

Chapters 6

Supervision

The primary purpose of supervision is to insure that staff are doing what their employer has hired them to do. It is the manager's responsibility to take corrective actions when this is not the case. It is also the manager's responsibility to provide incentives that will lead to the retention of productive employees. This is not easy. Most people who become managers rise through the ranks and have no training in supervision. What they know is what they have learned through the modeling provided by the managers they have worked for. It should not be a surprise that many managers are not very good at supervising. How many good tennis players have never had a lesson?

Although there is enormous variation in how effective supervision can be conducted and how staff respond, there are some general principles of supervision that have wide applicability.

Just Listen.

To feel valued, one must be heard. When staff feel that you don't listen to them, it will undermine the foundation of your relationship with them.

You probably are thinking, "of course I listen."

I have a Ph.D. in clinical psychology with years of experience as a psychotherapist and as a manager. I am a trained listener, yet I can tell you that I do not always do a very good job of listening. The barriers to actually listening with a clear and open mind, for all of us, are significant and innumerable. It would be an impossible task to develop a strategy for dealing with each and every barrier. However, there are some practical things you can do that have general applicability and will increase the likelihood that you will be able to listen effectively to your staff.

Before Supervision

- Stop doing non-supervisory work five minutes before supervision is going to begin.
- Don't do emails. Don't make or take phone calls. Instead, check your notes from the last supervision.
- If you haven't done so already, create a list of topics you want to discuss. If you already have put together such a list, think about each item you plan to discuss. Get into the "mental space" of being a supervisor.

- Think about the value and purpose of this activity.
- Remind yourself that the most important thing you can do during supervision is to be a good listener.

During Supervision

- Don't answer the telephone. If you have a cell phone, turn it off. Don't allow interruptions unless there is an urgent matter to attend to
- Take notes. In addition to the advantage of having a written record available for the future, taking notes communicates non-verbally to your staff that what they say is important.
- Be an active listener. To feel listened to, your staff need to receive feedback demonstrating that you have a reasonable understanding of both the content and emotion of what has been said to you. This sometimes can be as simple as saying, "it sounds like this has been a productive month for you." The word "productive" in this context captures both content (many tasks have been accomplished) and emotion (it feels good to have accomplished a lot)

Sometimes such a brief reflection of what you have heard will not adequately convey that you have been listening. You will need to say more. The examples below are ordered by complexity.

So, this has been a particularly difficult month. You've had to deal with more demanding customers than usual and the machinery breakdown we had did not make things any easier.

What a crazy month this has been for you with lots of ups and downs. The east wall on the downtown project was completed a week ahead of time, but the foundation uptown was set back a month. If I'm hearing you correctly, you are wanting more assistance from Dave and his team uptown, and you want me to run interference with the inspector. Did I get that right?

You sound disappointed and perhaps somewhat anxious. Are you thinking that how things went on this last deployment will lead to your being passed over for promotion? Maybe I'm reading too much into what you are saying, but I think I'm also hearing that if you don't get this promotion, you are not going to reenlist.

You accomplished a lot this month. It's probably your best month this year, but somehow you don't seem very satisfied. You appear to have not given yourself any credit for your accomplishments. You are also spending a lot of your time talking about how unreliable the folks on your team have been. This seems to be a pattern. You get better and better at your job, but what grabs your attention – or what you chose to communicate to me – are the negatives. Can you help me understand this?

Set Expectations

Supervision is one of those activities that is so familiar to managers that it is rare that we stop and take the time to talk about what we expect it to accomplish. Our staff also have unstated expectations about supervision. A collision occurs when our expectations and theirs don't align, resulting in frustration and possibly, a fractured relationship.

By not being explicit about what we want supervision to accomplish, we miss the opportunity to create a process that is directed towards specific outcomes. To spur your thinking and the thinking of the staff you supervise, I have created an example below of supervision goals that are explicit. Goals like these can be discussed as part of annual performance reviews (discussed in detail later in this chapter) and modified as circumstances and individual staff needs warrant.

