



Training Supervisor skills

Organisations investing in the development of their employees share a common goal. Learning and development programmes must produce the maximum bang for the buck. In this note we advocate prioritising spend on supervisor development.

...To Page 2



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In this edition:

- Training – Supervisor skills
- Performance Management (Part 2) – Results through people
- Wellness – Stress epidemic
- Misconduct – Value of thorough investigation

Training

Supervisor skills

Supervisors are an important category of leaders. They are the link between senior management and the workforce of a company. They crucially influence productivity, product quality, employment relations, cost reduction, morale of the work force, and other business success levers. Supervisors must keep close to the workforce yet be part of management. They must balance their technical competence with people skills. According to Sasser and Leonard (1980), being a supervisor is one of the most difficult, demanding, and challenging jobs in any organisation.



Many employees stumble when making the transition from managing self to managing others, which takes place when an employee is promoted from general worker to supervisor or junior manager (Charan, Drotter & Noel, 2001). Supervisors need to learn how to reallocate their time so that they not only complete their assigned work but also help others perform effectively. Many supervisors prefer (or naturally slide back) to spending their time in the comfort zone of their 'old work'.

Employers must help supervisors develop the skills which will ensure that they flourish in their role. We've identified 10 supervisor skills which are generic to the role across any type of business enterprise. These are the skills which supervisors must develop:

Lead & motivate • Problem solving • Conflict resolution • Communication • Running effective meetings • Performance management • Implementation of discipline • Time & attendance management • Quality assurance • Housekeeping.

A simple test to determine whether the above skills are necessary for effective supervisor job performance, is to complete this sentence with the target skill: *In order to perform as a supervisor, the incumbent must be able to _____ [insert skill label, e.g. 'lead and motivate'] in order to _____ [insert reason why the skill is necessary].* If you cannot come up with an "in order to" reason, then the skill is unnecessary. (Saunders, 2002)

To give supervisors formal training in these skills is to set them up with a valuable foundation of competence, which will stand them in good stead throughout their time as a supervisor and as they progress up the managerial hierarchy. A study showed that the same competencies are most important for supervisors, middle managers, and senior managers alike. (Zenger, Folkman, 2014). Long serving supervisors will also benefit by attending training which refreshes and refines the skills they have developed over time. It is the same principle as applies to top athletes who continue to practice, and hone the same skills throughout their careers.



Performance Management (Part 2)

Results through people

Goal Setting

Setting goals against which an employee's performance can be assessed is the starting point of performance management. Goals describe, in outcomes-based statements, how an employee's work would look or be experienced by the customer of that work, if it was excellent.

Customers may be internal, colleagues downstream in the organisation's value chain, or external, the people who buy the organisation's products or services. Typically, an employee has from 7 – 15 goals. For example, a sales representative may have sales volume, new customer sign-ups, customer complaint resolution; and competitor analysis amongst his or her goals.

Work performance goals are measurable if they specify a quantity (how much, or the volume of work, an employee performs), quality (how well a duty or activity is performed), and/or process (the steps necessary to complete a job duty). Goals should also be designed to encourage employees to work effectively (do the right things) and efficiently (get work done using the optimal method).

The value of goals is increased if they are the result of a two-way discussion involving the employee who must meet the goal. People buy-in to goals which they have a part in creating. Such a process is not an abdication of management authority. If an employee tries to 'low-ball' a goal, a manager can override the employee's input and impose a reasonable goal.

A useful framework to define performance goals is the SMART method. **SMART** goals are performance outcomes which are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.



The measures in SMART goals can be expressed in three ways: (1) As raw numbers e.g. number of widgets to be sold; (2) as a progress score e.g. percent of project to be achieved; or (3) as an indicator of change e.g. percent increase compared to the corresponding period in the preceding year. Some measures are leading and others lagging. Sales pipeline, for example, is a leading measure and sales achieved is a lagging measure. A leading measure has the advantage of enabling an employee to course correct before a result is finalised. (Olsen, 2016)

For the 'unmeasurable' elements of a job, focus on describing the product or service in a way that meets the customer's expectation of excellence. In addition, consider using proxy measures e.g. employee absenteeism is an indicator (albeit not the only one) of employee morale.

