

Developmental Supervision and Performance Management

*A Carefully Crafted 360° Feedback Strategy
for Working with a Difficult Employee*



The Napier Group

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Performance Matters

Developmental Supervision

Taken from *Measuring What Matters*, by Rod Napier and Rich McDaniel, published by Davies-Black, January 2006

*“We look at art 360 degrees,
the only problem is we forget to do that with our lives.”
Andy Warhol*

It is rare to find an organization that does not perceive supervision as an undesirable requirement, a passionless necessity. This historical view is reinforced by current realities where the focus on short-term, bottom-line objectives provides little room for the supposed luxury of effective supervision. Let’s face it, people are **rewarded for doing**, for **producing value** added products – not for coaching others to do their work better, or holding people accountable for doing what they are paid to do in the first place. These attitudes in a highly competitive world reflect, in our experience, the prevailing norms in most organizations whether they reside on the profit or non-profit side of the ledger. The problem is that these attitudes obscure huge benefits to be gained by those willing to embrace a longer term view of work and what motivates people to be productive, loyal and dedicated to an organization. Exactly how valuable this approach is will depend, to a large degree, on the *selective utilization of data* at both the product and developmental levels of supervision.

The issue is, of course, is to be selective, choosing the information that will, indeed, matter. In the story of the preacher who found himself with only one old rather wise parishioner who had weathered the blizzard we, like the minister, are always faced with the question of how much is enough. In the story, the old man was left bored and out of sorts because the minister did not know when to stop. In the words of the old man, dumping the whole load on him when a little would have been more than sufficient.

Definition of Terms

Developmental supervision and performance management are two parts of the same whole. Organizations without the capacity to hold people accountable and to reward work accomplished will find it difficult to motivate employees, to measure effectiveness or to celebrate hard earned successes. If arbitrary and capricious, trust and morale will suffer. If standards differ across different units, it can influence productivity. If measurement criteria differ among individual supervisors, it can undermine the very fabric of institutional trust.

Similarly, if individuals do not feel personally coached or mentored and if they have little sense of direction or professional opportunity, it is difficult to insure organizational loyalty or motivation.

It is the blending of performance and personal development that are the cornerstones of any successful supervisory program.

A useful definition for supervision is:

The process of developing the capacity of individuals to grow personally and professionally in ways that provide them with increased opportunities while continually adding value to the organization. At the same time, they are evaluated in relation to their contributions and rewarded in a manner commensurate with their ability to achieve their agreed upon goals at the highest possible level.

The underlying belief is that by encouraging individuals to expand their interests, skills and knowledge, they and the organization will benefit over the long run. By delegating responsibility and authority judiciously, the capacity of the organization will continue to grow, creating further opportunities for others. The key at both the performance and developmental levels is to provide continuous and measurable feedback that objectifies the total process.

Predictable Resistances to the Process

While many leaders would rationally support a change initiative that would increase supervisory efficiency and effectiveness, a number of issues make such a proposition easy prey to a wide variety of natural and expected resistances. These include:

- ❑ **A history in which supervision has been uneven and at best mediocre in its application. Few leaders have ever had a positive experience in this critical area of work.**
- ❑ **The reality that supervision has, generally, not been rewarded. Rather, individuals have been rewarded for producing work rather than for taking the necessary time to develop others to do work instead of themselves. The result limits an organization's capacity to grow.**
- ❑ **At the top level of organizations where leaders must be committed to more effective performance management, there are usually widely varying levels of understanding, differing degrees of skill and dedication to quality supervision. Words expressing many of the accepted concepts of modern management often**

are not reflected in the actual behaviors of these leaders. Since the process of management – outside of bottom line numbers – is often not evaluated, there is little reason for leaders to pay attention to supervision as a skill set and area of critical professional competency. Often supervision does not even make it as a measured performance object.

- ❑ It appears that, for many, supervision is a one shot experience occurring once a year – something to get out of the way – rather than being perceived as core to their success and followed and monitored throughout the year.
- ❑ It is not unusual that employees do not trust the process since established goals give way to the crisis of the moment without adjustments being made to their goals or the expectations negotiated previously.
- ❑ Similarly, many employees are unwilling to share what they know about morale or productivity to their supervisors since there has been little time spent building trust or openness. For some there is concern that revealing personal limitations or mistakes will be factored “informally” into their performance reviews and might easily influence their salaries or future opportunities.
- ❑ While supervision is theoretically tied into an organizational planning cycle, this process itself is not built on sufficient data, candor and trust. The result is that goal setting at the unit level is dependent on who your supervisor is rather than on a consistent process of even-handed performance management procedures based on an organizational vision and resulting goals.
- ❑ In many organizations there are always those individuals who recognize that they benefit from the lack of consistency and the arbitrary nature of the current supervisory process. It is often a process that breeds favoritism and a lack of fairness across the organization.