- Track progress on specific projects or time-specific goals
- Monitor and support overall performance
- If applicable, monitor progress towards resolution of performance problems
- Monitor and support job satisfaction, including work/life balance
- Support and encourage skill development and career advancement

Working Together To Create A Formal Process For Supervision

“Setting expectations” establishes the “what” of supervision: what you are going to discuss. Creating a process of supervision addresses the “how.” Having a written list of items to discuss can be very helpful. During the time between supervisions, I collect information, observations, and thoughts that I think will be useful to discuss during the next supervision. I keep a folder on my computer's hard drive for emails and other electronic documents and a manila folder in my desk drawer for hand-written and other hardcopy documents. Depending on which medium I am working in, I file items of interest into one of these two files as they occur to me or come across my desk. There are many different ways to accomplish the same goal. Arriving at supervision with a clear idea of what you want to talk about and the documents you want to refer to.

In structure, supervision looks a lot like a meeting. I always let my staff take the lead in constructing the supervision agenda. I ask them what they would like to discuss and then I tell them what I would like to discuss. Together, we prioritize the topics. Each of us has an opportunity to identify issues that absolutely must be discussed. By creating collaboratively developed goals and a collaboratively developed agenda, supervisees will generally develop a sense of ownership of the supervision process. They understand it is a formal process for assessing their ability to do their job, and they also see it as a resource that they, with their own initiative, can utilize. If they are having a problem, supervision is not something to fear; it is a place to obtain help in turning things around.

With a prioritized agenda, the expectation is established that the most important topics will be covered first. Those items that have not been covered will either be pended to the next supervision or an additional meeting time will be scheduled. Even if I have free time immediately after the scheduled supervision, I find it is not a good idea to extend supervision into “overtime.” This sends the message that my time for staff is unlimited. It also creates the expectation that it is not necessary to manage our supervision time together so that we complete our work within the block of scheduled time. Managing our time to the clock forces us to be goal-focused which in turn leads to our time being spent productively.

Adopt A Style Of Supervision That Is Adapted To The Individual You Are Working With

As a manager you need to start with the the assumption that the person you are supervising is most likely not like you and is not going to respond to a supervisor the way you would. Despite appearances and your “gut instinct” that tells you that “this person is like me,” you need to take the time to get to know each staff member and then develop an approach to supervision that is tailored specifically to them. People respond to direction, to authority, and to critical feedback in many different ways. . For you to be heard, your communication style and how you structure the time you spend in supervision should be adapted to the individual you are supervising.

Psychologists and related professionals have developed many different personality typologies to help us categorize and understand individual differences. Most people are familiar with personality types like “introvert” and “extrovert.” The most widely used personality profiling methodology used in the workplace is based on the work of the Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung. Called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator¹ this assessment tool is designed to identify how people process information, see the world, and make decisions. It divides people into variations of four different personality types. Many (often large) companies provide training to their managers, and sometimes their staff, on the Myers-Briggs. If it sounds intriguing to you, read about it and consider taking a course on how to use it. Generally, such trainings involve no more than a day of your time.

From my experience as a manager, the most critical factor that affects my style of supervision with individual staff is how they respond to taking direction. Some people love clear and concise marching orders. Without them they feel unfocused and sometimes even experience feelings of abandonment. At the other end of the continuum, there are individuals who will experience a high level of direction from their boss as stifling, demeaning and overbearing. These are the supervisees who just need to know in objective terms what is expected of them. Then, they should be left to their own devices to meet these expectations.

¹ For a quick overview, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs_Type_Indicator. For additional information, go to the Myers-Briggs website at <http://www.myersbriggs.org/>.

Neither approach is intrinsically better than the other. As discussed in Chapter 2, either approach can work well with most types of work, though certain organizations are going to have cultures and work processes that lend themselves more to one approach than to another. The kind of people who succeeds as marines are not as likely to succeed at Google, though they may very well succeed at an organization with a hierarchical culture. There is a lot of “buzz” in management journals and magazines about “flat” organizations vs. hierarchical organizations. (A flat organization has few or no levels of management between management and staff-level employees.) The conclusion of research on this topic is that some employees do well and like working in an organization with minimum hierarchy and others do well and like working in flat organizations. In other words, we are all different. Supervision that does not take individual difference into account is highly likely to fail – and when it does fail for this reason, it is the manager’s fault.

