

By Toni C. Talbot, SPHR

# Supervisory Training—Make it a Priority



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often receive a call that goes something like this: *"I'm having trouble in my (fill in the blank) department. We just promoted our best production worker to supervisor and now things are not going well. We are having morale problems, production is down, and I just don't know what to do."* My first question is, *"Did you give this new supervisor any training on how to effectively supervise?"* The answer is often, "NO." Their response is generally, *"He was such a good worker, we didn't think he needed any training."*

Supervision is a learned skill and, just like any other skill, it must be taught. Yet, rarely do supervisors receive any formal training before they are put to work. New supervisors often are left to fend for themselves and generally, they simply supervise the way they were supervised. If they were supervised well, it may work out. More than likely, they were not supervised well and bad habits will continue.

New supervisors need to understand the role of a supervisor and then be taught how to implement this role. This role includes, of course, getting the most production out of employees. But also it is to attract and retain employees, to keep morale up, to develop an environment of open communication, and to reduce potential liability for the company. After all, it is the supervisor that represents the company to the employee. How she or he treats the employees may have to be defended in court.

## Training options

How does a new supervisor learn this role? Through training. Where does a company get



such training for supervisors? Well, here are a number of options.

- 1) **In house training.** There are many companies and organizations that provide customized training for your supervisory staff. These are good since the training can be customized to your company's specific needs. If you have a large number of supervisors, you can get everyone up to speed in one fell swoop. The disadvantage is the need to train supervisors hired or promoted after the one fell swoop training. What do you do to get them trained? Bring in the trainer for the one or two supervisors? Or, do you wait until you have enough new supervisors to train...then bring in the trainer to make the training more cost effective? This may leave new supervisors without the necessary training to do their job. These are difficult questions that need to be answered.
- 2) **College coursework.** Many colleges offer classes on supervision and management. These are taken like any other college course. This

training is generally a broader view of supervision and often deals with theory. The key to an effective college course is in the instructor. Look for an instructor with practical experience in management and make sure the course ties the theory into practical application.

3) **Seminars.** There are many seminars available for supervisors. Some are good; some are not so good. You need to make sure the training is going to be effective and the material applicable. Some seminars lack the depth necessary to truly make the training beneficial. The advantage of seminars is the number of seminars available. They can be used as needed.

The Michigan Chamber has recognized the need for a supervisory training program and has developed a supervisory training series. The program is designed to provide practical and applicable training to the first line supervisor. It consists

of four half-day sessions that will cover the following core principles of supervision.

- The Fundamentals of Successful Supervision
- The Nuts and Bolts of Interviewing and Hiring
- The Keys to Performance Development
- The Steps of Effective Employee Discipline

Okay, I will admit to shamelessly promoting this series since I am going to be the one conducting the training. It is a series, however, designed based upon the issues I hear everyday from my clients. This series is a source of affordable and effective training for the first line supervisors.

Whatever training route you choose to take, you need to make training for your supervisory staff a priority. Supervisors are extremely important to your business. To put a person in a supervisory role without effective training is not fair to the supervisor, nor is it fair to the supervisor's employees. It is also not smart for your company. **MF**

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