



# UNIT-7      Supervising Others

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Adjust to the supervisor's role with confidence.
- ✓ Develop your skills in listening, asking questions, resolving conflict, and giving feedback to employees.
- ✓ Identify key attitudes that you can develop to enhance your supervisory skills.
- ✓ Use time management and planning techniques to maximize your success.
- ✓ Develop a technique for giving instructions that are clear and understood.
- ✓ Understand the importance of developing good relationships with employees and peers, so you are seen as fair and consistent.

## Unit 7

# Supervising Others

## Responsibilities of a Supervisor

As a supervisor, you are responsible for many things. Whether you supervise a small group of three, or a larger group of 25, you are also reporting to a manager of your own and looking after your team.

*In this session, you'll consider your role in context of the people that you work with.*

### Making Connections

**What are my responsibilities to management?**

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**What are my responsibilities to my workgroup?**

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**What are my responsibilities to myself?**

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## Key Behaviors and Attitudes

There's an old saying that attitude is everything. One thing is for sure: attitude is a huge factor in your success at anything, including leadership.

*In this session*, you'll learn about some important attitude shifts that you can make, including creating cues, motivation, and lifelong learning.

## Building the Right Environment

We can talk about ourselves in terms of leadership and set up a plan, but as the saying goes, "The proof is in the pudding."

When you make a series of decisions about what you intend to do, and you start doing them, your behavior is in line with and supporting your intention. If you say you will do something and then allow yourself to be distracted, or you lose the commitment to a particular goal, then your behavior is not supporting your stated intention.

In order to keep your behavior on track, we encourage you to leverage the teaching of Christopher Neck and Charles Manz in their excellent book *Mastering Self-Leadership: Empowering Yourself for Personal Excellence*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. They write about the power of positive and negative cues in our environment.

**Negative cues** are things that distract or stop you from doing the things you want to be doing. If you want to cut down on the amount of time you spend watching television, but you have a 52 inch screen and 130 channels, you have a negative cue set up. The temptation to turn the television on and then start scanning programs or flipping channels is very evident. On the other hand, having a smaller screen, fewer channels, or a stack of tempting books next to your favorite chair can help distract you from the television.

**Positive cues** are things that influence you to do things that meet your goals. That stack of books handy when you sit down to relax, an ergonomic chair to work from, or a good long distance plan when you need to be making a lot of calls, are all positive cues. If your work involves a lot of driving, then keeping your car clean and in good shape is another positive cue. Positive cues can also include calendars with good scheduling programming, reminders, sticky notes, task lists, and being with people who are reminders of your desired behaviors.

## Motivation from Within

**The things that motivate us are as different as the people we know.** Do you know what motivates you?

- What motivated Walt Disney to create cartoons and capture them on film?
- What motivated Mohammed Ali to become a world champion boxer?
- What motivated Stephen King to be an internationally renowned writer?

The things that motivate us include the **rewards** we get from doing the things that we want to do. This doesn't mean that you should be self-serving without thought to other people's needs, or to the laws or social mores that govern the way we act. It does mean that there are things that we do where the act of doing is its own reward and that in itself is motivating.

Other times, there are more **tangible rewards**. A reward can be simple, like time to read a book or having lunch with a mentor. These kinds of rewards help to motivate us quite easily and naturally. Other times, **more sophisticated rewards** are needed to encourage us to complete tasks that we don't find naturally rewarding.

### **Making Connections**

Consider the following questions in terms of your own motivation.

**Are you able to incorporate enough activities that you enjoy in your work?**

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**Is there a space at work where you can work comfortably and effectively?**

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**Do you spend more time thinking about the parts of your job that you do like rather than the parts that you don't enjoy?**

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**Do you point your thinking toward pleasantries of your job, rather than things that are unpleasant?**

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## Committing to Lifelong Learning

As you may have already figured out, **lifelong learning** means that we recognize and appreciate that learning does not stop when we leave school. With the rapid advances that technology makes, our international relationships, and global economies, the ability to learn and continue to seek knowledge are essential aspects of life today. Lifelong learning is part of leadership; it is a commitment by leaders to seek knowledge continuously.