Since I do best when given lots of space to create my own path to accomplishing goals, I have been very reluctant as a manager to give staff very specific directions. I have assumed that other people react like me when being told what to do. This has set me up as a big disappointment to staff who actually wanted specific directions from me and lots of oversight. My assumptions were a projection of how I would have responded to a supervisor directing me in this way and “micro-managing” my work. When I finally realized that certain people welcomed and indeed flourished with an approach that I personally did not like, I became much more effective as a manager and supervisor.

Staff Goals

Another important factor to consider in your approach to supervision is each staff member’s career goals. The person who is eager to advance will want to be pushed in a way that would not be welcomed by a person who has no such ambitions. In America, “the land of opportunity,” we tend to assume that it is everyone’s dream to “get ahead.” It isn’t necessarily so. Even if this is important for a person at one stage of their career, it may not be true at another time. Individuals who are managers generally are ambitious. They rise to a level of authority not just because they are capable and wanting to earn more, but because it fulfills a shared cultural view of what a “successful” person does. There is nothing wrong with that. Every culture has its own version of “success,” but cultures, particularly American urban culture, are not monolithic. Alternative visions abound and individual views of success vary widely, often contradicting cultural stereotypes.

Being helpful to staff in their career development necessitates that you take these individual differences and choices into account. Some staff may feel that they have personal limitations that make career advancement a risky proposition. They would rather stick with what they know and do well, rather than expose themselves to the dangers of having a job with more responsibilities, more demands, higher expectations, and a chance of failure. These are reasonable concerns, and making a choice to stay out of the fast lane is not a poor choice or a sign of weakness. This may not be the choice you would make for yourself. Male managers particularly will tend to judge men who make

such a choice as “wimpy.” These are projections on the manager’s part. They are values expressed as “truths” that say much more about the manager’s fear than the supervisee’s sense of self and self-worth. Managers need to recognize that such projections cloud their judgment and impede their ability to assist staff to do their best work. In other words, if managers want to advance in their careers, they need to let it be OK for supervisees not to share their own personal ambitions.

Expressing Yourself

The words you use can range from formal, (*Jim, I think it is important that I provide you with some critical feedback I have received regarding your work on the Philips project*), to informal (*Houston, we’ve got a problem here on the Philips project. Do you copy?*) Whichever choice of words your experience with the employee has led you to use, your basic message should be the same. The point of word choice is to facilitate your staff being receptive to listening. The idea is not to be a chameleon or to express yourself in a way that feels unnatural or uncomfortable to you, but rather, within a range of word choices, to choose the ones that are most likely to connect with your staff and that you feel comfortable with.

The same caveat pertains to how you express yourself. Besides representing different word choices, the examples I provided in the previous paragraph also represent different modes of expression. It is very difficult to entirely separate out the content of language from how you express it. As noted earlier, music is a combination of melody and rhythm. Neither component exists independently as music in the absence of the other. The same is true of language: word content and expression are intrinsically intertwined. The formal choice of words, illustrated above, creates a distance between the person speaking and the person listening.

The second example illustrates a choice of language that is both informal and humorous. Humor breaks down the distance between people; it is a space where we are human together, where hierarchy disappears. As Victor Borge said, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people." Humor is tricky, however. It can bridge gaps or create them if it is off the mark. The staff member who is comfortable saying to me in a casual way, “I’ve had it with that diva, I quit,” is going to be receptive to my saying in response, “Take a ticket: Jim and Martha already quit today. Only two people get to quit per day on my watch. Better luck tomorrow.” Other staff members would be horrified if I spoke to them this way.

Variations on how you express yourself, like the words themselves, are endless. The idea to keep in mind is that you need to be flexible and adaptable while also being true to yourself and feeling comfortable. Find your zone. You will need to push your envelope a little to find out what your outer limits are, but it will be worth the effort. It may have been your mastery of a specific set of work skills that propelled you into management, but now that you are a manager, your success rests in large part on how wide you can stretch your comfort zone to be able to work effectively with the greatest range of people. Your job satisfaction depends on this too. If you don’t find a way to enjoy

the variability in how you work with different staff, you are not going to find the experience of being a manager all that satisfying. This in turn will contribute to your not being a very good manager. If this is the case, perhaps this is not the right career choice for you.

