DOD Mentoring Resource Portal

SUPERVISING: A NEW ROLE LESSON

Information for Supervisors Portfolio
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LESSON: SUPERVISING: A NEW ROLE

"Properly trained supervisors are critical to the federal government's ability to efficiently and effectively provide essential services to the American people."

Senator Daniel Akaka (HI-D), Co-Sponsor, Federal Supervisor Training Act, 2011

The supervisor is one of the most significant roles in the DoD's Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service (DCPAS.) In addition to contributing to the agency's mission, the supervisor must support and guide staff while serving as a critical conduit between employees and senior management.

Given the crucial nature of the role, it is imperative that new supervisors adapt quickly to their new responsibilities. With a comprehensive enculturation process and tools for engaging employees, the new DCPAS supervisor can drive organizational success.

This lesson describes the processes, skills, and behaviors involved in understanding and adapting to the supervisory culture.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Describe the process of enculturation of a new supervisor to the new role
- Identify strategies to enculturate to the new role of supervisor
- Discuss differences between the role of employee and supervisor
- Describe the differences in the relationship between a supervisor and his or her team members and the relationship between fellow team members
- Identify desired behaviors that supervisors can model in the workplace
- Describe the importance of the supervisors being accessible to team members
- Describe ways the supervisors can be more accessible to team members
- Demonstrate behavior appropriate of a supervisor
- Recognize inappropriate behavior in a supervisor/ employee relationship
- Discuss the daily pressures associated with being a supervisor

ENCULTURATING NEW SUPERVISORS

In the past, new supervisors at the DoD have not been properly enculturated. According to surveys conducted by the MSPB, ("Managing for engagement," 2009) these newly-appointed supervisors have struggled to fit in culturally, failed to understand what is expected of them, established inadequate relationships with staff and management, and lacked the political savvy necessary to supervise effectively.

Today, new supervisors must undergo an immersive process during which they become thoroughly knowledgeable in agency practices, policies, and politics.

THE ENCULTURATION PROCESS

The enculturation process is critical to agency success; it provides new supervisors with the tools and strategies needed to assimilate to their new job.

The enculturation process helps the new supervisor:

- Understand the functions, expectations, and powers associated with the supervisory position as defined by the agency
- Transition from task-based duties to supervisory responsibilities including managing personnel and complying with rules and regulations
- Strengthen communication, conflict management, team building, and other leadership skills
- Develop skills and strategies for evaluating individual employee and team performances
- Adopt a flexible and proactive approach to change
- Self-assess strengths and weaknesses and identify opportunities to develop professionally and personally
- Identify and make use of helpful agency resources

ENCULTURATION STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW SUPERVISOR

Every newly-appointed supervisor who seeks to rapidly and thoroughly enculturate to his or her role should implement the strategies outlined in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: Enculturation Strategies for New Supervisors

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
Take advantage of training courses and mentoring opportunities	The new supervisor will need: • Working knowledge of the agency and HR matters • Strategies for motivating others • Understanding of human nature *Take every course and seminar aimed at helping the new supervisor through this critical transition.*
Study, evaluate, and incorporate existing protocols and policies	The new supervisor should not re-create the wheel. Instead, he or she should select the most effective and efficient material from predecessors and supervisors in other departments.

Table 1-1: Enculturation Strategies for New Supervisors (cont'd)

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
Master the art of communication	The new supervisor should become proficient in multiple communication methods, including: • Written reports • Face-to-face meetings • Conference/video calls Brush up on social skills – significant conversations occur in unexpected places (elevators, lunchrooms, and airports.) See Lesson 2 and Training Area 6 for more information on communication.
Become a leader	The new supervisor becomes a *successful* supervisor by offering his or her employees: • Motivation • Inspiration • Challenges • Assurance • Support *See Lesson 2 as well as Training Area 6 for more information on teamwork.*
Build and maintain exceptional teams	The new supervisor will contribute to mission success by leading effective teams. See Lesson 2 as well as Training Area 6 for more information on teamwork.
Learn to delegate	The new supervisor does not pass work off to employees. Instead, he distributes work in manner that maximizes staff skills and schedules.
Respect employees	The new supervisor is no longer a peer with her employees; she must take the lead in establishing appropriate relationships with team members.
Be responsible and accountable	The new supervisor has transitioned from being a member of the team to being in charge of the team. *The new supervisor is responsible and accountable **for** the team and **to** the team.*
Become a performance management expert	The new supervisor must: • Accurately assess and reward employees • Provide corrective yet constructive feedback • Be well-versed in the performance and conduct frameworks