**Employers** demonstrate their own appreciation for lifelong learning when they write up a job posting that includes equivalencies, with statements like, “A university degree or equivalent is required.” This demonstrates that while qualifications are valued, so is the learning that comes away from school.

**If you commit to lifelong learning**, you will keep your finger on the pulse of things that are changing and developing in your environment and around the world. This doesn’t mean that you are restricted in what you learn, either. No matter what your field of work or study is, your value and your understanding of the world increases as you learn about all kinds of subjects. Geography, geology, anthropology, music, art, sports, history, languages, business, technology, agriculture, and cooking will all enrich what you know, whether you work in a broad area such as science, or a narrower one such as micro-brewed beer.

In his book *The Outliers*, **Malcolm Gladwell** describes how people become successful at what they do through the value of practice. He proposes the theory that it takes about 10,000 hours of practice to master something, whether it is a sport, music, or academic field. Human nature is for people to look at successful people and say, “Wow, she sure lucked out,” or, “He did that so easily.” These statements are short-sighted as we know that success and mastery do not normally come easily: they require attention, learning, and plenty of practice.

This concept does not mean that you can create absolutely anything for yourself. Although it might seem like a nice ideal, it just isn’t realistic. Most of us do not wield the power to change economies, influence politics, or stop weather disasters. We do, however, have the ability to choose our behavior and to lead ourselves.

### Learning Plans

A learning plan is very specific, although it can be presented in many ways. Whatever form it takes, it should be meaningful to you, looked at regularly, and flexible enough to reflect your evolving life and goals.

For example, if you finish a two year college program and start your first full time position, you might create a learning plan that includes finishing a degree related to the college program. Or, you may want to attend a workshop twice a year that helps keep you up to date in the field.





Your specific dreams might include:

- Move into a senior management role.
- Finish my supervisor's certificate.
- Learn how to cook authentic Italian cuisine.
- Live and work in Italy for two years.

Now, clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others. So where do we start?

## Setting Goals with SPIRIT

Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

### **Specific**

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Be a great supervisor" is pretty ambiguous; "Achieve a top rating in the Supervisory category on my next performance review" is specific.

### **Prizes**

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to reorganize your office, for example, you might purchase a piece of artwork after you get the clutter cleaned out.

### **Individual**

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your manager wants you to reorganize your office, but the layout works for you, you're not going to want to work towards the goal.

### **Review**

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

### **Inspiring**

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.



**Employees have confidence in someone who is willing and able to plan their work well for them.**  
Nothing breaks down morale like continual crises.

**Employees appreciate routine.**

They like going home at night fairly certain of what they will do tomorrow and that the tasks will be ones they feel able to do. If you show them you can schedule work smoothly, employees will feel more like pitching in when the occasional emergency or a project that requires extra time and energy from them.

## Getting Things In Order

In some workplaces, it seems to be impossible to get everything done. This session will help you to prioritize what does need to be done and sort it out from things that you could do, but may not have the time to finish.

Brian Tracy wrote a great little book called *Eat that Frog!* that helps people get over procrastinating. He also plays with a couple of quotes from the writer Mark Twain that help us to remember what we are meant to do, and how to stop putting things off. The idea is this:

“If the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long.”

We are often guilty of procrastinating, and this stops us from getting things done. And as you likely already know, when we procrastinate about one thing, it can also interfere with getting other things done.

Here is another quote from Mark Twain that we like: “The rule of frog eating is this: If you have to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first.”

This quote is about taking the frog – the thing we are procrastinating about – and getting on with eating it. Clearly, after you’ve eaten a great big frog, everything else you have to do that day is going to be easier than what you started off with.

By procrastinating, that thing we are putting off often becomes a bigger and more daunting task than it really is, and the more we think about (rather than doing something about it), the more space it can take up in our head.

This is a very simple concept that can have a profound impact on our results. There is no self-satisfaction in knowing that we are letting things get away from us, and we feel better and more motivated when we go ahead and get these things crossed off our to do lists.

