

# **THE TRUTH ABOUT SUPERVISION**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

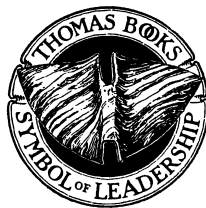
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# THE TRUTH ABOUT SUPERVISION

Coaching, Teamwork, Interviewing,  
Appraisals, 360° Assessments, and  
Recognition

*By*

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## PREFACE

Maria heaved a big sigh as she flipped through her calendar. As supervisor of a large department, she was used to days that were jam-packed with multiple responsibilities. She was, however, starting to feel overwhelmed.

She knew that there would always be the routine supervisory tasks that required her attention, such as keeping track of budgets and time and attendance, monitoring safety and efficiency goals for the department, and responding to employee concerns.

She knew that there would be larger projects that demanded her leadership, such as the reorganization of her department, customer service training, and the implementation of a new software system.

She had only been the supervisor for eight months, but was adjusting to the constant interruptions, problems to solve, and new assignments.

But just when she was beginning to understand the responsibilities of a supervisor, Maria was reminded by her manager that her employee performance appraisals were way overdue, and she was late in selecting an employee to receive a service award. In addition, she was supposed to conduct interviews for a new accountant, and she needed to write a plan for teambuilding.

Although Maria had a general idea about how to implement these tasks, she needed specific information on what was really involved in carrying them out effectively. She wanted clear-cut steps, down-to-earth advice, and practical recommendations.

This book is for supervisors like Maria who need realistic information about how to do some of the principal tasks of a supervisor. It provides detailed information for both new and experienced supervisors, as well as for employees and students who desire to become supervisors.

This book was created in response to thousands of participants in supervisory training programs who were seeking basic, frank informa-

tion about how to conduct key tasks of a supervisor. The training participants were busy carrying out the same tasks as Maria, often making significant decisions based on fast consultation with colleagues, quick perusals of literature, and just plain gut instinct. They repeatedly indicated in training sessions that they needed a resource that would quickly supply them with succinct answers to questions about supervisory issues. The training participants indicated that the responsibilities requiring specific guidance were:

- guiding and *coaching* for employee development rather than discipline
- conducting job *interviews* that are informative and fair
- designing and implementing *teamwork*
- carrying out comfortable and effective *performance appraisals*, including *360° Assessments* that involve multiple evaluations
- *delegating* important tasks so that supervisors can release work to employees who willingly accept the challenge
- *recognizing* employees for their accomplishments and *rewarding* them for making positive contributions.

*The Truth About Supervision: Coaching, Teamwork, Interviewing, Appraisals, 360° Assessments, and Recognition* was designed for supervisors who work in factories, hospitals, banks, offices, or any other work setting, because the essential tasks of a supervisor are universally similar. The chapters are written in a question-and-answer format that allows supervisors to research a specific problem or read an overview of a topic.

Many of the questions addressed were raised repeatedly in classes for new supervisors, as well as in training sessions with experienced supervisors. The examples of true experiences that are included in the book are from a variety of workplaces such as manufacturing plants, health care centers, educational organizations, and businesses.

The material contained in this book is based on the author's experiences and observations of good practices. Supervisors should discuss the contents of the chapters with colleagues and managers. Whenever supervisors implement a new activity or program, especially in an effort to comply with any law, they should consult with their Human Resources/Personnel department and/or obtain the advice of a legal representative of the organization.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book evolved from years of consulting with supervisors who were brave enough to share their concerns, ideas, and frustrations in professional training programs. They had to admit that they did not always know how to do their jobs effectively, and they participated in the training sessions with open minds and a willingness to self-assess and learn. My thanks to the thousands of training participants who asked questions, shared stories, and tackled problems. As all teachers know, you learn something new every day from your students.

Thank you to Wendy Millheiser Barnett and Barbara Kelly for assisting in the preparation of the text.

Thank you, of course, to Frank, Caitlin, and John, who understand that I could never write a book about managing a kitchen, and thank you to Ellen Saunders, Kathy O'Brien, Debbie Vertanin, Linda Scatton, Suzanne Brownrigg, Cindy Aleksa Mason, and Jennifer Dodge Johnson for your vital support.

Special thanks goes to the employees of Blue Circle Cement in Ravena, New York. At that plant (and up in the quarry) you will find hard-working, dedicated, good-humored problem-solvers who are not always easily supervised, but a constant source of valuable information and insight.





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# **THE TRUTH ABOUT SUPERVISION**



## Chapter 1

### THE TRUTH ABOUT COACHING

*I guess I better reserve an hour for coaching.*

(Customer Service Supervisor, preparing to discipline an employee.)