Provide Feedback. Get Feedback

The core function of supervision is to insure that employees are doing their jobs satisfactorily. Whatever your line of work, you hire different people to accomplish different things. Your business plan informs you that if collectively everyone does what they were hired to do, your organization will succeed. However, if you have a poor business plan, or the job descriptions of the people you hired were poorly written, even the person who “does their job” may not contribute to the organization’s success. Assuming this is not the case, supervision is the process that creates the feedback loop which informs both you and your staff if they are contributing to the organization’s success. Having this information puts both of you in a position to take corrective action.

On some regular basis (in most organizations it is once a year), there is a formal performance review. A goal of your regular supervision should be to address both problems and successes as they occur so that when it comes to doing the formal performance review, there are no surprises. Staff will feel double-crossed during a performance review if they are hearing about a problem for the first time. Managers may think they are being kind by not bringing up a performance problem during supervision. This “kindness” will be experienced as betrayal if a staff member's problem ends up getting them in trouble or limiting their advancement.

It is the manager's responsibility to periodically assess how well supervision is working from staff’s perspective. You can do this most immediately by asking at the end of supervision, “was this discussion helpful to you?” You will sometimes be quite surprised by what you hear. Often what we see as brilliant feedback goes unnoticed or something we said that we did not regard as all that significant or necessarily helpful was perceived as extremely useful by staff. When you hear from staff what they found valuable, write that down. Remembering what kind of feedback registers with different staff is going to help you enormously as a manager.

As I discussed previously regarding language, feedback is not just a matter of what words you use or the specific content you discuss, it is *how* you use these words and *how* you discuss the content that differentiates helpful feedback from feedback that has little value. Here are some examples:

Bryan’s father worked on the assembly line at a car manufacturing plant. Although Bryan works at a desk, his world view is shaped by his father’s nightly rundown of what happened at the plant. Bryan sees himself and his work through the eyes of his father. When his supervisor frames his questions or feedback in manner that assumes a logical, modular, linear work process, Bryan “gets it.”

Shana's first choice for a profession was acting. She wanted to be in the movies, but didn't quite have the talent or the confidence needed to make it. However, this dream and vision of herself still frames how she views herself at work. Feedback that takes the form of a theatrical review goes over great with her. *Siskel and Ebert give your last report two thumbs up. Mixed reviews for the first draft of the one you are working on now, however*

Kevin loves books. He majored in English literature. This was enjoyable, but provided limited employment options, so he became an information systems specialist. His manager logically concludes that a highly technical approach for providing feedback will work best with Kevin. Wrong. Appearances, in this case, are deceiving. If the manager listens attentively to Kevin, it would be clear that he is always telling stories. Kevin sees the world in narrative form: there is a beginning, middle and end to everything and lots of interesting plot twists. He does not see the world in ones and zeros as one might expect. An effective manager is going to frame his feedback to Kevin as part of a narrative: "Kevin, the plot line of what went wrong in your last installation is sounding like an episode from Seinfeld, with Kramer in charge. What's up?"

Expect Emotion

Supervision is a process that may lead to a higher than normal level of emotional expression by staff. There are many factors that contribute to this. Work matters to people. If your staff are comfortable with you, they are going to tell you what is not going well for them at work, and quite often, they are also going to tell you what is not going well for them outside work. A child being sick or the breaking up with a love interest is deeply emotional. Try as they will to control their emotions with you, staff's emotions are likely to come through. Our emotions are an inextricable component of communication.

As I have said, supervision is necessarily a time of judgment. Most people care deeply about how they are being viewed by their supervisor, so it is not uncommon or unnatural that they feel nervous and vulnerable during supervision, especially if they know that there is a problem with their work performance or they are having personal problems or concerns. When this is the case, there is a high likelihood that supervision is going to generate more emotions for staff than a non-supervisory conversation you have with them or a conversation they might have with their peers.

Heightened states of emotion can take many forms and they vary greatly from person to person and from emotion to emotion. Some people raise their voices, some actually get quieter (because they are struggling to contain their feelings.) Some people will look away from you and some will stare you down. One person may shrink and hide from any feelings of sadness, while staying angry for weeks on end over seemingly "small" issues.