## Making Connections

Do you have a frog or two waiting for you at work?

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What is standing in the way of eating that frog?

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## Mastering E-mail

### Putting Things in Perspective

One of the greatest demands on our time is e-mail, and so it is important to put it in proper perspective with the demands of our jobs. We've become a society where we expect replies to e-mail immediately, and where we send e-mails out to more people (and with more frequency) than is often required.

While e-mail has become a benefit in many ways, it is also a huge contributor to people's stress. And it's not enough to just have e-mail you can check on a computer somewhere either; many managers are issued a hand-held device that allows them to be connected to their e-mail 24/7.

### Calculating Your Time

If you consider e-mail in terms of time, let's see what kind of an impact it has on your day.

How many e-mails do you receive in an average day? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of those e-mails do you reply to? \_\_\_\_\_

**How many e-mails do you send (not including the replies above)? \_\_\_\_\_**

Let's say that an average e-mail takes you three minutes (and that is only if they are short and need very quick thinking on your part). **Take the total from above, multiply it by three minutes per incident, and put the total number of minutes per day that you manage e-mail right here: \_\_\_\_\_.**

Since we normally have lots of additional tasks in the day in addition to e-mail (like meetings, administration, performance management, and coaching), is it any wonder that we struggle to get through the day? Add to this the time you might take to read reports, meeting minutes or agendas, process information or work on projects, the need for a healthy lunch, and perhaps some time spent invested in your people, and it's no wonder we are often looking for more time.

## **Tips for Tackling the E-Mail Monster**

Check your e-mail only a few times a day. (We suggest first thing in the morning, after lunch, and at the end of the day. However, you should find two periods that work for you.) This will stop your e-mail from interrupting you over and over again and allow you to get more done. You can set most e-mail programs up to check for new messages on your schedule and turn the notifications off altogether so that you get to your mail when it makes sense for you to do so.

For those of you who are addicted to your e-mail, this can be a hard switch to make. If you have trained people so that they know you answer e-mails 24/7, and always right away, you will have to adjust their expectations so that they know how often you check your e-mail. Try it for a week and then see just how much more relaxed your work pace becomes, and how much more you can accomplish.

Try to read an e-mail only one time and decide what you want to do with it as you read it. Our rule of thumb is that if it takes three minutes or less, reply immediately. Any longer than that and you need to set it up as a task or in your calendar, or delegate it to someone else. Do not leave e-mails open to answer when you get a chance. When we do this, we tend to have multiple tabs open, and then we have to re-read all those open e-mails to decide what to do with them.

Consider whether e-mail is the best way to deal with something, or whether another method is more efficient. E-mails that go to large groups of people and have multiple strings of replies and information are often best dealt with in a meeting or conference call.

## **Time Management Tips**

Time can get away on all of us, but if this happens regularly, we will never get caught up! Here are some time management tips that are collected from efficiency experts. You will find that if you implement even a few techniques at a time, your productivity will improve enormously.

- You can save yourself an hour a day by getting organized. Did your mother ever tell you that there was "a place for everything and everything in its place"? The lesson there is to put things away and know where you put them. There is no need to do a big clean up once a year if you can take a half-hour once a week to file, sort, and keep things organized.

- It is important to identify and operate within two time horizons: short and long term. Anticipating events allows things to get done in the short term which contribute to achieving long-term objectives.
- An up-to-date master calendar can be your most helpful planning tool.
- When things begin to get hectic, a "Things to do today" list can help you focus your attention on the highest priority items.
- Action planning worksheets, milestone charts, and PERT diagrams are excellent planning aids when properly used.
- Planning contact with colleagues and staff will help minimize the disruption of their schedules. Keep a file for each person you meet with on a regular basis, with items to be discussed.
- The most effective approaches to planning are those tailored to meet individual needs. Concepts, procedures, and worksheets are all subject to modification to fit individual circumstances.
- Experts say nothing should be attempted without prior planning, but there must be flexibility.