While such a list can be daunting, the very introduction of a consistent, standardized and fair supervisory process would go a long way toward reducing the resistances. However, the implementation of any coordinated supervisory program would have to address these quite legitimate concerns. *The effective use of basic metrics is central to overcoming these formidable resistances.*

The Key Question – The Commitment

With flatter, leaner and more responsive organizations, many of the strongest advocates of supervision will be quick to agree that there is little time to supervise. Even the introduction of supposed time saving technologies has, paradoxically, resulted in more, not less, work as expectations for responsiveness and quick turnarounds have increased

time demands and, with it, stress. Up until the early 1980's a high quality, developmental supervision program could be expected to demand 20-25% of a manager's time. Such a commitment was deemed to be the minimum amount of time essential for a quality program. Times have changed and with it the answer to a key question: **What is the *least* amount of time we can utilize to maintain a high quality supervisor / performance management program for our organization?**

There is no indication that the pressure to do more with less will cease any time in the near future. We must be increasingly inventive as we allocate time and resources to the supervisory process. The assumption here is that most leaders give considerably less than 10% of their time to the performance management process – given a span of control of from six to twelve. If the following proposal doesn't fit within that constraint, there is little likelihood that our approach will be acceptable. For us, the issue isn't time, but, rather the discipline of **how such supervisory time is allocated and how well metrics are adapted to support it.** Few managers we have worked with would suggest that 10% for supervising their direct reports is not a fair use of their time. Taken as a cold, factual number, that gives the average supervisor 260 hours a year with which to work with his or her direct reports. Two hundred and sixty hours you say – impossible. True, if supervision is undervalued, not part of the reward system and if it remains the last priority on a manager's chaotic schedule, it will not work. For many leaders, supervision is relegated to a short, compressed time each spring just prior to the end of the fiscal year when performance evaluations are due. **The result is most often a superficial, unproductive, goal setting session that feels force fed rather than involving a thoughtful period of reflection, evaluation and personal development.**

The Numbers

The following pages will address how to rework this picture into a manageable and highly valued part of an employee's work life. Since making supervision and performance management a priority and building a schedule that maximizes its effectiveness is of theoretic importance, let's revisit the numbers and determine the requirements for a rather ideal performance process for a manager and her eight reports. Later we will investigate exactly how to commit the expenditure of time.

Proposed Allocation of A Supervisor's Time	
Meetings with each of eight direct reports for one hour twice a month to review individual progress, to strategize and coach.	192 hours
A two hour team meeting every other week with eight direct reports to plan, strategize, problem solve and review progress.	40 hours

Eight, three hour Supervisory Dialogues with each direct report once a year.	24 hours
Eight, one hour follow-up sessions to the dialogues four months later.	8 hours
A two day team building and planning/ goal setting retreat with team.	20 hours
Estimated time for supervisory management processes over the course of a business year.	284 hours

The estimated **284 hours** for related supervisory work represents 11% of total work time. Since individual performance is the key to any successful organization and is tied directly to holding them accountable to their goals and other commitments, the question is this: **“Is a 11% commitment of the supervisors time a valuable investment in the success of his/her direct reports and of the team?”** What we do know is that unless organizations institutionalize a committed, disciplined and metric based performance management process, it will deteriorate over the years into the kind of arbitrary, inconsistent and ineffective process all too familiar in many organizations.

Supervisory excellence is built on a foundation of regular meetings in which work is monitored and individuals are coached and supported in their efforts to improve their performance while developing personal and professional skills. This demands measuring what truly matters for each individual.

The Supervisory Dialogue – The Heart of Performance Management

Supervision is all about helping people become successful in doing their work. It should be about coaching, not blame; more about supporting and developing than criticizing and reprimand. The Supervisory Dialogue is the centerpiece of a program in which individuals feel supported in their efforts to improve, change and grow. **Historically, supervision has been either a passive or a reactive process. Here it is to be a developmental one** in which each person has the opportunity to track their own progress both in terms of their actual performance and their particular chosen areas of development.

By its nature, The Dialogue is a collaborative process with each supervisor working closely with direct reports and utilizing a wide variety of data to help gain a full picture of each individual’s work reality. It is the **ten-question dialogue** itself that provides the substance of the review process both in relation to goal setting and personal development. During The Dialogue employees have the opportunity to review their own progress by answering the ten questions. In addition, they are asked to consider what their supervisor might say in relation to each of the same questions. This information is

then compared with the supervisor's own responses to the same questions. The **Dialogue** results from the exploration of the agreements or discrepancies between these various points of view. It allows clarifying of perceptions and expectations so that, over time, the discrepancies will be less while the level of communication and understanding increase. Over a number of years, supervisors can more easily discern patterns, measure progress and monitor and reduce identified areas of concern. .

A Discipline

More than anything else, the Supervisory Dialogue represents a commitment by both sides to work toward the systematic and measured improvement of the employee's effectiveness. Where most supervision focuses on measured outcomes and successes and failures, here, fully two-thirds of the questions relate to the "process" of work and the direct or indirect influences on the ability of each individual to accomplish their agreed upon goals. By focusing on these questions, and being accountable to the process itself, progress is almost guaranteed. While the ten questions provide focus, the actual success of The Dialogue depends on the supervisor's commitment to the process itself – the willingness to take the necessary time, to listen, and to provide the feedback, support and guidance necessary to move the individual forward.

