

Supervision: Motivating Not Controlling

Edwin H. Amend

The concept of supervision has expanded. The modern supervisor is concerned with getting things done through motivated workers. The placement and supervision of Extension staff is critical to the success of the Extension educational system. The supervisor must know and practice principles of good management. He must also appraise his subordinates with the aim of helping them grow and develop. Above all, he must recognize that supervision is a continual process. As the organization changes, supervisory needs also change.

Supervision isn't like it used to be. From being thought of as "bossism," supervision has become a science with its own set of rules, procedures, and standards.

The word supervisor has always implied one who maintains control over the activities of others. This has now been broadened into the concept of being one who motivates others to do the job, the way it should be done, because they want to do it properly and effectively. Van Dersal defines supervision as,

. . . the art of working with a group of people over whom authority is exercised in such a way as to achieve their greatest combined effectiveness in getting work done.¹

Van Dersal also points out that good supervision is best performed when an atmosphere of goodwill and zestful cooperation prevails.

What Is Supervision?

Appley equates supervision with management, which he defines as "getting things done through other people."² Just as there is definite expansion in the scope of the supervisor's activity, there must be corresponding growth and development in the supervisor's overall view of his own job. He should realize that in the supervisory process a great responsibility exists—that of developing the leadership skills and motivational level of his people.

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Herzberg says,

. . . the single most important goal in the progress of supervision is the development of new insights into the role of the supervisor so that he may effectively plan and organize his work.³

As the supervisor begins to see the great importance of his job in accomplishing the goals of Extension, he'll begin to ask himself about setting these principles of modern management into motion and motivating people.

To be successful in his job, the supervisor must have a basic knowledge of people and their fundamental needs and wants. Though all workers in a supervisor's district are different from one another in many respects, they have certain common fundamental needs. These include a desire for recognition of their accomplishments, opportunity for growth on the job, group acceptance, and security.

The successful supervisor recognizes that his successes come from those he supervises. If his workers are internally motivated to do their best, both the workers and the supervisor are more likely to excel in their job assignments.

Extension—A Unique Educational System

The Cooperative Extension Service, by the very nature of its charter, national assignment, and organization, is unique. It's an agency charged with responsibility in adult

and youth education, without any compulsory hold on its clientele. The members of the field organization are dispersed throughout the counties of a given state. They're involved in a system of informal teaching of agriculture, home economics, and related subjects to men, women, and youth in real-life situations.

The successful agent must be a self-starter. Based many miles from the home institution and his immediate organizational supervisor, the agent has a great amount of individual responsibility with relatively little direct supervision. To succeed he must be self-motivated. He must also know how to motivate his clientele. Frutchey observes:

In extension teaching, motivation is a critical factor because participation is voluntary. No academic credit is given and the teaching is done under conditions which are not like those of the formal classroom.⁴

The supervisor, operating by "remote control," must keep in touch with his agents and their programs. This is a difficult assignment. The wide geographic distribution of staff presents time and space barriers between the agent and supervisor.

The Extension program varies widely from county to county, even within a supervisor's district. Because Extension has traditionally "started where people are," each county program is tailored to the needs of the local people, within the overall framework of the state Extension organization and resources.

The supervisor is also faced with differences between his agents. Most people employed as county Extension agents have their training in some technical field of agriculture or homemaking. When the agents go to work in the county, they become practical sociologists, though many of them fail to recognize this as the role in which they're actually working.

The agent must perceive himself as a teacher, working with a voluntary audience toward goals jointly established by the teacher and the clientele. Since most agents initially consider themselves trained technicians, their role perceptions may vary considerably.

The supervisor must help the agent understand what Extension is and how the individual works within the Extension educational concept. Unless the Extension agent grasps his assignment, he will be neither a good performer nor a satisfied worker.

Tiffin and McCormick point out that:

Individual differences usually are great enough and consistent enough that they should be a matter of concern both to the individuals in question and to management.⁵

A dissatisfied person, performing inadequately on the job, is a waste to himself and his organization. The goal of personnel administrators should be to properly place individuals for maximum utilization of their capabilities.

