would you enjoy doing this person's job? Why or why not?

4. What major personality traits do you share with this supervisor you have identified? In what ways are you different?

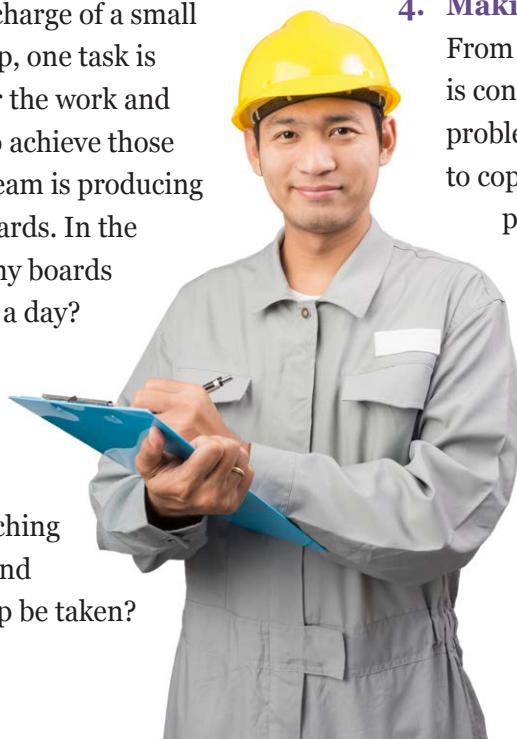
Functions of a Supervisor

Now that you've begun to think about why you might want to be a supervisor, it's time to consider the functions for which a supervisor is responsible. These can vary, of course, from company to company and from one supervisory position to another. Commonly, however, a supervisor's work includes the tasks described in the following list. For each task, note the typical questions that the supervisor has to answer.

1. Setting goals and planning.

Whether the supervisor is in charge of a small team or a large group, one task is to establish goals for the work and then devise a plan to achieve those objectives. Say the team is producing computer motherboards. In the short term, how many boards should it produce in a day?

In the long term, what are the ways to improve output and quality? What are the steps for reaching these goals? When and how should each step be taken?



2. Organizing the work and assigning tasks.

Say there are ten tasks to be done. How will they be divided? How many people will be assigned to each? Which people? A supervisor makes these choices.

3. Controlling work performance.

After planning and organizing, the supervisor must set up a control process to ensure that the work actually gets done according to plan. What checks will ensure that a project stays on schedule? How will the final product be inspected for quality? How will costs be controlled?

4. Making decisions and solving problems.

From the planning stage forward, the supervisor is constantly making decisions and solving problems that arise. Often the supervisor has to cope with unexpected situations. Say the production line snags and one key employee is sick, but the schedule still has to be met—how can this difficulty be handled?



Did you know?

For many years, educators have emphasized the role of teachers' expectations in student achievement. When teachers expect their students to succeed, the students often do. If teachers think their students are doomed to fail, however, the students often live up to those expectations.

The same kind of self-fulfilling prophecy has been found in the business world. Supervisors who set high goals and expect high performance from their subordinates generally get better results than those who expect little. The goals have to be realistic, of course, and the employees have to know that their efforts are appreciated.

- 5. Motivating employees.** Employees who don't care about the work will do a poor job. How does the supervisor encourage them to care? What incentives can the supervisor offer?
- 6. Instructing and coaching.** Typically the supervisor is highly skilled at some or all of the tasks the employees are doing. But how can the supervisor convey these skills to others? How much instruction is needed? When and how should it be done?
- 7. Evaluating personnel.** The supervisor may be directly responsible for hiring, promoting, and firing employees. Even if those decisions are someone else's responsibility, the supervisor will have to provide personnel evaluations on which the decisions will be based. What are fair criteria for judging an employee's performance? Should Lia be given a higher rating than Joe?

- 8. Handling change and conflict.** This function is inherent in all of the other supervisory tasks, but it is so important that it deserves special attention. In any work team there are changes—employees come, employees leave, people learn new skills, they develop different relationships. Moreover, today's work environment is continually evolving because of changes in technology, company mergers, and so on. The supervisor must handle all these changes in such a way that the team remains efficient.

When conflict erupts—a commonplace occurrence if employees are stressed by rapid change—the supervisor

has to manage it. Say the new computer system has disrupted internal communications, and Joe is mad at Lia because he thinks she failed to distribute an important notice. How can this flare-up be managed? Who will say what to whom?



No organization is so excellent, no team so unified, no business so successful that it is immune to internal conflict.

— KENNETH KAYE

Author, "Workplace Wars and How to End Them"

The division of time among these various supervisory functions changes as a person rises through an organizational hierarchy. A first-level supervisor, such as a production team leader or an office manager, may spend the most time on controlling, instructing, and motivating. At higher levels in the

organization, managers spend more of their time in planning, organizing, and evaluating.

Decision making and the management of change and conflict are major tasks at every level.

In later workshops, you'll learn specific skills relevant to all of these functions.



How Closely Should You Supervise?



You know how annoying it is to have someone constantly looking over your shoulder. Imagine that your significant other asks you to help in the garden. The job is a simple one that takes only half an hour, but on three separate occasions she or he comes by to check on whether you're doing the job right. At the final interruption you exclaim, "Do you think I'm totally incompetent? And how can I do the job if you keep pestering me?"

Supervisors may inspire similar reactions if they try to exercise extremely close control over routine tasks that are being handled by capable, confident employees. A good supervisor adapts the supervisory techniques to the nature of the job and the characteristics of each individual on the staff.

In deciding how closely to supervise, there are two basic questions to consider:

- ◆ How much direct supervision does the employee need?
- ◆ How much direct supervision does the employee want?

