

The Anatomy of a Supervisor

Ellen Parser

What is a supervisor? In the final session of a 15-week course in Basic Supervision, most of our trainees answered this question with the pat reply: "A supervisor is one who gets work done through others." True, this is the standard definition which we fed them at the beginning of the course. But we hoped that by the end of the course they would have a broader understanding of what supervision means. Instead we seemed to leave them with the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle: a topic here, a topic there, but with little understanding of how these topics fit together to make a unified whole. My problem, then, was to find a way to give our trainees a more meaningful understanding of supervision.

Since we tie our new learning to something we already know, I tried to think of an entity which would answer the two aspects of my problem, namely: (1) something with which most people would be familiar, and (2) something which has several parts functioning together to make a unified whole. My answer was to use the

human body as the basis of comparison.

Supervisors Are Human!

At the start of the final session of our basic supervision course, I now ask the trainees if they agree that supervisors are human beings. (Sometimes, admittedly, they may not seem too human!) On a chalkboard, I then draw a very simple outline of the human form with no attempt at artistry (Figure 1). I usually sketch in a path for an impression of terra firma and a cloud for an impression of atmosphere.

Then I lead a discussion following the outline as given in the accompanying comparison chart (Figure 2). I gradually lead the trainees into an understanding of how the various topics (discussed previously at length) coordinate with each other to make a whole—the topic we call supervision.

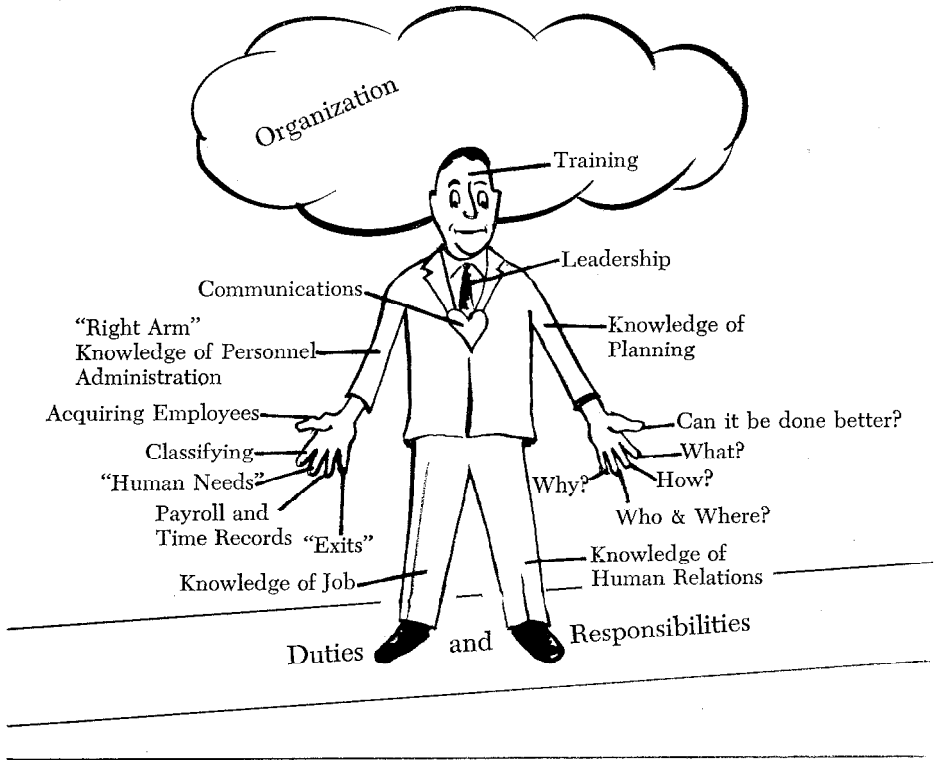
Many Talents Needed

What is a good supervisor? He's a good planner. He knows how to acquire and keep good help. He's a good teacher. He's a leader. He's a bit of

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Figure 1. The Anatomy of a Supervisor



a psychologist. He's many talents rolled into one.

