

Developing effective supervisors

By John Orr

Before you begin

Contact your human resources department to determine if your company has written procedures or training requirements for incorporating new supervisors into the workplace. If so, review the policy before beginning this session. If not, you may consider using this information to help develop one.



Introduction

If you are responsible for orienting a new supervisor to his or her new responsibilities, these tips may help you effectively perform your role.

Discussion

Employers often promote new supervisors because they are good at what they do, but doing a job well requires a very different skill set than overseeing how others do the job. Every newly minted supervisor – whether from inside or outside the company – requires training and mentoring before he or she can be expected to perform at a high level.

Why new supervisors fail

A change at the company nearly always causes the appointment of new supervisors. A new supervisor may be needed if your company is experiencing growth or as a replacement for a previous employee. A new supervisor can benefit from an extended mentoring period or learning from a long-time incumbent. However, this rarely occurs. Most employers thrust new supervisors into the job without adequate training.

Employees must help the new person make a successful transition. If the new supervisor is a friend or co-worker, it is tempting to try to maintain the same relationships as before. Good supervisors want to maintain positive relationships with their workers, but they also realize the job they have to do may require a change of direction to get the job done or to keep you safe. New supervisors may need to communicate this to their employees.

People skills, human relations

Some say people can only learn such skills through hard-won experience. To some extent, that may be true, but you can avoid many problems simply by doing your homework. For example, if a new supervisor has not learned how to record time sheets, he or she may shorten the paychecks of their employees. This can create credibility problems from the start.

A newly assigned supervisor must know the company's employment rules and policies, and how to administer and explain them. Make sure you give each new supervisor time to learn your company's rules and requirements.

A new supervisor must also know his or her roles and responsibilities. Supervisors must be able to explain both what is needed and why. Novice supervisors may have trouble explaining why things are done the way they are. If your company has a procedures manual, give it to the new supervisor early on, and set aside time to answer questions after he or she has had time to read it.

You may want to test the new supervisor's understanding by asking these questions.

- Can you explain your company's policies on vacations, time off and doctor visits?
- Are supervisors required to handle workers' compensation issues such as the employer's first report of injury report?

Group action

Ask the group members:

- What are your organization's rules for clocking in, time off, calling in sick, physician visits, etc.?
- How does an employee report an injury?
- What are the procedures?

If the group does not know the answers or the answers are incorrect, take the time to explain. By knowing the rules, employees can help new supervisors get through the red tape.

Technical job skills

You may have selected your new supervisor because he or she is efficient and performed well at his or her previous job. Besides knowing how to do the job right, your supervisors need to know how to recognize when an employee is doing a job incorrectly. Your supervisors need to know that you hold them responsible for ensuring their workers properly use the equipment and tools on their jobs.

Group action

If your company has job-site safety rules, ask the group members:

- What are they and which are applicable to their specific job.
- Ask the group if there are identified hazards within the workplace. What are they?
- If appropriate, ask the group to describe when and where personal protective equipment (PPE) is required within their area.

OSHA

A key element in your supervisor orientation is to make sure your supervisors know how health and safety regulations affect your company. This means they are responsible for ensuring each of their employees properly uses required PPE each time it is required. Use of safety equipment is non-negotiable.

Your supervisors must enforce your policies and company rules. You also need to ensure that your new supervisors are knowledgeable in the hazards associated with the tasks their crews will be performing.

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References

Division of Safety & Hygiene's training classes

Train the Trainer
Measuring Safety Performance

BWC's Web site (ohiobwc.com)

Industry Safety Manual
Construction Safety Manual
Safety Works –Various topics by industry/occupation.

OSHA's Web site (www.osha.gov)

- Safety and Health Program Assessment Worksheet
http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/asmnt_worksheet.html
- Safety and Health Management Systems eTool
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth>
- Sample Safety and Health programs for small business:
http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod2_sample_sh_program.html
- Improving workplace protection for new workers:
http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadis.show_document?p_table=FACT_SHEETS&p_id=145

BWC always strives to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to Safety@ohiobwc.com.