For every plan you make, cover these points:

- What
- Where
- When
- How
- Who

## **Putting Plans into Action with Scheduling Aids**

Some useful short-term planning aids:

- A daily to-do list
- A planner with at least a week at a glance
- A monthly project list
- Project planning worksheets

## **Organizing Your Work Area and Your Paperwork**

A clean desk is not a sign of an empty mind! Don't fall prey to the false notion that a messy work area means you're busy and therefore productive. Being active is not the same as being productive.

Here are some tips for organizing your work area.

### **Do it now!**

Anything that takes less than 30 minutes should be done as it comes up. Otherwise, we tend to procrastinate.

### **Dump.**

Throw out or take home all the things you have collected that you don't need or use.

**Sort and group.**

Your desk should be organized logically: pencils and pens in one place, another place for letterhead and envelopes. Have a basket for projects and another one for priority items so that you can locate the things you need when you want them. You can use the same kind of system on your computer so that you can find your working files. Once a project is complete, move it into an appropriate folder for retention.

**Set up a system.**

Use an electronic or paper planner to jot down your daily to-do list and schedule in any tasks that will take longer than 30 minutes to do. Prioritize each item so that you know what to work on, and make sure that you stick to the list (with some flexibility for emergencies, but making sure you get back to priorities as soon as possible).

**Don't save papers you can easily find somewhere else.**

Don't ask yourself, "Is there a chance I will need this someday?" because the answer is nearly always yes. Ask yourself, "If I know I need this, do I know how to find it?" One of our biggest time-wasters is searching for information that we know we have but we can't find. If a piece of paper or a file is important enough to save, it is important enough to file for retrieval.

**Get colorful!**

One technique that we like is to use color-coded files for paper. If you put your current projects in a red or purple file, let your colleagues know that they must not, under any circumstances, cover up a purple file on your desk. That way you will always know where they are. Once you are finished with that particular project, move the contents to a permanent beige file for storage, or have them scanned and filed on your computer in the appropriate place.

With electronic files we also recommend that you update the properties section of your documents. In that section, you can add keywords or tags as well as update the author's name. These functions will help enormously if you have to search for the file later on.

## The Parts of a Good Plan

### The Five Parts

A good plan has five parts.



### The Master Plan

This is the big picture: what will be done by when, by whom. For example: A new office building will be built by June 1, 2020, at a cost not to exceed ten million dollars.

Remember to always have a Plan B, because things can change.

### The Supporting Plan

This plan includes the details. Continuing with the example of building a new office, some possible supporting plan points could include:

- Building will be 5,000 square feet
- Will need built-in wireless Internet service
- Building will be located at 510 Acme Lane

## Usage of Resources

What time, people, and resources will be needed to complete the plan?

## Responsibility Matrix

Who will be responsible for what, and why?

## Communication Plan

Who will need to know what during the project? How will you let them know?

## The Next Steps

Setting goals or targets is just the start of the planning process. Each goal or target needs strategies or action plans to help you get to where you are headed. For example, if one goal for your department is to reduce overtime by 10%, just exactly what do you plan to do to accomplish that goal? Wishful thinking and dreaming have no place in your action plan.

Determine what resources you need, in terms of time, people, money, or equipment. Can you get them? Are they ready? What needs to be done? What if they aren't available?

Finally, the planning stage gives way to implementation. Research indicates that for every hour of planning time, you save three or four hours of work time, so don't fall victim to the common belief that you don't have time to plan. You don't have time not to!

## Suggestions to Maximize Planning and Prioritizing

- Write a to-do list. Everybody knows this is an effective time-management strategy and yet hardly anybody actually does it. Put your to-do list where you can see it (on your computer or on paper) so you know what you need to accomplish.
- Plan tomorrow today. Take five or ten minutes at the end of the day to make up tomorrow's to-do list so you can start fresh tomorrow and not spend the rest of today fretting about it. At the end of the week, it can be very helpful to not just plan the first day of next week but to list those things you REALLY want to accomplish next week.
- Revise your plan. Stay flexible. Check your to-do list several times throughout the day, and if necessary, postpone, rearrange, and even procrastinate on purpose.
- Make at least one appointment with yourself each day. Give yourself one hour of prime time every day to work on top priority items. This is uninterrupted time at a time when you are personally most effective. (How can you do this? Come in early, stay late, trade