For more information…

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board – http://www.mspb.gov/publicaffairs/surveys.htm

Department of Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service – http://www.cpms.osd.mil/

SUPERVISORS, EMPLOYEES, AND TEAMS

Comparing Roles: Supervisor and Employees

Employees and their supervisor contribute in achieving the agency mission. However, each individual plays a different part in that success. While employees are largely responsible for doing the work, the supervisor is responsible for making sure the work is performed.

Table 1-2 compares employees' roles with the role of supervisor.

EMPLOYEES' ROLE	SUPERVISOR'S ROLE
Perform assigned tasks	• Identify tasks to be performed • Assign tasks
Produce quality results	• Evaluate and reward employees' performance • Correct performance where necessary
Follow timetables and adhere to deadlines	• Develop schedules and organize deadlines • Communicate changes in schedules and deadlines to employees
Provide regular reports on activities and progress	• Adjust employees' activity based on progress reports • Communicate employees' progress to senior management
Perform quality work with given materials and resources	• Monitor resource consumption • Reallocate resources or work as necessary
Participate in team meetings, providing honest and constructive input	• Guide staff meetings and respond to employees' input • Communicate mission- and task-pertinent information to employees
Adhere to company guidelines for behavior and work output	• Be responsible for employees' actions and work • Resolve conflict and discipline employees as necessary
Seek development opportunities	• Provide employees with training and opportunities for development

Comparing Relationships: Supervisors and Teams

Teams are comprised of employees and supervisors. All team members work together to achieve the team objectives. However, there is a significant difference between the relationship supervisors have with team members and the relationship that team members have with one another. Table 1-3 compares these relationships within teams.

Table 1-3: Employees' Role vs. Supervisor's Role

TEAM MEMBERS/ TEAM MEMBERS	SUPERVISORS/ TEAM MEMBERS
…work together or separately to complete individual goals	…direct team members to accomplish larger projects
…work together or separately to meet deadlines	…organize deadlines for the team to maintain overall productivity
…do not hold authority over one another	…hold positions of authority over the team members
…may choose to assist one another on tasks, but are not expected to do so	…assign tasks to team members
…perform individually to their best ability	…encourage and evaluate individual team member productivity
…work together to promote the team's efficiency and productivity	…evaluate and promote the overall team's efficiency

MODELING DESIRABLE BEHAVIOR

In order to achieve the agency mission, supervisors must ensure that their staff demonstrates a specific set of behaviors and characteristics. These actions and traits are cultivated during training and employee development. However, employees' conduct is also influenced by their supervisors, who model the behaviors and characteristics expected of employees.

Behaviors and characteristics supervisors should model include:

- Listening actively
- Communicating openly and honestly
- Being ready and willing to seek solutions for problems
- Treating others respectfully

- Working for mission success
- Saying yes to customers
- Providing and receiving feedback
- Encouraging open discussions
- Expressing gratitude toward others

- Being reliable, trustworthy, and honest
- Being resilient yet flexible
- Helping others
- Displaying a positive attitude
- Having courage to address and resolve issues

ACCESSIBILITY AND THE NEW SUPERVISOR

Accessibility

Engaged employees trust their supervisors. This trust is based largely on the accessibility of the supervisor – the more accessible the supervisor, the more effective the employee.

Conversely, when supervisors are not accessible, employees stop trusting their supervisors, stop asking for help, and stop engaging.

The Inaccessible Supervisor

The inaccessible supervisor is unavailable, uncommunicative, and unresponsive. Table 1-4 outlines the behaviors of inaccessible supervisors and the impact of their behavior on employees.