By the use of the comparison just described, our trainees are better able to understand how the various aspects of supervision fit together and work together. The trainees' reaction to this

anatomical discussion has been very favorable. Their learning from it has proven to me that it is a worth-while approach. It not only ties together the topics taught during the course of study, but it also shows that a good supervisor is basically a *human being*.

Figure 2. Comparison Chart

Human Part	Supervisory Topic	Suggested Discussion Points
Atmosphere	Organization	The human being cannot function in a vacuum; he needs the oxygen supplied by the atmosphere in which he lives. The supervisor cannot function in a vacuum, either; he needs the organization which gives him his reason for being, his chain of command, his authority, his responsibility, and so forth.

Two Legs	Knowledge of job and Knowledge of people (Employee relations)	The human being needs two firm underpinnings to help him stand straight and tall and to help him to get where he is going. If the supervisor is to get where he is going, he too must have two firm underpinnings. He must know his job thoroughly and he must have a basic understanding of people.
Two Arms	Knowledge of Personnel Administration and Knowledge of Planning	Man has two "help-mates"—if they don't function properly, he has a difficult time getting things done. These two arms and hands must often help each other and must often work cooperatively if things are to be done efficiently. Personnel administration can be compared to the supervisor's good right arm because this helps him to get and keep qualified help. The five fingers can be likened to the five areas of personnel administration, (1) acquiring employees, (2) classifying jobs properly, (3) making certain that payroll matters are processed quickly and efficiently, (4) making certain that employee "needs" are met (safety, training, health insurance, etc.) and (5) terminating employees (promotions, resignations, retirements, transfers, dismissals, and death). The other arm of supervision can be compared to planning because getting work done efficiently is essential to good supervision. The five fingers here can be compared to the five main questions a supervisor should ask in relation to his responsibilities: (1) What is done, (2) Who does it and where is it done, (3) Why is it done, (4) How is it done, and (5) Can it be done better?
Head	Training	Our heads provide the means for seeing where we are going and for steering us in the right direction. The supervisor's training function provides him with the means of getting where he is going. The supervisor who trains his employees effectively will gain employees who feel more secure because they know what they are doing and what is expected of them. And the supervisor will thus be able to meet his responsibilities more efficiently.
Spinal Column	Leadership	Without a backbone, man would fall in a heap. Without leadership ability, the supervisor would also fall in a heap. His employees would have little respect for him and all of his other supervisory abilities would lose their effectiveness if the supervisor didn't have enough leadership ability to hold

Heart

Communication

him straight and tall in the eyes of his employees.

The heart gives life to the human being. So, too, communication gives life to the supervisor. Just as the heart sends out blood and gets blood back, so the communication function can be compared to sending out messages and getting messages back. If the heart doesn't function properly, the body suffers ill effects; if the supervisor doesn't communicate properly, his supervision suffers ill effects.

Bliss Meets With Trainers in Turkey

ASTD Executive Director Gordon Bliss arrived in Ankara, the capital city of the Republic of Turkey, October 21 and on that day spoke to a group of over 100 of the principal training personnel of that country and key staff members of the U. S. Agency for International Development.

On October 24 and 25, Bliss met in the city of Istanbul with the representatives of 27 companies and several government agencies to conduct a general workshop touching on nearly all aspects of training. The purpose of this workshop was to review current training practices in the U. S. Much interest was displayed by the attendees who participated freely in the discussions.

On October 26 and 27, Bliss met with the AID personnel in Istanbul and the Turkish In-Plant Training representatives who assist companies in organizing their training efforts.

Bliss noted that the problems faced by training people in Turkey are fundamentally the same as those encountered by ASTD members in the United States and Canada. As in some companies in the States, training directors in Turkey are concerned about the complacency of management in the face of mounting training needs. Other problems faced by Turkish training people include the lack of a clear line of demarcation between management and non-management personnel. Thus it sometimes becomes a bit cloudy as to what material should be included in a supervisory training program, when the supervisors may, in effect, be members of the same collective bargaining unit as the workers.

Bliss also met with Turkish Society of Training Directors members and officers and discussed plans to strengthen their organization and collaborate on an international scale with ASTD.