Rationale

The purpose of the ten questions is to create, in a relatively short amount of time, an enormous amount of information so you can understand each employee's feelings, attitudes and performance. This includes understanding their personal and professional dreams, how they would like to reach them, whether anything is holding them back and how you, as their supervisor, might be personally helpful in their development. This process provides a structured dialogue that will help to build your relationship with each individual. Many managers take very little time to build more than superficial relationships with their direct reports, and many don't know how to go about it even if they would like to. The idea of building a more personal relationship is felt, by many, to be inappropriate, since it might reduce the capacity of "the boss" to be objective and dispassionate in his or her evaluation of those reporting to them. Nothing could be further from the truth. The issue is how to develop a trusting and personal relationship by developing an evaluation process that is fair, objective and consistent across individuals. Our assumption is that a personal and open supervisory relationship is key to building trust, and trust is an essential element in the creation of an effective supervisory team. When people feel fairly treated, they bring that sense of support and openness to the team. The Dialogue is a common and formative experience of each of the team members. Done well, the trust is cumulative among the individuals and with the team as a whole.

The nature of the ten Dialogue questions, and the fact that both the supervisor and the employee are responding to them immediately reduces the inclination of one or the other not to be candid. It is our experience that the responses of the boss and the employee are usually very similar. Because both are aware that they are working from a relatively similar data -base and that their responses will provide a reality test for which neither would like to be too far off track, common ground is usual. Employees often do know more and have a greater sense of their own reality. But, in areas of limitation, the last thing they will want is to be perceived as not being conscious of their own imperfections. The price is right for them to be self critical and candid. For the boss, there is an interest in being perceived as aware, realistic and on top of the situation. Putting employees in the shoes of their boss provides the potential for a powerful reality check. This is useful for both parties. As the supervisor, it is essential to know how direct reports see you and understand your perceptions of their job, their performance and your grasp of their strengths and limitations. For employees, discovering how personal projections or untested assumptions influence their behavior can be hugely important.

The kind of data gathering proposed for The Dialogue is generally described as “subjective,” yet, it is an incredibly important source of information for the two parties involved. Because of the pressure on both the boss and the employee to be truthful and candid, the way the data evolve is as important as the information itself. As is often noted ***perception is reality***, and the perceptions of the boss and the employee form the foundation of their relationship. If each is not clear in this area, both will be vulnerable to miscommunication and potential dysfunction.

Creating the Substance of the Dialogue

Discrepancies between your answers and those of your direct report provide the seedbed for conversation and negotiation. For example, if you see your direct report as having been particularly successful in one area that he does not mention, it offers you an immediate “stroke” to open the discussion of why he did not see this as a success or achievement. Similarly, you may overlook something important to the employee or there may be a real difference in the individual’s perception of his success on a project. You should attempt to get behind the words and to learn how individuals really think and feel about their work. What is important in The Dialogue is the degree of understanding that the question format can accomplish. Along the way, the employee will get to know a great deal about you based on how willing you are to be open, to share your feelings and your values in relation to what is being discussed. At the end of three hours, the result should be an increase in trust, clarifying of expectations and concerns, and establishment of clear priorities and a positive atmosphere supporting real negotiations. Before exploring the Dialogue in detail, discuss the pre-work essential for its success.

The Pre-Dialogue Orientation

You will want to prepare your direct reports for the Supervisory Dialogue. This usually requires conducting a 15 - 30 minute meeting with each direct report or with the team a week or so before the evaluation session. This pre-meeting sets the tone of the entire three hour Dialogue. It also presents an opportunity to outline expectations, answer specific questions, and explore the level and quality of responses to various questions. Rehearsing what to expect, reduces apprehensions. Affirm that the process is about development as much as it is about evaluation and measured goals. It is important that each individual know that the meeting will last at least three hours, and that they will want to prepare themselves by answering the Ten Questions in writing – first in relation to how they perceive themselves and, second, how they perceive that you - their supervisor - perceives them. Make clear that the dialogue is just that – a discussion about performance and areas of strength and development. Writing the questions is meant to provide focus as well as clarity.

For example, we have found that writing out their responses helps them determine clearly whether there are differences in how they personally see themselves in relation to each question versus how they believe you will respond. Forcing them to get into the shoes of their boss is an essential part of the process, since to be out of synch can have a dramatic effect on their priorities, expectations, standards and other factors usually assumed and often not discussed. The goal is not to “guess correctly” but, rather, to gain a clear understanding whether everyone is on the same page and, if not, to gain a better knowledge of where differences could spell problems. Both differences and similarities often provide stimulation for further discussion.

If individuals arrive for The Dialogue ill-prepared, **do not conduct the interview**. This is equally true for you as supervisor. Credibility and trust can be undermined if it is obvious that your responses are being generated as The Dialogue unfolds and that you have given little thought to the serious nature of the process.

During this pre-meeting, it is useful to review the “givens” of the employee’s job description as a framework for further discussion and later role clarification. What is important is to lay the groundwork for The Dialogue and it begins with the job description.

Ideally, you should conduct The Dialogue, Exercise 10-1, at a comfortable off site location with refreshments at hand and an atmosphere of informality and comfort. It is not helpful to have it in the boss’s office. A neutral environment can somewhat diminish issues of status and authority. As a kick-off for the year -long supervisory cycle, it is the foundation for everything that follows. The employee should receive a set of the questions in Exercise 10-1, but the rationale immediately following Exercise 10-1 will make more sense to you and will provide a greater understanding of specific questions, The Dialogue in general, and your role in it.