Crying can mean many things: joy, sadness, or feeling overwhelmed. The list goes on and on. Tears signal strong emotions, but exactly what emotion that is often requires asking. Most often, the context in which tears are flowing – or visibly being held back – can tell you what the tears mean. Sometimes it is not at all clear what they mean. In these situations, just ask. “I see you feel strongly about this, but I am not sure what that feeling is.” Your staff will appreciate this question. (or your version of the question, it is likely to vary from situation to situation). To ask about staff are feeling does not mean that you are prying into their private thoughts. The question demonstrates that you care about them and you are interested in understanding what they are trying to communicate.

This is not news to most women. They are very likely to understand that tears are part of human expression, and not a big deal. Quite often guys are afraid of tears; they see crying as a sign of weakness – a breakdown or a loss of control. It is easy to see where these views and these fears come from. Many of our subcultures reinforce a view of manliness that includes very negative messages about emotional expression. If you are a manager and you have similar views about expressions of feeling, you will want to honestly evaluate these feelings and secure professional assistance, if necessary. If you want to be a good manager and connect with your supervisees, you will need to find a way to become comfortable with listening to individuals express intense emotions.

Challenging Staff and Bad Apples

There is a part of being a manager that we all hate: supervising staff who do not complete their work, disrupt the work of others, do not follow directions, and undermine our authority and leadership. There are days when the best of us just want to stay home and curl up under a blanket or say something mean and stupid. I have wracked my brain trying to find a way to avoid making the distinction between “challenging staff” and “bad apples.” It would be so much simpler to choose only one conceptual framework and lump management of all difficult and exasperating staff into it. Yes, it would be easier, but ultimately it would not be helpful.

Managers need to make decisions and that requires making distinctions among staff. There are those whose problems and limitations are potentially remediable and those whose problems are not. The former you want to work with in good faith to help become successful. Then, there are the “bad apples.” You need to do what you can to move them out of your organization ASAP.

Coming to a determination regarding whose problems are remediable and whose are not requires a consideration of many factors, the most important of which is your assessment of your own abilities and limitations as a manager. Just because YOU lack the ability to help an employee does not mean this employee should be shown the door. It is quite possible that a manager with a different skill set and range of management experience than yours could help turn this employee

around. We all have our limitations. You are not a terrible manager if you cannot find a way to be helpful to all challenging staff.

On the other hand, if it is your determination that a supervisee does not have the essential skills for the job and cannot be taught these skills by someone else in your organization, as the manager you will need to confront the employee about his or her limitations. When appropriate, help your supervised begin the process of thinking about what might be a better line of work to pursue. Simultaneously, you will need to follow your organization's progressive discipline process. In the end, if staff cannot perform the work that is required, they need to be let go.

So, what is a "bad apple?" This is a person who intentionally takes advantage of the organization and the people who work for it. There are many varieties of bad apples. For example, bad apples know the job requires 40 hours of work, but consistently look for ways to work less. They have no personal investment in the work they do and care less if the organization they work for succeeds or fails. It is possible that they have a pathological investment in seeing themselves as losers and try, generally unconsciously, to find a way to fail. There are many paths to becoming a "bad apple." It is the manager's job to understand how or why this occurred. Your job is to protect the bad apples' co-workers, your organization, and yourself. You accomplish this by terminating such employees as quickly as possible.

Once you have decided on termination, use every legal means possible to hasten the departure. For any infraction that allows you to immediately terminate such an employee, such as theft of company property, take advantage of that opportunity. Do not provide a second chance. For lesser infractions, document each and every one, then move as quickly as possible through the progressive discipline process. It is quite possible your rules allow an oral warning on Monday, a written warning for a second infraction on Wednesday, and termination on Friday for a third infraction. If you have followed your process to the "T" and have good documentation and good reason to terminate employment, then use it. Stretching out the process longer than it needs to be is not in the best interest of the organization or anyone involved.

