

# SUPERVISOR STATUS AND TRAINING

*an approach to the  
changing needs in  
supervisory development*

A readily-accepted maxim is that training concepts should be geared to the qualifications necessary for effective performance. It follows that the supervisor's job must first be defined before applicable training can be ascertained and the role which he is expected to carry out should serve as the basis for determining the training which he should receive and his place in the training function. But very often *assumptions* are made regarding the job and status of the supervisor based on tradition and outdated management and work theory, and very little real effort is made to find out his actual and realistic position and the responsibilities he can most effectively undertake to maximize worker performance and productivity.

## THE NATURE OF WORK

The principal step — although quite obvious but sometimes overlooked — in ascertaining the supervisor's most pertinent and effective functions is to first determine the nature of the work and the workers in his charge. In many industries and organizations, dramatic changes have taken place not only in the makeup of work but in the character, education, expectations and sense of values of the worker. To define the supervisor's task in light of looking at the people under his direction as laborers, assembly line workers or even highly skilled from the conventional point of view, who are the same kind of employees of 20 or even ten years ago is to fail to recognize the impact of change — both in the concept of work and the nature of the worker.

Work is now much more mental than physical; conceptual than functional; systems rather than task oriented; more decision making than operational in structure; varied more than repetitive and requiring multi-skill mastery rather than single skill or task proficiency. These relatively recent — but growing in importance and applicability — characteristics of jobs demand a shift and different emphasis in worker qualifications which can be summarized as:

Ability to adapt to change — technical, social and environmental  
Single skill to breadth of knowledge  
Follower to self-motivated  
Singular to conceptual understanding  
Order taker to imaginative and analytical  
Dependent to independent and professional

What must also be considered is that these new adeptness qualifications, combined with other changes in society, have also had an impact on the worker and the way he looks at himself and his work. More highly educated, sophisticated, performing different work than his predecessors of only a few years ago has naturally resulted in changed values, behavior, response and outlook on his part. He has moved from a laborer or even skilled craftsman to professional or at least semi-professional in status, and this is the way he regards himself.

## ROLE OF SUPERVISOR

Evaluation of these modern qualifications for effectiveness and the new status of the worker leads to the conclusion that the foreman cannot be expected to *supervise* work and employees in the traditional sense simply because the work now performed and the worker are very different.

Most jobs cannot be supervised from the technical point of view, for their satisfactory completion depends on individual decision making and accomplishment rather than on assembly line productivity. The tasks are so varied that it is close to impossible for the supervisor to have sufficient grasp of all of them to oversee their performance from a skill standpoint. The first-line supervisor becomes an administrator and work group consultant, distributing the assigned work, providing for understanding of employer policies, state of mind and spirit, evaluating the judgment (not the work itself for its adequacy can usually be determined only on completion and not while in progress) used by employees subject to his surveillance, and helping to create and maintain an environment conducive to productivity. His job is to deal effectively with the value

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systems, attitudes and decision-making process of the people rather than the work itself.

### FROM SUPERVISOR TO ADMINISTRATOR

It has long been the responsibility of the first-line supervisor to be the major link between the organization and the worker. But this role has often been looked upon as simply one of disseminating information on company policy and procedures. The better educated, more sensitive, highly mobile, knowledge worker requires more than this kind of information. He has higher status than his predecessor, the manual worker, and this new status must be appealed to if cooperation with company goals is to become practice.

The supervisor can no longer be only the source of information regarding benefits, rules and similar data but must be the transmitter of the spirit and perspective of the organization so the worker will become as much a part of the company as he is wedded to his "profession." Information on company plans, objectives, expectations, promotion possibilities and other such topics help the worker feel he is being given consideration in accord with his new standing. All of this is part of the job of the modern supervisor. Supervisor training must encompass these fresh areas of responsibility if the organization is to receive greater degree of employee dedication, involvement and sense of responsibility demanded by today's jobs.

### UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES

Knowledge worker performance depends more on attitude, outlook and motivation than is the case when machinery helps set the pace of productivity. This demands that employee behavior, sense of values and outlook be understood and be given more attention than the work itself and is the second major supervisor responsibility. Being closest to the workers physically, he is in the position to become closest to them mentally and behaviorally, but he

can only do so if he understands them and their sense of values, and this requires training.

Many cases point to the lack of the foreman's understanding of the knowledge worker as a principal cause of poor supervisor-worker relationships and disappointing employee productivity. The following case is typical and illustrates the "generation gap" which presently exists on the first-line supervisor-worker level in many organizations:

The owner of a contracting firm, a college graduate, reported that he was finding it difficult to retain his younger workers. He agreed they were smarter, more intelligent and learned their jobs much easier and quicker than the worker hired ten years previously. But, they did not seem to have much interest in their work, became dissatisfied with their situation in a short time and often resigned for no apparent reason. Yet, he found that he could communicate with them about the tasks to be accomplished on a higher and more intelligent plane than had been the situation with work groups of some years back. He also found that when he was supervising them, they appeared to be interested in and content with their work.