Selection and Placement

Proper selection and placement, followed by good supervision, are likely to result in a higher motivational level within the agent. According to Clegg, some sources of motivation to perform are:

1. A positive interest in doing the work.
2. Perceived success which has the effect of raising the level of aspiration.
3. A feeling of obligation to the people at the level of operation.⁶

It's unlikely that the poorly placed agent, or one who doesn't get along with either his clientele or his supervisor, will be highly motivated. In fact, it's more likely that his attitude, and thus his performance, will be less than that expected of him. Herzberg distinguished between factors involved in doing the job and factors that define the job context. He points out that:

Poor working conditions, bad company policies and administration, and bad supervision will lead to job dissatisfaction. [However], good company policies, good administration, good supervision and good working conditions will not [necessarily] lead to positive job attitudes. In opposition to this, as far as our data has gone, recognition, achievement, interesting work, responsibility, and advancement all lead to positive job attitudes.⁷

Myers⁸ identified practically the same factors as motivators. He

found that most individuals derive the greatest satisfaction and the strongest motivation from a challenging job that allows a feeling of achievement, responsibility, growth, advancement, enjoyment of work itself, and earned recognition.

If these observations of Herzberg, Myers, and Clegg are valid, it's logical for administrative and supervisory staff to consider them in placing and counseling employees. Special care should be taken to make it possible for the agent, in the course of his work, to earn recognition, achievement, and advancement because he finds his work vocationally interesting and satisfying.

It's especially important in Extension work to select and place county agents who are effective. As the Federal Extension Service observed, county agents

. . . are the extension personnel who have continuous and direct contact with the people. Depending upon them, Extension succeeds or fails.⁹

Frutchey notes:

The effectiveness of the Cooperative Extension Service depends upon its county extension agents. A good county extension agent means a good program, good methods, and good results.¹⁰

The responsibility for proper selection, orientation, and training of personnel rests with the supervisor whose ultimate goal is the development of an effective, productive work force.

The Agent and Role Conflicts

Because of the nature of job assignments and organizational patterns, an agent can find himself in a difficult position. His immediate reference group surrounds him. His local "supervisors" are the people with whom and for whom he works. There's usually a board of local people who feel some responsibility for the Extension program and for the professional Extension staff. They may be the county commissioners, an Extension board, or other group, depending on the particular organizational pattern within the state.

Administratively, the agent is responsible to his district supervisor, as the line representative of the state Extension organization. The supervisor is usually far removed from the agent's base of location.

For subject matter, the agent relies on the state specialist staff for program-content support and information. Because of these various relationships, it's quite easy for the agent to find himself in a delicate position between the University hegemony and his local clientele.

Rogers identifies this potential quandary:

Because a change agent's social position is located midway between the bureaucracy to which he is responsible and the client system in which he works, he is subjected to various role conflicts. The change agent is often expected to engage in certain behaviors by his professional system and, at the same time, he is ex-

pected by his client system to carry on quite different actions.¹¹

Rogers' assertion implies that the worker and the supervisor must consciously work toward establishing a satisfactory worker-supervisor relationship if rapport is to evolve.

The Supervisory Role

What is the task of the supervisor? Herzberg says that the supervisor must be able to discriminate in recognizing and appropriately rewarding good work. Personal relationships between the supervisor and worker should be maintained at the optimum level.

Every supervisor, to be effective and to meet responsibilities of his job, must engage in counseling with his employees. He must understand the importance of counseling to a smooth-running and efficient organization. He must make every effort to improve his counseling ability.

Counseling isn't easy. It requires skill, experience, understanding, and tact. The temptation to express his opinion or "tell" the employee what to do is great. Maturity, patience, understanding, and impartiality are all goals the counselor will constantly seek.

A person in a supervisory position spends much of his time counseling. An effective counselor must keep his word. If he pretends to be open-minded and understanding, but is actually vindictive and prejudiced, he can't do a good job of counseling. He must not give the im-

pression by word or action that he *doesn't have time for the employee.*

He must be a good listener. The supervisor should pay close attention not only to what the employee says, but also the emotions indicated by the words, pauses, or omissions. He must be interested, but not curious. He must have management know-how. He must be able to appraise, evaluate, and interpret what he hears in terms of the individual's needs and the needs of Extension.