If you have a Human Resources Department (HR), always consult with HR in these situations. They are the experts in these matters and can provide you with guidance and support. You will need both. Terminating an employee for reasons less severe than gross infractions of company rules or the breaking of the law is always tricky. We have created complex employment laws because the ways in which some employers can take advantage of their employees are numerous and complex. Employees need and deserve legal protection (e.g., whistleblower statutes). Your HR Department or your legal advisor can guide you through the process of firing a bad apple without breaking the law and without putting your and/or your organization at risk of a lawsuit.

It is very important not to confuse a person with mental illness or a person going through emotional difficulties at home with a person who is a bad apple. Mental illness can sometimes create a temporary situation in which a person seems to have some of the attributes of a bad apple. The

employee may become so mistrustful of others, disruptive or uncooperative that you want to terminate this individual. The key words in this discussion are “temporary situation.” As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 7, people can and do recover from mental illness. They can also recover from addiction. How you supervise staff under these circumstances (discussed in this same chapter) can facilitate the process of their recovery or hinder it.

Growth and Human Limitations

Managers are not psychotherapists. Employees do not come to work for the express purpose of achieving personal emotional growth. On the other hand, a client contracts with his or her therapist to be a change agent. The client will retain or fire a therapist based on how helpful the therapist is judged to be. Managers have no such contract with their staff. Managers hire staff to fulfill their work responsibilities. Employees will be terminated if their performance is inadequate. However, the emotional maturity, the ability to form constructive relationships, and the general mental health of employees directly impact their work performance. Managers and psychotherapists therefore necessarily deal with many of the same issues, but from different perspectives and with different goals in mind.

Managers, however, do have an obligation to facilitate *professional* growth. The army private sees herself as someday being a captain. The person who is an administrative assistant today hopes to someday be a manager. Someone digging a trench dreams of someday owning his or her own contracting company or supervising others. The supervisors of all of these people have an obligation to assist their staff in developing the skills and having the work experiences that facilitate their forward career movement. This does not have to be complicated. The guy who shows up to work on time, digs the trench exactly as he was told, and has some good, practical ideas about how to do his job better and faster should be listened to and provided an opportunity to test his ideas. If he succeeds, he should be given increasing responsibilities or, at a minimum, an excellent letter of reference to a company that can provide him with an opportunity for advancement. This is not only good for the employee, it is good for the organization. A business that demonstrates consistently that it rewards excellent work will get excellent work from its employees. It will outcompete organizations that do not see workforce development as the responsibility of each and every one of its managers.

On a very practical level, this means weaving discussions of career goals into every formal performance review. It also means framing discussions of day-to-day work assignments in a manner that help staff understand how a job well done today can lead to more complex, interesting, and rewarding work down the road. It is essential when you do this that you have a realistic understanding of your staff’s capabilities and career interests. Not all staff have the skills to take on more responsibilities or want to. Sometimes this reluctance represents the kind of anxiety we all experience when contemplating doing something new, something that is beyond our current reach. When this is the case, your support and encouragement can help your staff manage this anxiety and

move forward. However, sometimes this reluctance to seize career advancement opportunities is the expression of a conscious, personal choice – as discussed earlier in this chapter. There may be many reasons for staff to be satisfied with their current level of responsibility and compensation. It is not the manager's job to try and change the employee's mind. To do so is disrespectful. If you continue to press them, they are likely to find another job.

Whether or not they chose to take on increasing responsibilities, employees need to be open to expanding their skill sets. Workers who do not, will eventually be replaced by workers who do. Organizations that do not support their workers' ongoing skill development will eventually be out-competed by organizations that do.

A more subtle and challenging situation is when managers impose limitations on ourselves that are arbitrary and/or irrational. These ideas and self-images hinder job performance and impede future professional development.

- If we have had a bad experience with one math teacher, we may erroneously conclude that we are bad at math. Later in life when career advancement requires the construction and management of a budget, we may say “thanks, but no thanks.” At the time we make this decision we are patting ourselves on the back for honestly acknowledging our limitations when in fact, we have passed up a great opportunity for advancement based on an erroneous assessment of our abilities.
- Because we had a parent who was a tyrant we may pass up an opportunity to manage, not realizing that we have neither inherited the parent's personality nor modeled their interpersonal style.
- More commonly, because we had family or work experiences that did not allow for failure, we are afraid to take risks. This is a significant challenge for the manager. A fairly large percentage of the work force is risk averse. Such risk aversion may be even higher in cultures that do not promote individual expression, but even in entrepreneurial America, our internal wiring and early learning experiences leave many of us inclined to play it safe. It takes active encouragement and support for a person to overcome this inclination.