- off time with a colleague, work in another area, close your door, use your voice mail, and/or write in a one-hour appointment with yourself on the calendar.)
- Consolidate activities. Shorten your to-do list by grouping like items together. Group activities by category: make calls, work on reports, etc. Or group priorities into A, B, and C priorities. Watch out for “C” priorities that don’t need to be done at all or could be delegated to someone else.
- Make time every day to work on your progress tasks, the priorities that will move you forward and tie into your goals. Don’t put these on the back burner.
- Use a system that works for you. Some people prefer a paper day planner while others use computer software. Just be consistent.
- Remember that your top priorities are the tasks your manager has asked you to do.

Remember to document what you do, because someone is sure to ask.

#### Session Eight: Active Listening Techniques

Are you a good listener? Some of us are better at listening than others. Others of us do a good job of looking like we are listening, but we’re not really taking in what is being said. What kind of listener are you?

*In this session, we’re learning how to hear what is said to us by listening actively and attentively.*

## About Active Listening

**Active listening** means that we try to understand things from the speaker’s point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

## Key Listening Skills

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

### Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker’s feelings adds an extra dimension of listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

## Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

## Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are genuine in using them.

**Physical indicators** include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- "Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"
- "So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?"

## Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- **Make a decision to listen.** Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- **Don't interrupt** people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments until they have finished.
- Keep your **eyes** focused on the speaker and your **ears** tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Carry a **notebook** or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.

- When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

## Giving Feedback

Are you able to provide feedback that is heard and acted on? How do you feel when people offer you feedback on your own behavior and results? Some of us dread hearing feedback as much as we don't like giving it, yet it is something all of us need.

*In this session*, you'll learn about a helpful method of offering feedback, and work on developing your own skills.

## Six Characteristics of Effective Feedback

One goal of feedback is for it to contribute to an improvement in future performance. Even when it does not lead to a desired level of performance, the feedback meeting itself provides the platform to discuss expectations, results, motivation, and how to succeed. For employees who choose not to perform at an adequate level, the meeting serves as a benchmark within the larger performance management arena. If an employee refuses to comply, has been supported and coached to do well, and continues to refuse, then the supervisor has the necessary means to move into a disciplinary performance management plan.

When feedback is perceived to be negative (because of our own behavior, or perhaps because it is not well delivered), people will naturally try to avoid it, or at least minimize the negative effects. However, we need to let people know that it can be a great tool for personal development, especially when we include information on both the issues and the possible solutions. With this in mind, let's delve deeper into the six major characteristics of effective feedback.

### **In Private**

Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers. (This should be apparent without having to state it, but sometimes we get excited and forget!)

### **Balanced**

Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. We recommend that you avoid the older form of "sandwich approach" (by making a positive comment, a negative, and then a positive).

However, you should still start any feedback with a positive comment about some aspect of the employee's work. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build. Feedback that is delivered in specific terms and in a sincere manner is usually accepted well, even when we are receiving criticism.

### **Relevant**

Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything, or asking for a sophisticated looking brochure when there is no budget provided for the proper paper and licensed photography, only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

### **Specific**

Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. "You seem unmotivated," is not nearly as helpful as, "You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week."

### **Documented**

Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don't rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard, when you should be available to monitor what is going on yourself.

### **Personal (In the Right Way)**

Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaningless to an employee. "We just don't seem able to get out error-free invoices," is not as constructive as, "Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them." Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don't make a personal attack on the individual.

## Skill Building

Think of somebody at work or at home that has earned some positive feedback. In the space below, describe the situation and the people involved.

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Think of somebody at work or at home that you would like to give constructive criticism to. In the space below, describe the situation and the people involved.

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## Receiving Feedback

Accepting criticism from others can be really difficult. We often hear criticism as a very personal attack on behavior that we already may not be proud of. It helps to think about criticism as feedback and as something to help you improve. This is what we refer to as **positive intent**.