Exercise 10-1

The Ten Questions of the Supervisory Dialogue - *Measuring What Truly Matters*

Directions: Please consider the following questions and respond to each from two points of view. First, being as candid as possible, answer them from your own perspective providing specific examples. Second, answer each as you believe your supervisor will respond based on their perceptions of your work during the past year and your goals for the next. It is suggested that you write your responses in preparation for The Dialogue.

- 1. What are your five or six greatest accomplishments or successes of the past year? Please be specific and explain why they are important to you and the organization.**
- 2. What are the three or four things you like best about working here?**
- 3. What are the three or four things you like least about working here? How do they hinder your ability to be successful or to be as satisfied as you might be?**
- 4. What are the three or four things you failed to accomplish over the course of the past year that you believe you should have? For each consider why this occurred and what you might have done differently had you the opportunity.**
- 5. What are the five or six most important goals or projects you believe would be a measure of success for you during the coming year and why? (One of these should include supervision if you have supervisory responsibilities.) In addition, how much time do you believe each of these goals will take and over what length of time?**
- 6. Considering each of the goals identified in Question #5, what specific behaviorally based criteria would be used to measure your success? In other words, how will you know when you have accomplished each? Are they measurable, observable? (Please see the appendix, *Building Effective Goals and Measurement Criteria*.)**
- 7. What are the potential blocks that could inhibit your ability to accomplish these goals and, limit your success over the next year? These could be a lack of knowledge or skills, a lack of support or guidance, political realities or any of a number of other factors. Again, please be specific.**
- 8. What strategies do you recommend to reduce these potential blocks to your success? Such things as being coached, taking a special class or an internship, seeking out special resources, even reading might be included.**
- 9. Where would you like to be professionally in the next five years? How can we help you reach your dream? How can I help you as your supervisor?**
- 10. What do we need to do to strengthen our relationship? How do we increase our trust and ability to work effectively together? What can I do to be more helpful? Are there specific things I can do to support in specific goals or projects you are undertaking? When and how often should we be meeting to help insure your success this year?**

Understanding the Rationale for the Ten Questions

Following is an overview of the various questions and why they are asked. They reflect a comprehensive approach that attempts to address the needs and interests of both the employee and the supervisor. Understanding the rationale for each question is central to placing The Dialogue in the proper supervisory context.

Questions #1, #2, #3

Together these questions allow each individual to talk about their successes, likes, and dislikes while working within this organization. Covering them could easily take an hour. Since most people are not accustomed to talk at this level with their boss, you may need to probe beneath the initial responses to gain the level of understanding that is so essential. These questions provide a doorway into the individual's fears, expectations, needs, and dreams. Here are also found clues to their values and aspirations. They are designed to open and explore the relationship –if you can find out in what areas the person isn't happy, then you can do something to help out – this, over time, will increase your credibility and further build trust. As the supervisor, your most important role is to help the employee be successful. However, at this point in The Dialogue is not a time to “solve” problems. Rather, it is a **time to listen, and to explore differences or similarities** in your perceptions **without judgment**.

Such questions are rarely a part of most performance reviews. It is an opportunity lost since they help build trust at the beginning of The Dialogue based on your ability to listen and to show some understanding and empathy through your responses. Even when your own responses differ from theirs, the information can broaden the relationship. Over several years, patterns are more easily perceived. Not only this, but, there will be many opportunities to help resolve problems and to support them during the course of the year based on what you learn here.

For example, if your views of success differ from theirs, it might reflect a need to be more conscious of the kinds of success they have defined and to pay more attention during the course of the year. Or, it might be a miscommunication on your part so that the individual simply does not realize what is important to you. While you are not after conformity to your views, your views are important to be clearly understood.

Question #4

This question is designed to help each individual own their problems or failures with the least amount of defensiveness possible. What makes most people feel defensive is being told that they are wrong, or feeling blamed or criticized. However, even if the failure is very real, using this process, the individual being evaluated will say most of what needs to be said. Because they realize that you have specific areas in which you believe they failed to accomplish previous goals and have noted them in your

assessment, they are left with a choice. Fake it and not acknowledge the obvious. Or, they can step up to the plate and “own” the problem(s) that most certainly exist because of the failure to resolve them during the course of the past year.

The result, in our experience, is an 80% agreement between such problem areas the boss and the direct report have identified. Suddenly, rather than finger pointing and blame, there is agreement and the opportunity to explore what issues might have deterred success. It could be a resource issue, a lack of necessary training, unrealistic expectations or a myriad of other factors. Such a problem solving focus opens the door for you to work together to gain a more complete understanding and to determine what might occur differently in the future. Where you don’t agree is an opportunity for discussion and clarification. Why didn’t they see as a problem something you identified? Or why didn’t you identify something on their list. It is a time for candid understanding and clearing the deck for the coming year.

Critical to this discussion is the “unfinished” business that can still be corrected and what you and this person can do to turn things around. Is the issue more or less a problem now and will it deserve priority status during the coming year? (See Questions #5 and #6) If so, how should it be handled differently? It may be that there is not sufficient time during The Dialogue to provide a complete assessment, discussion and closure to each issue. If necessary allocate further time for a later date – particularly if goals for the coming year are influenced by what occurred previously.

