



Pitfalls for New Supervisors

Imagine that you finally made it to Supervisor. It feels good that the company acknowledged your personal and team contribution while you were an individual contributor. It is clear to you that the consistently high level of effort and commitment that your record shows weren't purely motivated by a possible promotion, but it sure is nice to have it pay off with a supervisor's job.

No, that high performance level was motivated by the fact that that's who you are. When an employer hires you, that's what they get, every time, no matter what, because it is important to you personally to do the absolute best job that you can.

So now you're the boss. You have had a chance to watch lots of bosses over your career and all of them became role models. Sometimes they showed you what you never wanted to be like when you became a supervisor. Other times, you wanted to emulate their behavior exactly. But in any case, all those bosses you've observed taught you something. So now you may be feeling that it is your turn to do the same for others.

If you are like most new supervisors, it didn't take you long to learn that the supervisor's role is a lot harder than you thought it would be. At Learning Dynamics, we hear a consistent message from new supervisors that there is much more to consider in order to do the job well than was originally described when offered the position.

So now your goal is to get really good at this new assignment. There are a number of pitfalls that you might want to avoid. Here are just a few of the most common mistakes that we see new

supervisors make and all of them are created out of the best intentions.

Setting Yourself as The Standard for Performance

We often hear, "I don't expect or demand anything from my direct reports that I would not do myself." It sounds like good logic but it really isn't fair, or even more importantly, it isn't necessary. The standard for performance that you demonstrated prior to your promotion was noticeably higher than others. That's part of the way you were noticed and tapped for promotion. To demand that level of performance from your direct reports may be an unrealistic expectation. The more realistic expectation is based on the demands of the job -- what constitutes successful completion of the work the team is responsible for. That becomes the realistic target for performance.

Quick Decisive Actions to Demonstrate That You Are in Charge

Too often, we see new supervisors who still have not had enough time in their new job to make significant changes to the team, the schedule, the targets for performance and other changes. Perhaps this pitfall is motivated by a bit of individual uncertainty or insecurity, but the effect on overall production, morale and results is seldom positive.

There is seldom any confusion, from the point of view of the employees, about who the boss is. Active listening, good questioning and probing, and taking the time to fully understand the capabilities of the team will have a much more powerful and effective result.

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Lack of Delegation

The reasons for new supervisors not delegating are wide and varied. They range from “nobody else can do it as well as I can,” to “it’s faster for me to do it,” to “they aren’t trained to do it,” to countless other rationalizations. The simple fact is that every time the supervisor performs a task that could or should be delegated, then that supervisor will continue to perform that task. It is a self-defeating cycle and additionally, it has a detrimental effect on the team. Without realizing it, the supervisor has sent a negative message to the team about their own capabilities. Often, this pitfall is the result of the “quick action, hit the ground running” mentality that high performers often share. But for new supervisors, the results of that

point of view, when it generates actions, is seldom positive.

One key to dodging these pitfalls is having an effective, experienced coach for every new supervisor. Our experience is that the relationship between the new supervisor and his/her coach is a win/win scenario. The coach gets to work with someone whose motivation is strong, positive and energetic. The supervisor gets a voice to hear and a coach who will listen to help channel all that positive energy into the most effective pathways. While that careful coaching may take a slightly longer timeframe for the supervisor to be fully functioning in his or her new role, the payoff is clear and lasting.