Any goal setting process should incorporate the science of marginal gains. It involves breaking down a big goal into smaller parts, and then improving on each of them, to deliver a big performance improvement when the small gains are aggregated. The approach has its roots in a basic property of empirical evidence: to find out if something is working, you must isolate its effect. Access to comprehensive, accurate and rich data



makes performance at the margin easier to analyse, correct and improve. (Syed, 2015)

Toyota's philosophy of continuous improvement 'kaizen' is a close relative of the philosophy of goal attainment through marginal gains. Kaizen is not change for change's sake. It's deliberate, constant improvement, and changes that don't bring rewards are not pursued. Continual, aligned small improvements and standardization yield large performance improvement results. Toyota's culture is to create new challenges constantly and not to rest when you meet old ones.

Aiming for marginal gains to achieve big goals should form part of every organisation's approach to optimising the performance of its people. As performance inputs such as technology, education, and infrastructure equalise, competitive advantage must increasingly be found at the margins of superior people performance.

Setting an employee's work performance goals, is as important as the subsequent performance check-ins.

"All good performance starts with clear goals."

Gary Ridge

Managers who take time to identify goals, which capture clear performance standards, will lay the foundation for a valuable performance management contract with employees.

Continuous performance management

An opportunity is missed if managers think that performance management is mainly about twice-yearly appraisals, performance dashboards or monthly 'check-ins' with direct reports. While these processes and reports are an important part of a performance

management process, managers should apply performance management every day.



Blanchard and Johnson (2015) point out that managers should make it their mission to catch people doing things well and immediately recognise them for it. It is an informal 'one-minute praising'. In applying this, managers should not overdo it. Managers must look for and praise examples of people doing more than expected. Complimenting work activities should be aimed at all team members (no favourites) and if appropriate at the whole team. Words of praise must be genuine.

Similarly, Blanchard & Johnson (2015) advise that supervisors and managers should use 'one-minute corrections' to give feedback on an employee's mistakes and to redirect the employee's performance. Again, it is immediate and informal feedback. This helps the employee get back on track and achieve his or her goals. It helps the employee and the business succeed. The steps to take are: (1) Redirect as soon as possible. (2) Confirm the facts first and review the mistake together with the employee. (3) The supervisor / manager must express how she or he feels about the mistake and its impact on team results.

"An aim of performance management is to get day-by-day organisation goal aligned actions by employees."

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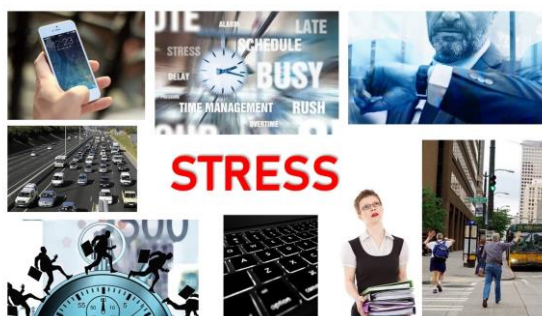


If an aim of performance management is to get day-by-day organisation goal aligned actions by employees, then frequent two-way performance communication is required. Managers should sit at least once a month face to face with each of their team members to acknowledge good performance; gain understanding of performance barriers and agree short term action plans with support to be given by managers where necessary. This first level of formality is typically referred to as 'monthly performance check-ins'.