Of course, the answers to these questions often conflict. The employee may want more or less supervision than he or she actually needs. You have to find a way to balance concern for the task with consideration of the employee's long-term development and morale. If the immediate task is all-important, the employee's feelings may have to be wounded a bit. If the task is minor, you may decide to allow the employee to make mistakes and learn from them.

ACTIVITY 1.2

NAME _____

Rating Yourself on Supervisory Functions

- For each of the supervisory functions you have read about, decide how much you would enjoy performing it. That is, would you really like organizing work and assigning tasks, or would you find that job unpleasant? Rate your likely enjoyment on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Select the appropriate number.

Setting goals and planning	1	2	3	4	5
Organizing work and assigning tasks	1	2	3	4	5
Controlling quality and schedules	1	2	3	4	5
Making decisions, solving problems	1	2	3	4	5
Motivating employees	1	2	3	4	5
Instructing and coaching	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating personnel	1	2	3	4	5
Handling change and conflict	1	2	3	4	5

- Now do a similar rating, but base it on your estimate of your current level of skill at each function. That is, if you think you're excellent at planning and setting goals, give yourself a 5 in that category. If you believe you'd be terrible at that task, give yourself a 1. Do the same for all eight tasks.

Setting goals and planning	1	2	3	4	5
Organizing work and assigning tasks	1	2	3	4	5
Controlling quality and schedules	1	2	3	4	5
Making decisions, solving problems	1	2	3	4	5
Motivating employees	1	2	3	4	5
Instructing and coaching	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating personnel	1	2	3	4	5
Handling change and conflict	1	2	3	4	5

- Now compare your answers to questions 1 and 2. What can you learn from the comparison? For instance, do you find a high correlation between what you would like and what you think you're good at? If so, would raising your skill level for certain tasks change your attitude toward those tasks?

A Fundamental Skill: Time Management

Deficiencies in any of the skills you read about in the preceding section can cause you trouble when you become a supervisor. Later workshops in this book will address those skills and help you build your competence. First, however, you should think about one fundamental matter that will affect all your efforts: the way you manage your time.

When you're in charge of a group, it may seem that you have *less* control over your own time than ever before. While you're trying to plan and organize, your team members may interrupt you often with questions. Small crises may steal most of your time. If one person is out sick, for example, you may spend all day trying to make up for that absence, and, in the process, none of your other work will get done.

The higher you advance in an organization, the more important it is to manage your time wisely. Here are some tips:

You can ask me for anything you like, except time.

— NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Emperor

- ◆ *Prioritize the tasks you have to do.* Distinguish between those that are important and those that are merely pressing. That is, make sure that important long-term tasks are not neglected in the rush to deal with small emergencies.
- ◆ *Control interruptions.* Let people know when to approach you and when not to interrupt what you're doing.
- ◆ *Learn to delegate effectively.* You will save time.
- ◆ *Keep your work space organized and neat* so you don't lose time looking for documents, supplies, or tools.
- ◆ *Practice a once-past-the-desk approach to emails, reports, and correspondence.* As soon as you receive an item, screen it and decide what to do with it. Read it now, file it, circulate it, or throw it away. Don't get bogged down in useless information or waste time sorting the same pieces of paper again and again.
- ◆ *Keep a daily to-do list and a weekly personal planning calendar* to help you prioritize your tasks and budget your time.



ACTIVITY 1.3

NAME _____

Assessing Your Time Management

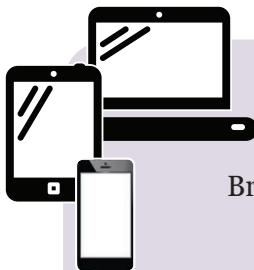
For each of the statements listed below, decide how well it applies to you. Answer as honestly as you can. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 by selecting the appropriate number.

	Not True of Me		Very True of Me		
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of information I have to deal with.					
2. Every day, no matter how many urgent problems arise, I make some progress toward long-term goals.					
3. I can't trust people to do things right unless I check on them constantly.					
4. I can find my tools and papers right away when I need them.					
5. Because I know what I have to do, I don't bother keeping a calendar.					
6. One of my handiest tools is the wastebasket.					
7. It seems like I can't stop people from interrupting me.					
8. Each night, I write a list of what I have to do the next day, in order of priority.					
9. People are always imposing on me, giving me tasks that aren't really my job.					
10. However busy I am, I always have time for rest and recreation.					

To calculate your total score for this exercise, first reverse the scores for the odd-numbered items. That is, if you wrote a 5 next to the first item, make it a 1; if you wrote a 4, make it a 2. (A 3 stays the same.) Now add up all the numbers. The maximum score is 50. The closer you came to 50, the more likely you are to manage your time wisely as a supervisor.

_____ SCORE

Look back at the items on which you had the poorest scores. What can you do to improve your skills and habits in those areas?



GETTING CONNECTED

Browse the online resources at Monster.com's Education Training Center

<https://myqss.link/Education-Training>

and check out the article

<https://myqss.link/Expert-Tips>

What do you see that relates to your own needs as a supervisor?

As another option, check the articles you find by entering the search term
supervision or *supervisor* at Free Learning Library:

<https://myqss.link/Management-Help>

See if any of the suggestions will help you develop your skills in the areas
you have identified as being your weakest.

WORKSHOP WRAP-UP

- Advantages of a supervisory position include not just salary, status, and power, but also the joy of meeting challenges and the sense of personal accomplishment.
- Supervisors perform many functions, including setting goals and planning, organizing the work, controlling performance, making decisions, motivating workers, instructing and coaching employees, evaluating personnel, and handling change and conflict.
- Time management is a fundamental skill for an effective supervisor.