It is a manager's responsibility to provide that kind of support and encouragement. Most of us can become reasonably comfortable with taking modest risks. Do not jump to the conclusion that staff member's first “no” is his/her final “no.” Discuss the idea. Let it sit. Circle back to it in a month and check to see if during the intervening time your supervisee has become more comfortable with the idea of trying something new.

There are two exceptions to this general advice. Sometimes you can detect in a person's body language and intonation that their first “no” has a ring of finality to it. When that is the case, either go with their “no” or check in one more time a few weeks later. At worst, double-checking may

create a moment of discomfort for you and your staff, but it also could start a dialogue, on a deeper level, regarding his or her professional aspirations and willingness to take risks to achieve them.

The second exception is when your staff's "no" has a ring of transference to it. As discussed in Chapter 4, the meaning of "no" under these circumstances will be complicated. Most likely, you don't want to go there. If this is the case, accept "no" and move on.

The Rewards Of Being A Supervisor

You might be thinking to yourself, "Supervision can be a real hassle." This feeling is understandable. Some of what I have discussed regarding supervision involves difficult and sometimes unpleasant interactions. However, these are relatively rare and rewards of supervision well done are big – though sometimes these rewards can be subtle.

The least subtle rewards are staff's direct expression of appreciation for your support, mentoring, honesty, concern, and willingness to confront and deal with difficult situations and interactions. If you receive a "Happy Bosses' Day" card and it expresses sentiments that you find positive and believable, keep it on your desk. You can look at it from time to time to remind yourself that your staff have recognized your effort and appreciate what you do for them. Keeping it on your desk also sends a message that you value their recognition.

A more subtle indication of their appreciation and valuing of their relationship with you, in my experience, is when staff kid you, when they take the risk of making fun of you in a playful way. It takes a lot of mutual trust for this to occur, which is a sign of a strong, positive bond. Some managers may misinterpret gentle teasing as an expression of hostility. Certainly teasing can take on this dimension and then it most definitely is not an expression of appreciation. However, when that dimension is absent, sit back and enjoy the teasing. Tease back if you have that talent (I don't, so I don't try), but sure you tease back in the same positive spirit with which the teasing was delivered.

As in parenting, the biggest reward is seeing your staff grow and watching their skills and responsibilities expand as their capabilities and self-confidence grows. This is a remarkable accomplishment. Be proud of it. Enjoy it even though success often means that the staff you have helped the most to grow will leave you, assuming positions that don't report to you. Do everything you can to find employment opportunities within your organization for those who are ready for them. Your business has been the funder of their growth; ideally it should be the beneficiary.

The most consistent reward of doing supervision is the pleasure of problem solving. For me, being a psychologist, I get the most pleasure when I help my staff solve their own problems. This happens when I play a facilitating role, helping them to think through the pros and cons of various

solutions. This approach leads to the most skill development and the most growth in self-confidence. Sometimes it is necessary to play a more active role in solving problems.

When skills grow, your staff is more productive. This in turn means that your organization is going to benefit. That is a significant reward of supervision done well. Those who supervise you (we all have a boss, even the CEO) are likely to notice and when they do, this could and should mean a tangible reward for you. Supervision is a major component of a manager's job. Rewards generally go to those who do their job well.

A less tangible, but still valuable reward of doing supervision is the quality of the time you spend with your employee when your door is closed and the phone calls, emails, texts etc. are not being responded to. Supervision can and should provide a calm, thoughtful space in the middle of what is often a fast-paced, sometimes frenetic work environment. It also provides an opportunity to interact one-on-one without interruption, focusing on the human issues that weave throughout our work as well as each employee's tasks and goals. Such conversations have a different quality than our generally brief, information laden communications. It is this different quality that usually makes supervision a welcome time of the day. When we skip supervision, generally as a result of competing demands on our time, we lose both the tangible benefits that result from this activity, as well as the thoughtful, relaxed space that supervision frequently affords.