Wellness

Stress epidemic

The World Health Organisation has labelled *stress* the health epidemic of the 21st Century. (Soleil, 2017). According to an editorial in the American Medical Association journal, 70% - 90% of people visiting a doctor have an ailment which has stress as its root driver (Chatterjee, 2019). Chatterjee, a UK based medical doctor and stress guru, says that work related stress is the highest contributor to total stress in peoples' lives. Stress caused illnesses include anxiety, inability to concentrate, insomnia, diabetes, hormone problems, high blood pressure, and obesity. He goes on to say that in the UK, in any given year, one in four people will be diagnosed with a mental health problem. Other conditions linked to workplace stress include indigestion, ulcers, headaches, alcohol and other drug abuse, more frequent work accidents, cardiovascular disease and back ache.



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What are the causes of increasing levels of debilitating work stress affecting employees? The World Health Organisation identifies two sources of work-related stress (WHO, 2007):

(1) Work content which includes • job tasks (monotony, under-stimulation, meaningless tasks, lack of variety, etc) • work load and work pace (too much or too little to do, work under time pressure, etc.) • working hours (strict or inflexible, long and unsocial, unpredictable, badly designed shift systems) • participation and control (lack of participation in decision-making, lack of control over work processes, pace, hours, methods, and the work environment)

(2) Work context which includes • career development, status and pay (job insecurity, lack of promotion opportunities, under- or over-promotion, work of 'low social value', piece rate payment schemes, unclear or unfair performance evaluation systems, being over- or under-skilled for a job) • role in the organization (unclear role, conflicting roles) • interpersonal relationships (inadequate, inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision, poor relationships with colleagues, bullying/harassment and violence, isolated or solitary work, etc) • organizational culture (poor communication, poor leadership, lack of behavioural rule, lack of clarity about organizational objectives, structures and strategies) • work-life balance (conflicting demands of work and home, lack of support for domestic problems at work, lack of support for work problems at home, lack of organizational rules and policies to support work-life balance).

“Going for a walk at lunchtime without your phone is one of the most impactful things you can do [to manage stress levels].”

Dr Ragan Chatterjee



However, these sources are not a 21st Century phenomenon and therefore do not fully explain the rising trend of work-related stress. Soleil (2016) provides two causes which more adequately explain the rise in work-related stress:

Technological advances. New smartphones, tablets, apps and sophisticated enterprise wide systems have forever changed the way employees work. People are connected to their work 24/7, people spend more time with their heads down looking at their phones, checking email and texting around the clock. The line between work-life and home-life is blurred.

Smart-hard work. This approach to work took hold when the Millennials generation entered the workplace in the early 2000's. On the back of technology advances, Millennials could work around the clock on their own time in their own way. The price for employees of this work pattern was an expectation that employees accomplish more than the previous generation. Then the great recession of 2008/2009 saw employers embrace the philosophy of "Do More with Less". Those who were still employed found themselves chasing business demands that required them to take on the responsibility of two or three jobs—resulting in dismal cultures and workplace stress levels hitting an all-time high. (Economic recovery has not seen employers let go of this philosophy.)

The costs to an economy of work-related stress are staggering. Lost productivity, absenteeism, poor decision making, illnesses, accidents at work, litigation, grievances, conflict, interpersonal problems, customer service problems, resistance to change, substandard work, loss of intellectual capital and substance abuse which are often rooted in stress add to the cost of doing business. (Kalia, 2002). With this degree of impact every business should prioritise a wellness initiative which focusses on creating awareness and managing work-related stress.

We recommend that employers wanting to de-stress their work environments consider implementing the following three steps:

1. Adopt and communicate a position (policy) on employee wellness.
2. Assess all areas of the workplace to identify sources of work-related stress.
3. Implement a work-related stress reduction strategy.

The scope of the assessment and resulting strategy should at a minimum address the dimensions of work content, work context, technology, and smart-hard work outlined above.

