

"MANY SUPERVISORS RISE ON THEIR TECHNICAL COMPETENCY WITHOUT ANY TRAINING IN THE AREA OF SUPERVISORY SKILLS."

AN ANALYSIS OF SUPERVISORY TRAINING NEEDS

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The bureaucracy is a complicated system designed to serve the public in numerous ways. Sometimes regulations, forms, memos, and special documents of all types are used to keep bureaucratic functions moving rather than attention to management principles. Bureaucrats quite frequently think that the system of government can be made to be more efficient by adding forms, deleting forms, computerizing massive amounts of information or firing a lot of people and starting fresh with a new group. It is also quite common to see the government call in experts to solve their problems.

From the perspective of the Training Branch within the Department for Human Resources in Kentucky, we thought there should be considerable emphasis on training people to be good supervisors. This grassroots approach might have more impact over the long-run than temporary measures. Enlightened supervisory-management training places considerable

emphasis on employee welfare when considering work force efficiency (Herzberg, 1976). It was thought that the behavior of supervisors on all levels might influence employees in a positive way (meaning a more efficient and productive work force). The literature on supervisory-management consistently stresses the fact that first-line supervisors are key elements in any organization. The Department for Human Resources is Kentucky's largest bureaucratic organization with almost 12,000 people (about one-third of the total number of state employees). Often supervisors are placed in a position of responsibility with absolutely no training or experience managing people. No basic courses on motivation, leadership or supervisory methods are provided in many cases. Too often supervisors cannot make the grade, because they do not know what a supervisor should do. Supervisors frequently do not understand that people are their most important resource.

Research indicates that most first-line supervisors view the technical aspects of their jobs as

more important than the human relations aspect (Stogdill, 1974). Yet, supervisors must be experts in human relations. The problem is compounded when the technically oriented supervisor becomes a manager. This emphasis on people is particularly important for a department that is responsible for providing human services to every citizen in the state. "People helping people" is the motto of the department.

Many supervisors rise on their technical competency without any training in the area of supervisory skills, e.g. being able to recognize what motivates people. When there are numerous supervisors that do not know how to supervise, there is bound to be trouble such as: high turnover, low morale, sloppy work habits and inefficiency. The entire organization is often not as effective as it could be, because first-line supervisors don't know what they should be doing to recognize problems, motivate employees or exercise some simple leadership techniques. Supervisors and managers are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge and deal

with personnel problems.

In order to provide some supervisory training, we thought it would be a good idea to first do a needs analysis. Our needs analysis was concentrated on training for first-line supervisors. We asked first-line supervisors, second level supervisors and middle managers to identify what kind of supervisory training first-line supervisors needed. We provided each group with 23 possible choices.

The Methodology Involved

We constructed a survey instrument with items grouped into four general categories: motivation/leadership, personnel, communications and management methods. These general categories are the basics contained in numerous supervisory-management courses. Twenty-three items were available for selection as possible training needs for first-line supervisors. The supervisors and middle-managers were asked to indicate the degree of need they felt existed for training in each skill listed. There were three columns for selection: great need, some need and little need.

Analysis was based on a numerical value assigned to each judgment (great need was assigned a three, some need was assigned a two and little need was given a one). Each training category was given a weighted score based on the number of people scoring the item as either a three, two or one. For instance, if six people each gave an item a three, then the weighted score would be 18. This allowed us to rank each item in order of degree of need. A mean average was also calculated for each item. Blank spaces were included with a list of supervisory responsibilities to provide for additional input. Supervisors and managers were requested to indicate the degree of need they felt existed for training in each skill listed.

This survey instrument was randomly distributed throughout the Department for Human Resources in Kentucky. There were approximately 12,000 employees in the department, and the survey was sent to 400 supervisory or management level employees.

Figure 1.
Responses from first-level supervisors (n = 190)

Ranking		Weighted Score	Mean Score
1	Motivating	459	2.42
2	Developing Employees	457	2.41
3	Communications	442	2.33
4	Leadership	420	2.21
5	Planning/Organizing	409	2.15
6	Human Relations	407	2.14
7	Performance Appraisal	398	2.09
8	Disciplining	390	2.05
9	Decision Making	385	2.03
10	Handling Complaints/Grievances	381	2.01
11	Management Methods (e.g. M.B.O.)	380	2.00
12	Reporting Systems (written information)	366	1.93
13	Counseling	359	1.89
14	Functioning in the Organization	356	1.87
15	Time Management	349	1.84
16	Delegation	338	1.78
17	Affirmative Action/E.E.O.	334	1.76
18	Safety (e.g. OSHA, FIRST AID)	332	1.75
19	Conducting Meetings	318	1.67
20	Termination Procedures	309	1.63
21	Interviewing	307	1.62
22	Hiring Procedures	279	1.47
23	Budgeting	255	1.34

The response from the 400 surveys was 314 or 78 percent. Of the surveys returned, 190 (61 percent) were from first-line supervisors, 82 (26 percent) were from second-line supervisors and 42 (13 percent) were from management personnel. No accurate information is available on the actual number of employees in the department who have supervisory-management responsibilities, but the number is estimated at 4,000. The sample represents approximately eight percent of all the supervisors and

managers in the department.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate the results from first-level supervisors and a composite of all groups.