Question #5

Here the concern focuses on the individual’s areas of responsibility during the coming year in relation to desired projects, goals, objectives, and outcomes. It is the consideration of this question, plus some of the previous information, which allows the review to have meaning and to help in the development of the individual’s work responsibilities. Your role is to help make certain that both you and the employee understand as clearly as possible what are your priorities in relation to what they believe they should be doing. Explore similarities and discrepancies in depth. Ideally, this process represents a true negotiation of how this individual will utilize personal resources of time and skill in light of the organization’s needs.

In most cases, if the organization’s goals and those of the unit have been clearly defined, the individual’s goals will be closely aligned with them. Clearly, there may be a problem if your perception of the individual’s goals differs dramatically from their own and from what they believe you will expect. Again, as in all of the other questions, it is important that your direct report answer both for themselves and for how they believe you will respond. Your role is not to capitulate to capricious interests of your report, rather, it is possible that they know something you don’t, or that they have an interest that will motivate them and benefit the organization that was not considered.

If the individual has supervisory responsibilities, it should be one of the legitimate five or six project goals for the year. Since time is a crucial resource and reflects what is valued, it is essential to look at their role and actual goals in direct relation to how much time is to be spent in relation to each, including the goal of supervision. Without supervision being a legitimately measured performance goal, it will rarely become an important priority in the work life of the individual or, consequently, their direct reports. The Supervisory Review, Exercise 10-2, at the end of this chapter, provides the behavioral data for measuring the degree to which individual supervisors are taking their responsibilities seriously and are applying the skills necessary to be effective.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the problems identified in Question #4 may still exist. Question #5 provides the opportunity to address them if they are still sufficiently important to be a major goal(s). Questions #7 and #8 may add insight as well since they provide feedback and strategies for dealing with specific issues of skill or leadership behavior. At this point, however, it is essential not just to acknowledge past failure or a remaining current need, but what things must change in order to improve chances of success. It is necessary to determine exactly what differences must occur for the effort to be successful. That is why it is so important to be realistic in your agreed upon goal expectations and the time allotted for their success. Here is where the negotiation involves identifying a set of goals and responsibilities that can result in success. **All too often the employee develops an unrealistic set of goals to please you and, as a result, guarantees failure in the future.** Your role is to be sure that success is possible and that personal enthusiasm on the part of the direct report has not clouded reality or might impinge unfairly on their family life. Similarly, the negotiation surrounding Question #5 allows the opportunity to stretch an employee's view of success, to challenge them and encourage greater responsibilities or effort.

Question #6

This is based on the assumption that we can and should measure agreed upon work outcomes. The issue is to be certain that they are clear and agreed to up front and that the criteria of success have been fairly negotiated. One example of measures you can establish, given that effective supervision is a goal, is based upon The Supervisory Review (See following section) which could be distributed to each of the individual's direct reports and would provide feedback regarding their ability to supervise. Other examples of criterion based goals are found in "Building Effective Goals and Measurement Criteria" in the appendix.

Often a brief follow-up session is required after the Supervisory Dialogue since the final list of agreed upon goals is the result of a negotiation between those you and your employee have each raised. In addition, the criteria often need some strengthening – especially if there has been little training or practice in the use of criterion based goal setting. Part of the success of the supervisory process is that both progress and a final evaluation can be compared to the original agreements. The end result should be a brief **written contract** signed off by both you and the individual outlining the agreed upon

goals and the accompanying criteria used to measure success. The idea is to formalize the agreement. This raises its value and is something that can be returned to at various times over the course of the year, if necessary, in order to clarify expectations (see below.)

Question # 7

This is critical to the entire supervisory process. In order to help your direct reports be successful, you and they must examine the potential blocks to their success. This is your opportunity to provide them personal feedback about what you see as possible obstacles based on past performance (refer also to Question #4). Such feedback can relate to specific behaviors that may inhibit their success because of inadequate skills, issues of attitude or the quality of their work.

Here is where coaching and support for their personal development is most legitimate. It is also the area that is most often avoided by supervisors. Again, by asking each individual to identify what they perceive as factors blocking their success and what you might say, it begins an important thought process well in advance of The Dialogue itself. As in Question #4, the amount of agreement between the boss and employee is usually considerable because of the interest on the part of both parties to not appear insensitive to the realities of the situation. Most employees realize their limitations. The issue is to provide an atmosphere in which the ownership of such limitations is not threatening and where developing alternatives is legitimate and supported.

Question #8

This question provides the opportunity to explore the strategic actions that will help the person to overcome the blocks identified in Question #7. Be creative. Suggest helpful opportunities for the individual's development. Besides courses, there are opportunities for observing an expert, creating internships, taking special courses or workshops.

When issues identified in Question #7 pose a threat to the person's success or their ability to do their job successfully, then a particular strategy needs to evolve with change as an imperative. **Clearly define the initiative and incorporate it as a goal within those established in Question #5.** This legitimizes sufficient time and focus to insure the kinds of change felt to be essential. Also, by defining criteria, you can benchmark the individual's progress over time. Of course, there can be other strategies not tied into measurable criteria. Nevertheless, commitments to action, beyond good intentions, make this question vital to the personal development and growth of the individual.