After experimenting with and studying the situation it was determined that much of the problem resulted from the foremen and younger workers coming from two different schools. Most of the foremen had terminated their education after the seventh grade and the rest had only completed junior high. They were raised in a more staid and conservative environment and followed the rules of close supervision which is the way they were *bossed* and very seldom permitted deviation from established work methods. The younger employees were quite different. They were high school graduates who had been brought up in a more permissive milieu and had developed a degree of independence that was difficult for the foremen to cope with. They resented being constantly told what to do and how specifically to accomplish their work, and needed the type of satisfaction from their work that close supervision would not permit. The circumstances were further aggravated by the difficulty the foremen found in accepting the fact that the work itself had changed and required more autonomy and decision making on the worker level.

### TWO VIEWPOINTS

It becomes very difficult to develop the kind of foreman-worker relationship conducive to maximum productivity when such conditions predominate.

Two different languages and different outlooks and sense of values makes it hard to achieve understanding, communication and compatibility. The result is that the supervisors and workers look at the work to be accomplished in different lights and from diverse points of view which causes conflict and dissatisfaction. What is called for is training which will change the perspective and ways of doing things so the supervisors can effectively cope with this new breed of employee. Training should include the effect of changing worker outlook, education, status and work itself on worker response and supervisory practices and provide an avenue for understanding changing work and behavioral concepts. This should enable supervisors to continuously reevaluate their methods in light of changing conditions and help them to recognize that the new work and worker require a greater employee independence and a broader view of work.

This kind of training must be continuous to be effective, for not only is work affected by scientific discoveries, advances in technology, education, communication, etc. but also the worker. New developments and circumstances not only change the mode of work about every ten years, they also bring about conditions which result in the young being raised in a different culture, with changed outlooks and values. Each new generation, and perhaps every ten years, now brings changed attitudes, behavior, response to motivation, etc., which requires continuous training if workers are to be administered effectively, and if the older generations are not to become strangers in their own land.

### DEVELOPING JUDGMENT

The new kind of work requires that the supervisor become more of a consultant to the workers and their assigned tasks and less of a boss of the work itself for he is no longer so much looking after jobs requiring manual dexterity as he is overseeing assignments demanding ana-

lytical competence. This brings about the third dimension of modern supervisor training, namely, developing their judgment so they can determine whether work under their supervision is being carried out according to plans and so they can evaluate the decision-making process of their workers. In other words, more emphasis must be given to training in evaluating problem areas, determining alternatives and making decisions. In the case of the knowledge worker, the supervisor must become an advisor to, overseer, and judge of the thought process of workers under their

direction.

This calls for more than technical competence. It also requires a comprehension of the complete concept of the work to be accomplished, for only in this way can the supervisor act in the capacity of "consultant." It also demands more than a two-week course in decision making, but rather continuous, regularly-scheduled lectures and discussions which apprise supervisors of new developments, trends in the evolution of work, long-term expectations in work changes, predictions of the impact of technology on job definition and work

performance, changes taking place in concepts from which the work emanates and the impact of all these factors on the judgment and decision-making process required for expected worker performance. Supervision is no longer a matter of just keeping up with changes, but rather being ahead of developments in order to keep up.

For a more comprehensive study of the author's views on training see *New Priorities in Training - A Guide for Industry*. American Management Assn., 1969.

## MANPOWER TRAINING SEEN AS WEAPON IN WAR AGAINST CRIME

The Labor Department's vast manpower experience is being used as a weapon in the war against crime, according to Jerome E. Rosow, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy, Evaluation, and Research.

Speaking at the First National Workshop on Prison Inmate Training in Washington, D.C., Rosow emphasized the increasing interest that the Department is taking in the broad field of offender rehabilitation.

He said the Labor Department has experimented with several successful approaches in assistance for offenders through in-prison training, pre-trial manpower services, job placement, and bonding for post-prison jobs.

Rosow suggested an effort to engage the full energies of private employers, and of the manpower system in an effort to link the inmate offender with the labor market and reasonable employment opportunity.

He said the key element for each individual could be a personally-tailored plan for employment and job development.

"The Department of Labor," he declared, "has had considerable experience working with private employers on behalf of the disadvantaged - as in our

JOBS program with the National Alliance of Businessmen. We are prepared to bring this experience to bear on the problems of offenders."

Rosow said there is "substantial reason to believe" that a comprehensive approach to the employment and training problems of the offender can produce significant results.

"The Department of Labor can and should play a significant role in the development of a government-wide approach to the problems with which the criminal justice system now seeks to deal," he said.

"In large part this is because the significant relationship between unemployment and crime represents a key intervention point in the life style of the offender."

Rosow said the Department is now carefully reviewing all of its present and past activities in this area - research, experimental and demonstration projects, a pilot bonding program, and the "251" inmate training program.

"We also are examining new ideas for programs as well as ways and means of creating additional knowledge that may contribute to the development of effective policies," he said.