While you may hesitate in doing this, it can be an outstanding opportunity for you to grow. It also means that you are going to follow up a feedback session by asking the other individual if your feedback was helpful, sensitive to their needs, and respectful.

Here are some tips on accepting criticism.

### **Listen attentively.**

Make sure you understand the criticism and what needs improvement. You may even want to paraphrase the other person's remarks.

**Ask for details.**

Find out as much as you can about the incident(s) described. Ask lots of open ended questions to gather all the information that you can.

**Find something to agree with.**

You don't need to say that you were wrong if you weren't, but it does do a lot for your own integrity for you to say that you were wrong if you were. Of equal importance, you need to acknowledge the person's right to criticize and to recognize the importance of the person's concerns. If you cannot agree with the other person about any aspect of the criticism being offered, you could be perceived as rejecting the person as well.

**Try not to take their comments personally.**

If they've learned anything about offering feedback, they will know they need to speak to your behaviors and not your personal self, but not everyone knows this. Consider that they are being brave and offering feedback (not an easy thing for most people to do) as an opportunity to improve yourself.

## Giving Instructions

There's an old expression that you can attract more flies with honey than you can with vinegar. The point is to always be kind and to treat your team with respect as a way to encourage a productive workplace.

*In this session*, you'll consider how giving instructions impacts the results that you get, as we all interpret things in our own way.

## Understanding Learning Styles

We can learn by seeing, by hearing, and by doing, but we usually have a preference for one method or another. Depending on what we are learning, we may need things shared with us in different ways. When we are working with employees, we must use all three of these learning styles in order to make our instructions stick.

Do you need to see someone's name written down before you can remember it? That is an indication (not a guarantee) that you are a visual learner. This means you learn best by seeing your new skill being done by someone else, or you need to see directions on a map before you understand where you are going. On the other hand, if you need to actually say somebody's name before you remember it, or if you only understand a problem by talking it through, or reading it out loud, you may be an aural learner, meaning you need to hear what you are trying to understand.

Still others aren't really going to get the gist of any skill until they actually do it themselves, or incorporate some kind of physical activity. Kinesthetic learners have to be doing something, like completing the spreadsheet, or talking with the customer. During training they may be doodling or appear distracted, but they need the physical activity in order to register what's being said.

## Obstacles to Effective Instructions

### Lack of Preparation

Inadequate preparation on our part can lead to problems. If we aren't clear about the steps involved, forget to tell the employee which steps require independent action and which must go by the book, or try to foresee potential problems and forewarn the employee, we can create obstacles for everyone later on. What steps can we take to make sure this doesn't happen?

### Vague Instructions

Many people are afraid of asking questions because they are afraid of appearing stupid, so we don't always get the feedback we need about how others perceive our instructions. Similarly, we aren't always aware of how we are making our needs known. For example, when you want others to do things your way, you can choose orders, requests, or suggestions.

### Jumping to Conclusions

Don't assume what the employee knows or doesn't know. Ask questions, and make your instructions a two-way process.

## Orders, Requests, and Suggestions

If you go through a drive-through to order a meal, do you ask for the meal (with a polite use of please and thank you), demand the meal (by listing what you want), or do it some other way? We all have our own style, and some styles get different results than others.

*In this session, you learn the nuances of ordering, requesting, and making suggestions in the quest to get the results you want.*

## Defining the Terms

**Giving orders** is a telling style of getting things done. It's still used frequently, even though most of us hate to be told what to do. As a supervisor, only give orders when you have to (for example, because of a safety issue or because of an emergency). In giving orders, we would expect an employee to obey instantly without hesitation. We shouldn't use them more than absolutely needed, and when we need that instant reaction. (For example: "Jamie, shut off the water valve.")

**Making requests** are our usual way of getting things done. We ask rather than tell, and we apply good manners to what we do. (For example: "Jamie, would you please shut off that valve.") We will use these most of the time. To further aid in getting the response we want, it can be useful to include a time frame for the task. (Example: "Jamie, can you get that valve turned off before the technician arrives at lunchtime?")