From all levels of supervisors surveyed, the greatest needs were for training relating to motivation and development of employees (Figure 2). The degree of need indicated for both of these items was between a great need and some need. There was little need indicated for training in budgeting (bottom Figure 2). This could possibly be explained by the fact

Figure 2.

Composite (n = 314)

Ranking		Weighted Score	Mean Score
1	Motivating	777	2.47
2	Developing Employees	760	2.42
3	Communications	725	2.31
4	Leadership	706	2.25
5	Human Relations	683	2.18
6	Planning/Organizing	683	2.18
7	Disciplining	678	2.16
8	Performance Appraisal	664	2.11
9	Handling Complaints/Grievances	646	2.06
10	Decision Making	641	2.04
11	Management Methods (e.g. M.B.O.)	629	2.00
12	Reporting Systems (written information)	604	1.92
13	Counseling	601	1.91
14	Time Management	601	1.91
15	Functioning in the Organization	599	1.91
16	Delegation	577	1.84
17	Safety (e.g. OSHA, FIRST AID)	547	1.74
18	Affirmative Action/E.E.O.	543	1.73
19	Conducting Meetings	538	1.71
20	Termination Procedures	532	1.69
21	Interviewing	528	1.68
22	Hiring Procedures	488	1.55
23	Budgeting	431	1.37

SURVEY OF SUPERVISORY TRAINING NEEDS

NAME _____

BUREAU _____

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY BY CHECKING ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- first-line supervisor (the employees you supervise do not supervise others)
- second-line supervisor (you supervise employees who also have supervisory responsibilities)
- management level

I. PLEASE INDICATE BY CHECKING THE APPROPRIATE COLUMN THE DEGREE OF NEED YOU THINK EXISTS FOR TRAINING FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS **ONLY**.

	GREAT NEED	SOME NEED	LITTLE NEED
1. COMMUNICATIONS			
2. INTERVIEWING			
3. COUNSELING			
4. DISCIPLINING			
5. HIRING PROCEDURES			
6. TERMINATION PROCEDURES			
7. DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES			
8. MOTIVATING			
9. HUMAN RELATIONS			
10. HANDLING COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES			
11. PLANNING/ORGANIZING			
12. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL			
13. DECISION MAKING			
14. LEADERSHIP			
15. FUNCTIONING IN THE ORGANIZATION			
16. DELEGATION			
17. MANAGEMENT METHODS (e.g. M.B.O.)			
18. BUDGETING			
19. TIME MANAGEMENT			
20. CONDUCTING MEETINGS			
21. REPORTING SYSTEMS (written information)			
22. SAFETY (e.g. OSHA, FIRST AID)			
23. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/E.E.O.			

II. PLEASE INDICATE ANY OTHER SUPERVISORY SKILLS FOR WHICH YOU FEEL THERE MAY BE A NEED. LIST THEM BELOW AND CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX INDICATING THE DEGREE OF NEED.

	GREAT NEED	SOME NEED	LITTLE NEED
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

(Continued from Page 60)

that in the Department for Human Resources the responsibility for budget information and preparation does not include first-level supervisors.

Generally, the items which were seen to have the greatest need were those intangible abilities relating to people: motivation, developing employees, communications, leadership and human relations. Those items which were thought to have the least degree of need for training involved more specific procedures: budgeting, hiring procedures, interviewing, termination procedures and conducting meetings. This finding should not be viewed as unusual. The ability to deal with people and elicit their support are the most difficult tasks supervisors and managers have to accomplish in complex organizations (McGregor, 1966). In this respect the large bureaucratic organization is similar to large industrial organizations.

There was a difference between the number of areas in which first-

level supervisors thought they needed training and the number of areas in which second-level supervisors thought the first-level supervisors needed training. This can be determined by comparing the relative degree of need (mean scores) expressed by both groups. First-line supervisors identified 11 items with a mean score of two or more (Figure 1). Second-level supervisors identified 16 items with a mean score of two or higher.

A score of two indicates some training is needed. In fact second-level supervisors had higher mean scores than first-level supervisors on each potential training subject indicated. Second-level supervisors perceive a greater need for training in more areas than the first-level supervisors perceive for themselves. Managers responded with only nine items being valued at two or above.

Another interesting aspect of the results is in the area of disciplining. First-level supervisors indicated there was only some need for this training (mean score of

2.05); however, second-level supervisors apparently felt first-level supervisors needed considerable training on the topic of disciplining (mean score of 2.43). Managers scored disciplining 2.12. Perhaps second-level supervisors think that their employees are not being properly disciplined for some reason or another.

As a result of this needs analysis, a day-long course on motivation and leadership was established for first-level supervisors. Applications of the information gained from this needs analysis will probably be limited. The department is, for the most part, lacking in career-ladder procedures. There is also no management-development program similar to those found in the private sector.

Employees advance into supervisory positions often with no background or experience in supervisory skills. This transition in private enterprise is likely to be more thoroughly planned as a result of a career ladder based on minimum training prior to progression. Public-service programs need supervisors and managers with many of the skills mentioned in the survey; however, political and special organizational considerations frequently interfere with an orderly career progression.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A one-day program has been developed around the results derived from the survey highlighted in this article. For more information contact Mark E. Thompson, 19628 Enterprise Way, Gaithersburg, MD 20760.

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