Table 1-4: Behavior and Impact of Inaccessible Supervisors

WHEN A SUPERVISOR...	THEN EMPLOYEES...
- Spends hours behind closed doors... - Fails to reply to emails or return phone calls... - Frequently cancels meetings with employees to put out fires or work on important projects...	- Hide problems - Become stalled in their work **Disengage**
- Neglects to communicate information required by employees to complete tasks... - Answers questions dishonestly or evasively... - Fails to report changes, decisions, or problems to employees... - Responds negatively to feedback from employees...	- Distrust the supervisor - Dislike the supervisor **Disengage**
- Does not acknowledge and address employee conflict... - Fails to regularly assess employee performance...	- Feel unseen and unappreciated **Disengage**

The Accessible Supervisor

The supervisor who is accessible sends a simple but powerful message:
I empower my employees to drive agency success. Table 1-5 outlines the behaviors of accessible supervisors and the impact of their behavior on employees.

Table 1-5: Behavior and Impact of Accessible Supervisors

THE ACCESSIBLE SUPERVISOR	
Communicates honestly, clearly, and regularly with employees. She answers her phone, replies to emails, and leaves her office door open for some portion of the day.	The supervisor's actions build an environment in which employees have the support they need to focus entirely on the work they need to perform.
Designates 'alternates' authorized to make decisions in her absence.	This action keeps work flowing and resentments from building. It also demonstrates to employees that they are the element that is critical to the work.
Assesses employee performance and provides corrective feedback.	This action demonstrates to employees the agency's appreciation for their contribution and its expectations for their ongoing professional development.

APPROPRIATE VS. INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

Supervisors must adhere to acceptable behavior in order to maintain high levels of employee engagement. Deviating from this behavior will not create a 'friendly' atmosphere that will contribute to mission success. Instead, inappropriate behavior will undermine the respect and trust employees have for their leadership. Table 1-6 compares appropriate and inappropriate supervisory behavior.

Table 1-6: Appropriate and Inappropriate Supervisory Behavior

SUPERVISOR BEHAVIOR: APPROPRIATE VS. INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR	
Supervisors should…	**Supervisors should not…**
Clarify any misunderstandings their employees have about company policy	Critique company policies with employees
Encourage employees to report teammates' oversights in a respectful manner and following agency policy and procedures	• Speak in a derogatory manner about other employees • Spread rumors • Discuss team members' performance or personal details with their employees
Promote employee productivity during work time Reserve non-work related discussions for break time, lunch time, or other non-work times	Discuss non-work related topics with employees during work time
Adjudicate workloads based on individual employee strengths and weaknesses Work should be divided in a fair and even manner	Adjust employee workloads based on personal differences or grudges Employees should not believe their workload increases to be personal attacks
Reward employees for their contributions to the team and the overall project These rewards can take many forms, including merit based approval, additional responsibilities.	Reward employees based on personally motivated reasons **Discriminatory behavior is unacceptable**
• Use the employee evaluations to provide an honest and unbiased employee appraisal	Use the promise of a favorable employee evaluation as either an intimidation or reward
Discuss conduct issues with employees in a one-on-one setting	Discipline employees in front of coworkers.

For more information…

- U.S. Office of Personnel Management – http://www.opm.gov/er/
- Department of Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service – Labor and Employee Relations Division - http://www.cpms.osd.mil/faslerd/

DAILY PRESSURE OF SUPERVISION

New supervisors can quickly become overwhelmed by their role. Taking responsibility for the performance and actions of each of their employees is stressful. The daily pressures of supervising employees include:

- Managing knowledge-based staff
- Solving problems and making decisions
- Acting as 'go between', or liaison for employees and upper management
- Being accountable for deadlines and budget
- Recognizing organizational cycles and patterns
- Maintaining morale
- Coping With Stress

Though they might seem insurmountable, these pressures can be managed. The keys to handling the stress are identifying and implementing critical coping mechanisms. These mechanisms include:

- Working with a mentor
- Networking with other supervisors
- Identifying possible workload changes
- Attending stress and time management training
- Using HR and agency resources such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Lesson 1 Summary

New supervisors at the DoD who undergo a thorough enculturation process are better equipped to meet supervisory expectations including modeling appropriate behavior, remaining accessible to employees, and coping with the daily pressures of supervision.

- This lesson covered the following topics:
- The new supervisor's enculturation process
- Differences in employees' roles and supervisor roles
- Difference in relationships between team members and relationships between team members and their supervisor
- Behavior that supervisors should model for employees
- Behaviors of accessible and inaccessible supervisors
- Appropriate and inappropriate supervisory behavior
- Daily pressure of supervision