Question #9

This helps individuals focus on their future – the personal and professional choices available to them. The assumption is that one way to maintain an individual's motivation is to help them establish a clear career path and enable them to make continuous progress along it. Ultimately, it should increase their skills and sense of

worth. Not everyone has to be ambitious with a high level need for achievement, education or status. However, in today's rapidly changing world of technology and work environments, all employees must be prepared, minimally, to ask questions about what they need to do to keep pace and to be ready to handle the changing demands of the organization. We expect that most workers at all levels are interested in the possibilities for future promotions, job possibilities and shifts in responsibility. That demands a plan, commitments to study or preparation, building skills and extending opportunities. Here is a place and time to begin exploring such possibilities.

The underlying assumption of this question is that if supervisors work to delegate, to promote and to ready people for greater challenges, the benefits will accrue, ultimately, to the organization. Even if individuals leave the organization for greater challenges, it will open opportunities for other deserving people from within. Furthermore, in a tight job market, the organization will become known as a place that develops its people and provides opportunities for individuals to take increasing responsibilities and to grow both personally and professionally. Here is another opportunity to develop the level of personal relationship and trust that can only result from such a concerted exploration of intimate issues and the lives of your employees.

Question #10

Because the success of the supervisory process relies so heavily on the relationship with each supervisor, this question is essential. The focus is on how to improve the supervisory relationship and what can be done to maximize the value of supervision for each individual engaged in it. The assumption is that each person has different needs and deserves the opportunity to shape their supervisory process in a manner that best suits their needs. Some will require more hands-on coaching while, for others, there will be extended periods for reviewing projects or delegated responsibilities. Since it is often difficult for the employee to be candid here, it may take some encouraging and modeling on your part to bring the discussion to a meaningful level.

Conclusion

The commitment to leadership development and individual growth is designed to create a more competent and committed workforce. The assumption is that if you educate, train and support individuals in their growth and development, the result will be a more loyal and dedicated group of workers who will be more likely to commit themselves to the organization, its values, its customers and to the services it provides.

Underlying Pressures to Reassess Our Supervisory Assumptions

In most goal directed organizations, it is essential that employees remain current, adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of the organization. Not only this, but individuals deserve and require ongoing feedback in relation to their contributions and

to their individual effectiveness. Rewards and recognition should, in turn, be ongoing and reflect changes in success and overall performance.

We can also assume that most employees, while not necessarily committed to the institution for the duration, are likely to remain in one place of work for five or even ten years. Such a moderate commitment to an organization can more likely be secured if there are opportunities for personal and professional development and if recognition and rewards are commensurate with achievement levels and the skills of each individual.¹ Increasingly, when supervision does occur in many organizations, it is ritualized with the same format followed and squeezed into the “least” amount of time possible. The result is the utilization of checklists, goal setting formulas and a minimalist approach to the entire process. Unless there is a problem that demands attention, supervision is likely to be increasingly ceremonial and less and less substantive.

Signs of such a *pro forma* approach to supervision are characterized by undifferentiated reviews and salary increases. Since to discriminate on the basis of performance demands evidence and attention to actual achievements, one way to reduce overt conflict is to reduce the differences among the salaries of individuals at the same level. When most people are given nearly the same salaries and fewer dollars are allocated to those achieving true excellence, there is less room for argument, which is often welcomed in conflict-averse organizations. In the absence of easily defined differences, such as is in sales and marketing, the trend is to create simplistic, boilerplate approaches to supervision that act to conserve time and reduce the potential for conflict. The outcome, over time, can be a slow slide into organizational mediocrity with the disillusionment of some high performing employees who resent their lack of recognition for their extra effort and both the quantity and quality of their contributions. In the long run, the price paid in falling morale and productivity can be large indeed.

What we do know is:

To discriminate on the basis of salary among individual performances in a fair and equitable fashion requires skill, quality time, discipline and valid data. Without them it is predictable that morale and personal motivation will decline and, ultimately, so will productivity.

A Three-Year Supervisory Cycle

Paying equal attention to every employee every year can be draining, repetitive and inefficient. While there is the need for goal setting and the monitoring of individual progress on a yearly basis, it is possible to distribute other aspects of the supervisory process over time. A supervisor can work developmentally with dedicated employees

¹ Buckingham and Coffman, *First Break All the Rules* revealed in dramatic fashion how even minimal attention to personal development had a direct correlation with both increased profits and reduced turnover in a study of over 100,000 employees in 24 companies.

over a longer period. Obviously, they will have to monitor those individuals with problems or on probation on a more regular basis.

The following proposal assumes that, on average, a supervisor will commit 11% of his or her time to the evaluation and development of the individuals who report directly to them.

Stage I Supervision - Each Employee Every Year

At the heart of the supervisory process is **The Supervisory Dialogue**. It represents a three hour review of each individual's goals, personal development accomplishments, blocks to success and the exploration of measurable, criterion--based goals for the coming year. In addition, direct reports will evaluate their supervisor's effectiveness on a yearly basis. The interview-based format of the Supervisory Dialogue allows for responses and comparisons of both the employee's and supervisor's views on each of ten questions. The agreements and discrepancies stemming from this dialogue provide the foundation for further discussions throughout the year, with the opportunity to evaluate progress against the various agreements reached. The Dialogue, while focused on the ten questions, can and should be far reaching as an effort to explore what is working and not working for the employee in their work life.