Coaching is not disciplining and it should never take an hour. When a supervisor stops an employee in the hall and quickly reviews a new procedure, that is *coaching*. When the supervisor meets privately for a few minutes with an employee and provides ideas about how to improve a presentation, that is *coaching*. When the supervisor calls an employee into the office and *briefly* reviews expectations about work policies, that is *coaching*.

Coaching allows supervisors the opportunity to provide employees with information, support, and direction. Supervisors who understand the purpose of coaching discover that it is a valuable managerial tool.

Supervisors who are good coaches realize that coaching is a short interaction with one employee who needs immediate guidance. It is not a review of performance in general, or a disciplinary session. It is not meant for identifying employees who are failing at their jobs, or for warning employees who refuse to meet organizational standards. Coaching is an educational process, designed for steering employees in the right direction, and for providing information and support so that employees can succeed.

Coaching is based on the premise that employees want to learn and want to do things correctly. Coaching allows supervisors to intervene when they spot confused or struggling employees, or employees who are not following organizational policies or procedures. By coaching, supervisors can guide employees back on track. If the coaching is done in an efficient and sensitive manner, then employees learn from the experience and welcome the interest and guidance of their supervisors.

This chapter covers the purpose of coaching, as well as the steps and strategies that can assist supervisors in coaching effectively.

## 1. WHAT EXACTLY IS COACHING?

The term *coaching* conjures up images of an athletic coach, whistle in hand, yelling from the sidelines and lecturing in the locker room. Coaching in the workplace is not quite as dramatic. Effective supervisors are actually coaching their employees throughout the entire workday because most coaching is informal, and takes place “on the run,” requiring a few minutes of quick, focused interaction.

Coaching does not mean long conversations, tension-filled dialogues, and written goals and action plans. It does not mean that an employee is in “big trouble” and needs to be put back in line. It does not mean that discipline is necessary, and a closed-door meeting is in order. Coaching occurs when a supervisor observes a behavior that indicates that an employee needs quick guidance. Before the employee can get completely off track, the supervisor connects with the employee, provides information and encouragement, and then moves on. Coaching takes place when it is necessary to prevent a minor problem from getting worse.

The employee gains new knowledge and direction from coaching, as well as support from the supervisor. Coaching can take two minutes or 15 minutes, but it rarely becomes a lengthy conversation unless additional problems surface.

Supervisors know that they are coaching when the interaction with the employee is an *intervention* that is *individualized* and *instructional*.

It is a quick *intervention* when a supervisor spots the *first signs* of:

- faulty work behavior
- lagging work behavior
- employee confusion, complaining, or work avoidance
- employee unrealistic expectations
- employee need for encouragement.

The coaching session is *individualized* because it is conducted privately, one-to-one, and immediately after the need for intervention is determined.

The coaching is *instructional* because the purpose of the coaching session is to quickly educate employees. For example, employees may need to be reminded about expectations, deadlines, and standards.



They may not have realized that they are failing to follow organizational policies or procedures. They may be falling behind because they need help with time management or skill development. It is the responsibility of supervisors to catch the first signs of stumbling, and then to coach employees so that they can learn how to improve. The employees will then feel confident that supervisors will provide support and guidance.

Once supervisors understand that a major part of their job is to educate employees, then coaching happens automatically. It means that supervisors are teaching when it is needed, keeping an eye out for employees who may need assistance, and praising when improvements occur.

## 2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO COACH?

Coaching is essential because it is better to catch a problem in its initial stages than to wait until employees are really in trouble. Since coaching is a quick, informal intervention, the results can be an immediate change in the behavior of employees.

Although it is often tempting to ignore a problem to see if the employee solves it, or to avoid an interaction with an employee because it might be tense, it is better to step in, provide guidance, and then step back again. The employee now knows what the supervisor expects, and, if appropriate information is provided, the employee can concentrate on getting work done effectively.

Coaching also tells employees that the supervisor is paying close attention, has expertise and ideas to share, and is interested in assisting employees in doing their best work. If coaching is done on a routine basis, then employees are not threatened by the process. They see it as an opportunity to learn how they are doing and to gain clear direction on what they can do better.

Although coaching is not intended to serve as a substitute for performance appraisals, the coaching session can provide valuable information that can contribute to annual appraisals. For example, if a supervisor notices that Mary Jane is frequently coming to meetings unprepared, a quick coaching session can raise the concern, get to the root of the problem, clarify expectations, and get Mary Jane back on