Employee Appraisal

A difficult but critical function of the supervisor is that of agent appraisal. If the supervisor is to be able to coach and counsel the agent, he and the agent must have a mutual understanding of their professional relationship. This understanding may be reached through appraisal. A few simple but straightforward principles in employee appraisal are outlined by Hoppock:

1. Ask him before you tell him. In reviewing a man's strengths and weaknesses, he often can criticize himself more readily than he can accept supervisory criticism.
2. Listen. The supervisor must hear, recognize, and understand not only the agent's words, but also his meanings.
3. If the subordinate appraises himself more favorably than you (the supervisor) appraise him, invite him to tell you why. Discuss and clarify any differences.
4. When you must criticize, criti-

- cize the man's performance, not the man himself.
5. If you are partly at fault, admit it. He may become more willing to admit his mistakes if you admit yours.
 6. Never discuss another employee with him.
 7. Do not discuss salary during the performance appraisal. Concentrate on helping the man improve his present job.
 8. It is not necessary that you agree on everything. Try to state the positions so that both understand, then allow time to think about what was said.
 9. Be yourself. You will get nowhere in appraisal if you and the employee are both putting up a front.¹²

Following any appraisal interview, the supervisor must follow up and see that correct learning is taking place within the employee. Such follow-up isn't easy. However, it's one of the major responsibilities of the supervisor. Furthermore, it's because he has shown special abilities in this area that the supervisor has been chosen for his position.

A good job of employee appraisal will, according to the NRECA,

. . . provide each employee with advice, counsel, and training that will assist him to meet accepted standards of performance, demonstrate potentialities and abilities in his present position and encourage him to equip himself for more rewarding positions of greater responsibility.¹³

Today's supervisor must un-

derstand that his responsibilities for tomorrow include developing subordinates. He must also be a teacher, as well as coach, counselor, and appraiser. The test of a supervisor isn't only his technical knowledge, but his ability to inspire and motivate his people. He must remember that as he helps others grow, he also grows.

Supervision—A Continuous Process

Personnel management, or supervision, is an ongoing process. As long as there are people working in an organization, there must be supervision if the enterprise is to move ahead. It's the task of the supervisor to take the initiative in analyzing his staff members' qualifications and supervisory needs of the organization.

The organizational teamwork manual of the University of Chicago observes that:

Business problems are always problems of people—the people in the business and the people with whom business is done. It is the quality of the individual in the business which measures the quality of the business itself. He, multiplied, is the business. It is as much a routine part of good business management to continuously value and re-value the individual as it is to inventory the plant and keep track of goods on hand. If this is not done as a matter of policy and practice, emergencies force it.¹⁴

Herzberg emphasizes that:

Company policy and administration is the single most important factor determining (employees') bad feelings about a job.¹⁵

The word university might well be substituted for business or company in the preceding two statements on personnel administration.

The supervisor has both the responsibility and the privilege of helping his people develop. As the individual matures on the job, he passes through states of psychological development which may affect his performance. Herzberg identifies six points of psychological growth:

1. Knowing more.
2. Seeing more relationships in what we know.
3. Being creative.
4. Being effective in ambiguous situations.
5. Maintaining individuality in the face of the pressures of the group.
6. Attaining real psychological growth.¹⁶

The Extension agent, as a teacher of adults and youth who are free to accept or reject the Extension program at will, must move rapidly in his personal development of these six points. Extension supervisors must recognize that the agents themselves are subject to the same kinds of problems, frustrations, motivations, and satisfactions as their clientele.

If the agent is to be able to effectively help his clients, he must be well adjusted to the task himself. If the supervisor can help the agent

be well matched to job requirements, the agent's productivity will be high, and his morale will probably (though not automatically) be high.

Conclusion

The successful supervisor who can maintain a high level of morale among his staff members will avoid many major personnel problems. Morale is an elusive but valid measure of the attitude of the men on a job. Guion defines morale as,

. . . the extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction as stemming from his total job situation.¹⁷

The supervisor who can help agents maintain a favorable "total job situation" will be doing a good job of supervision.

The successful supervisor will remember and apply the seven basic principles of supervision outlined by Van Dersal:

1. People must always understand clearly what's expected of them.
2. People must have guidance in doing their work.
3. Good work should always be recognized.
4. Poor work deserves constructive criticism.
5. People should have opportunities to show they can accept greater responsibilities.
6. People should be encouraged to improve themselves.
7. People should work in a safe and healthful environment.¹⁸

Though Extension is a unique organization, with a broad assignment and a diverse program, its success depends on its staff. And, as long as people are involved, good supervisors will observe basic principles of dealing with people, regardless of the type of organization or the nature of its assignment.

Footnotes

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