We continue with our model supervisor who has a span of control of eight individuals and follows his dialogue with a one hour follow-up session six months later to focus specifically on progress, problems and successes relating to The Dialogue. This meeting is in addition to bi-weekly supervisory meetings suggested previously.

What we propose here is a dimension of supervision that requires an entirely new level of effectiveness for only a small increase in the expenditure of a supervisor's time. While the Dialogue and follow-up sessions, to some degree, focus on personal and professional development (see Questions 2,3,4,7,8,9), justice can only be done with more quality data and with an increase in quality time allocated for thorough discussion and planning.

Stage II Supervision – 1/3 of the Employees Each Year

Most supervisors have limited opportunities to witness their employees at work, especially as the ranks of middle managers have been thinned and workloads of all supervisors have increased. While supervisor observation is critical to any effective reporting process, it can be dramatically improved by the inclusion, on a periodic basis, of a modified 360 feedback reporting process. Such additional data can focus on specific skills, leadership behaviors or attitudes central to the individual's success. The process itself can be individualized or standardized across the organization.

Typically, an uncomplicated and direct approach to such an assessment is preferable. Twenty-five behaviorally based scaled items and four or five open ended questions can provide a substantial indication of how each person being reviewed is perceived by

those they influence on the job. Of course, a number of preconditions must be present to insure the quality process essential for success.

These include:

1. The effective training of each supervisor in how to review the data with the employee and how to provide the developmental planning and monitoring necessary to insure success. This would ideally include observation and feedback during one of his actual Dialogues to be certain that he/she has the empathy and listening skills essential for this level of supervision. For an example, see the example in *The Case of Jake – Ch.7*)
2. The protection of the employee from threat, intimidation or the possibility of retribution based on the 360 report. This assumes that this developmental aspect of the individual's supervision is separate from the goal directed criteria utilized to determine salary and promotion.
3. The regular review of each manager's supervisory skills to insure that they have the sensitivity and positive relationship with their direct reports to insure the success of this aspect of the supervisory process.
4. A well monitored process that standardizes how data are collected for individuals and insures anonymity and confidentiality in order to attain the most accurate picture of the individual employee.

It is assumed that, in most situations, individuals receiving their data will be helped to develop specific action steps to improve their situations and their ability to be effective on the job. Normally, there would be no relation between performance goals and the personal development goals and action steps derived from the 360 degree data. In some instances, however, the data would be strong enough to suggest that one or more of the individual's measurable performance goals developed as part of their yearly Supervisory Dialogue would relate directly to the 360 feedback data. This would then become part of the regular performance review and be one of the conditions reviewed in relation to their overall success – including salary.

It is our experience that such additional data analysis, problem solving and counseling may require as much as additional half day of work with each of the three individuals engaged in the **Stage II Supervision** – which we believe is a small addition given the obvious benefits to be gained. Clearly, the desire is to help each individual strengthen identified behaviors or skill areas that are limiting their effectiveness.

Stage III Supervision - Monitoring Phase for 1/3 of the Employees

On a scheduled three-year cycle, the employees who experience the 360 degree feedback in year two are then monitored during the following year. The supervisor focuses on the Supervisory Dialogue as well as the action commitments based on the 360 data from the previous year. The data from the 360 can supplement the normal Dialogue process. This allows a convenient vehicle for benchmarking specific behaviors or issues drawn from the 360 information. Such monitoring / follow-up to Phase II work takes small amounts of time and can usually be included in the yearly Supervisory Dialogue of the individual.

Developmentally, the three year cycle provides time to focus on work behaviors, future plans and yearly goals. Acting as coach, mentor and evaluator, the supervisor should become a consistent source of support and accountability for the individual at both the product / goals and developmental levels.

Exempt and Non-Exempt Differences in the Supervisory Process

Every employee deserves quality supervision. However, when managing others is not part of the equation, and when the work tends to be more focused, technical and routine, a different approach to supervision occurs. If we take the ten question Supervisory Dialogue as the foundation of supervision for all employees, then it would be logical for employees not focused on management or special projects to skip the questions #4,5 & 6 which are focused on criterion based goals. This would reduce the estimated time for the Dialogue by nearly an hour and would not require the same in-depth follow-up sessions demanded with more project focused work.

Furthermore, 360 Degree feedback conducted in the second stage of the three stage supervisory cycle is most advantageous for individuals working across units and with external customers. However, it is relatively easy to develop feedback instruments reflecting the uniqueness of any individual's role. For example, an assistant to a Management Team member, who engages a broad range of personalities across the organization during the course of a year, may wish to have a review that contains specific questions that provide feedback reflecting the peculiar nature of his or her role. A sampling of the assistant's many constituencies can easily provide this information. Clearly, the feedback is only as useful to individuals as it is relevant to their role and responsibilities. For them, it too depends on *what matters for their success*.

Nevertheless, the more routine, the more predictable and consistent the work of any individual, the less the need for broad ranging feedback or project based goals. This, in turn, simplifies the nature of supervision. To maintain standards across the organization, the feedback instruments for a particular type of role may be standardized with supervisors and the employees themselves trained in the specific nature of the expected standards.