**Suggestions** are just that – suggestions – and you shouldn't use this style of asking if you want something done, and done within a specific time frame. Saying, "Jamie, it might be a good idea to turn off the valve," is a passive way to get work done. Don't be surprised to learn that Jamie thinks he has a choice now, to turn off the water or not to turn off the water, as he sees fit.

## Making Connections

Define orders, requests, and suggestions. Then, come up with an example for each and illustrate when to use each method.

	Definition	Example	When to Use
Orders			
Requests			
Suggestions			

## Managing Conflict

We may not like it much, but there is going to be conflict in the workplace if you have more than one person working or servicing customers. It's our approach that can make a big difference in our results.

*In this session, you'll learn about a process for conflict resolution that can be applied to any situation.*

### The Conflict Resolution Process

There are six steps to use when your employees are in conflict:



Generally there are four times when supervisors should get involved in a conflict.

- When the employees who are in conflict come and ask you for help.
- When the other employees come to you and ask you to step in.
- When productivity and/or morale are dropping because of the conflict.
- When not dealing with the conflict is starting to make you (as a supervisor) look bad.

## Breaking Down the Process

Let's look at those six steps to conflict resolution in greater detail.

### **Acknowledge that conflict exists.**

Meet with the person you have a conflict with and address the fact that there is a problem. No conflict is going to be resolved unless both parties are sincere about making things work out.

### **Identify the real conflict.**

We often discuss the surface issues rather than digging in and identifying the real problem. Sometimes we do this to prevent the conflict from escalating, and other times we do so to avoid hurting someone's feelings. However, unless we get to the root of the problem, it's likely to come back again and again. For example, Jamie may say that he has a problem with the schedule, when in actual fact he feels he is doing more than his fair share of the work.

### **Hear all points of view.**

Communication is the ultimate tool for this situation. You must listen and clarify that you understand the other person. Afterward you can tell your story, taking care to ensure that they understand where you are coming from.

### **Explore ways to resolve the conflict together.**

It's not necessary for there to be a "winner" in conflict resolution. Explore how to resolve the issue. Is Jamie getting more work than the rest of the team? How can things be better distributed if that's the case? How can he better understand the demands on the rest of the team if it is already evenly distributed?

### **Gain agreement on, and responsibility for, a solution.**

The supervisor does not have to be the one to implement the solution, nor should you be telling others what they should do. Work on it together, in partnership, and have everyone involved determine who is responsible for what.

## Schedule a follow-up session.

People will make commitments and agree on actions just to get out of a sticky situation. Make sure you follow up and ensure that things have been suitably resolved. This will help to acknowledge and preserve the value of the relationship, which is what resolving conflict is really about.

## Managing Challenging Situations

Difficult employees, terrible bosses, and demanding customers can plague our workplace. Our challenge is to keep in mind that sometimes it's not really them being difficult so much as it is our reaction to what's going on.

*In this session*, you'll consider a process for managing difficult conversations and start applying what you've learned.

## Steps for a Difficult Conversation

It can help to have a framework for conversations that occur during conflict and challenging situations. We like this seven-step process as it can be modified to suit any situation.

### Step 1: Make sure the receiver is ready.

Some people resent it when we pounce on them unannounced. Others are much more receptive when you simply ask permission. If you are unsure if someone is ready to talk, try these helpful icebreakers:

- Is this a good time to talk?
- Can we talk about something I've been thinking about?
- Would now be a good time to talk, or should I come back later?
- Can I have 15 minutes of your time? (Make sure you stick to just 15 minutes!)

### Step 2: State your purpose.

Remember to use positive intent and to be aware of your body language. If you are professional and avoid anger, you can be pretty sure that the other person will too.

### Step 3: Ask for their story.

Listen. Ask questions so that you understand. (You may want to refer back to the toolkit that we covered this morning.)

### **Step 4: Tell your side.**

Focus on behaviors, numbers, and facts rather than criticizing the person. “Lesley, your work is always late,” is too general, but “Lesley, your reports have been late six times this month,” is specific. Be aware of your frame of reference as well as theirs to keep your message clear; reframe as needed.