Misconduct

Value of thorough investigation

I was recently asked by a client which aspect of disciplinary procedures is the most problematic for employers. It is an area of concern for many employers. Disputes about the how and why of employee dismissals is a constant point of conflict between employers and employees in South African employment relations. During the year ending 31 March 2019, the CCMA, the country's statutory dispute resolution body dealt with 193'732 cases of which approximately 71% were related to unfair dismissals. (CCMA, 2019)

Based on our regular exposure to disciplinary cases, my client's question was easily answered. The most prevalent problem that we encounter is inadequate pre-hearing investigation. Costs of not doing in a well-structured and comprehensive investigation include important relevant facts being omitted, or coming up at the wrong time in a case; allegations not being proved on a balance of probabilities; and wrong, irrelevant, or excessive allegations being levelled against an employee. The latter



problem manifests in an employer 'throwing the book' at an employee and hoping something sticks. I recently saw a case where an employer used five separate labels to describe one incident of misconduct. This practice of charge stacking, or splitting is frowned upon by the labour courts. (See for example – *Specialised Belting & Hose (Pty) Ltd v JD Sello and others* (2009) Case JR3136/05 LC)



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Employers sometimes resort to using lie detector / polygraph tests to bolster a case or as 'scientific' proof of an employee's misconduct. Use this approach with caution. Polygraphs have value as an investigatory tool but are usually disregarded as a source of proof. In a Labour Court case involving an ICT company, the court found polygraph test results unreliable because the same test administered twice on a group of suspects produced different outcomes (Labour Court, 2013).

There are four elements of a thorough disciplinary investigation:

1. Find answers to the following 5W, 1H questions

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?



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2. Cover the full scope of substantive fairness

- The existence of a conduct rule
- The employee's knowledge of the rule
- The reasonableness and validity of the rule
- Facts proving the employee broke the rule
- Factors relevant to determining a fair disciplinary measure
- The employer's consistency in enforcing the rule

3. Anticipate the employee's case

Always ask the alleged wrongdoer for an explanation for their actions and speak to witnesses who may support the employee. Even incriminating evidence like clear video images or a signature on a document may not be as clear cut as expected. Dishonest people with their jobs on the line can be very creative in explaining their purported innocence.

4. Take statements from witnesses

Well written statements preserve information while it is still fresh; piece together a complete documentary record of relevant facts and limit story changing at a later stage.

When dealing with serious misconduct, especially theft and fraud, we recommend that employers invest as much in the pre-hearing investigation as in appointing a skilled disciplinary hearing chairperson. An expert (most often external to the organisation) well versed in the rules of evidence and disciplinary processes will pay off in disciplinary hearing results which stick. In addition to saving dispute costs,



employers will weed out that small fraction of employees bent on enriching themselves at their employers' expense.

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Course details:

Date: 25 February 2020 | **Venue:** Tennant Human Capital Solutions, 59 Woodlands Avenue, Hurlingham Office Park, Block A Suite 3, Cnr. Republic & William Nicol Drive, Hurlingham Manor, Sandton **Time:** 9:00 – 16:30 | **Cost:** R2'400 excluding VAT per person

Who should attend?

Managers, supervisors, team leaders, newly appointed junior managers, HR practitioners, project team members and management development candidates.

The conflict challenge:

No workplace is immune from conflict. Where it is not effectively dealt with, conflict can debilitate organisation performance. The course aims to give participants practical skills to effectively manage inevitable conflict by means other than avoidance, coercion and force.

Facilitator:

Peter Fisher, Executive HR Consultant, holds a BSocSc Hons degree and has more than 25 years' experience as HR Consultant, HR Manager and HR Director. Peter is passionate about implementing and facilitating development programmes which help employees realise their full potential at work. This in turn, is a building block for excellent business performance.

This is what some course participants have written about training programmes facilitated by Peter: 'He is very clear and delivers lessons simply and understandably.' ● Peter performed his function very well and especially encouraged participation from members of the class.' ● 'The manual is very useful – will keep this file safely for future referral.' ● 'The learning is very applicable.'

To book, [contact Peter direct](mailto:peter.fisher@tennant.co.za): 082 453 7034 | peter.fisher@tennant.co.za

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**the most
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which is
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human beings**

- Alfred Marshall