### **Step 5: Get to the third side.**

Synthesize both stories into the third story. This is an objective view of what’s going on, so it’ll be different than the first two stories. Here you can check for understanding by sharing what’s coming out in both points of view.

### **Step 6: Evaluate the three F’s.**

To get to the heart of the problem, evaluate the 3 F’s: **facts**, **frequency**, and **frustrated relationship**.

#### **Facts**

What are the facts of the issue? Create a list so that you do not get sidetracked while you plan your conversation. Don’t drag in other stories or unrelated issues that have happened previously. If you are talking to someone about tardiness, then stick to that and leave things like poor report writing, gossiping, or not taking care of equipment out of the conversation.

#### **Frequency**

Make sure you have a very clear history of the frequency of the issue. In this case, how often is the individual late? How late are they?

Describe the pattern like this: “This is the second time that I’ve called this to your attention. You agreed it would not happen again. Now I am concerned that I cannot trust you to keep a promise.”

Revealing that you notice a pattern brings the history to the forefront. The history is important because repeated frequency erodes your trust.

#### **Frustrated Relationship**

If your real concern is about the relationship, but you only focus on the pattern, then you are not likely to get the change that you are aiming for. You have to discuss what is important to you in terms of the relationship. Explain that when they repeatedly ignore your expectations to be on time, they aren’t just demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job. They are eroding your trust in them, your trust in their ability to do their job, and the possibility of being trusted with assignments in the future.

Statements like the following can be helpful:

- I feel like I cannot trust you to get the work done.
- I feel like I am constantly nagging you and I don’t like to do that.
- I feel like I can’t trust you to keep the commitments you make.

**Step 7: Create an action plan, if appropriate.**

Make sure that the employee creates or at least contributes to the plan so that they agree to it. They need to be responsible for the outcomes, not blaming co-workers, life at home, or the company if things do not go as planned.

**Step 8: Follow up.**

If you commit to follow up with the employee every few days at first, and then less frequently, make sure that you do so. They may need support from you initially to keep on track.

## Developing Relationships

The workplace is structured on layers of relationships, and our work as supervisors can be facilitative in developing those relationships. But what does that really mean, and how do we get there?

*In this session, you'll learn about the nature of reciprocal relationships, and how to create credibility in your role as a leader.*

## Understanding Your Relationships

**Step One**

**To begin, put yourself in the middle of the space below. Now, think of all the people that you deal with regularly in the course of a single day. Put these people around yourself. This is your people network.**



### Step Two

Now, assess the degree of difficulty you have working with each of these people. If you do not have much difficulty with someone, draw a straight line between yourself and them. If you have a lot of difficulty, draw a zigzagging line.

### Step Three

Look at the people you get along well with (the straight line people). **Write down some of the things these people do that makes your interaction run smoothly.**

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Next, move on to the people causing you difficulty. **What are they doing or not doing that makes your relationship so difficult? What do you want them to do instead?**

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Sometimes we do things that add to the strain of a difficult relationship, although we don't really think that we are. Examine your involvement in these relationships and consider your role there. **Is there anything that you should be doing?**

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## Establishing Credibility

Whether you have recently started your position as a supervisor or you hope to in the near future, there are behaviors you can start now to help give you a leadership edge.

In his book *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, author Seth Godin says that if you don't have anyone following you, you are not a leader. What kind of leader will you be, or are you?

In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner write about five practices of exemplary leadership, one principle of which is that leadership opportunities are everywhere. You do not have to be in a leadership position in order to be a leader. You can take the lead, create opportunities, and achieve your goals no matter what your job title is.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ Canfield, Jack, Mark Victor Hansen, and Lee Hewitt. *The Power of Focus*. HCI, 2000.
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- ✓ Kouzes, James M., and Barry Z. Posner. *The Leadership Challenge (5th Edition)*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.
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- ✓ Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Vintage, 2006.
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- ✓ Stack, Laura. *Leave the Office Earlier*. Broadway Books, 2004.
- ✓ Tracy, Brian. *Eat That Frog!* Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007.