Why Performance Management Often Fails

Even the best-intentioned and well organized efforts at performance management fail. There are two primary reasons. The first is that, all too often, the boss uses the goals and the criteria of success more as a means of threat and intimidation than as a vehicle for counsel and support. While criterion based goals allow accountability to occur, the idea is to create opportunities for success and not to establish a case for reprimand or criticism. How often do leaders render the supervisory process useless by pushing employees toward unreachable goals so that success is rarely achieved – all in the name of motivation? Here the supervisor's goal is to squeeze every last piece of work out of the employee. In contrast, The Dialogue allows both a context for performance and personal development based on a comprehensive view of the individual and the job itself. Holding written goals over people's heads in order to drive them to greater performance will inevitably result in mistrust and generally will work only in the short term.

A second reason such criterion-based performance often fails has to do with the reality of "new business". In virtually any given year, new challenges and goals, new priorities are bound to arise. This issue is not that this occurs. Rather, the problem arises when what has been previously negotiated is taken for granted and new tasks and goals are simply added to the old list with nothing being removed. The result is a guessing game for employees as they attempt to determine which goals are most important and which should be put aside. In all probability, the new "add on" goals have not been included as part of the criterion based evaluation. In order for the total performance evaluation process not to lose credibility the following needs to occur: **Assume that a person's performance criteria negotiated during The Supervisory Dialogue represents 100% plus of their time and commitment.**

If a new and important project arrives on the scene, which takes perhaps 10% to 20% of the person's time, new criteria should be agreed upon along with the establishment of new time expectations and priorities. Only by removing something from the original list – taken off the individual's plate - will the performance management process maintain its integrity. While there is always room for emergencies, the failure to renegotiate the criteria in good faith will result in future negotiations being manipulated. All too often individuals will attempt to protect themselves by negotiating "down" so they are not left vulnerable by not being able to complete the goals upon which they had agreed. Their assumption is that the process lacks integrity and there will be no room made for changing demands. Thus, I need to protect myself.

Data Sources Supporting the Three Stages of Performance Management

It is important that the kinds of information generated for each of the supervisory stages do not become ritualized and lacking in meaning. The data must be limited so that those receiving the information do not become overwhelmed. Similarly, if highly complex and unnecessarily elaborate, the individual data will be too difficult to organize, monitor and too expensive to remain affordable. With this in mind, the following explanations focus on categories of information that would seem relevant across a variety of organizations and reflect the kinds of information that will be most useful and sustainable over time. Determining a sampling of behaviors that are consistent with a particular organization's values, as well as their ideal qualities of supervision and leadership is essential if the process is to be useful. Following are some of the areas to be considered.

1. The ten questions of the Supervisor Dialogue would be asked on a yearly basis and completed by both the supervisor and the employee. An important added dimension is that the employee also estimates what he or she believes the supervisor would say. If either the expectations or the assessment of the supervisor are far a field from those of the employee, it provides a unique opportunity to resolve differences before the discrepancies result in problems during the year.
2. The yearly definition of reachable, measurable and criterion based goals (Questions #5 and #6 of the Dialogue) form the basis for measuring actual performance. The goals themselves become the source of critical questions for each evaluation – to what degree was the individual able to accomplish the tasks implied in the goal statements.
3. A brief scaled item questionnaire to be given anonymously **by all supervisors** to their direct reports **on a yearly basis** with the results to be reviewed at the time of the Supervisory Dialogue with their supervisor. This is essential if supervision is to be taken seriously. It also assumes that one of the measurable performance based goals of each manager's dialogue includes supervision. **Without supervision being perceived as important as any other goal, there is no reason for it to be given priority over competing tasks.**
4. The scaled items included in Stage II of the Supervisory Cycle should include three types: a) behaviors reflecting agreed upon organizational values, b) behaviors relating to generic leadership behaviors thought to be relevant across job roles, c) additional behaviors unique to an individual's role and job responsibilities and believed to be essential to a particular individual's success.

5. The Stage II open ended questions should be a) generic and useful to individuals regardless of their specific organizational role and b) questions appropriate and essential for understanding a particular individual's role which can be added if felt to be essential.

Following are the exercises 10-2 and 10 - 3 developed to support the Three Stage Supervisory Cycle. They consider executive leadership skills and attributes and competencies drawn from a wide range of resources. The effort has been to reduce costs, complexities and redundancies while remaining comprehensive and representative of the skills and behaviors most often recognized as crucial to effective leadership and management.

Exercise 10- 2

SUPERVISORY REVIEW

SUPERVISOR'S NAME _____

DIRECTIONS: Please respond to the following scaled items in relation to how you have experienced your supervision during the course of the past year. Place an 8,9 or 10 next to the statement if it represents what you have experienced regularly. Place a 5,6 or 7 if it has been experienced occasionally, and use a 1,2,3 or 4 to indicate that the particular quality has, generally speaking, not been part of your experience.

- ___ 1. Your supervisor helps you define your areas of responsibility and actual authority.
- ___ 2. Through effective delegation, you have had the opportunity to learn, grow and increase your own capacity.
- ___ 3. A relationship has been developed between you and your supervisor in which timely help and support are easily accessible to you.
- ___ 4. You experience the supervisory process as one in which your professional development is important and encouraged.
- ___ 5. You perceive recognition and rewards to be distributed fairly – based on your and others performance and contribution to the organization.
- ___ 6. The goals and objectives that are used to determine your success are fairly negotiated along with agreed upon criteria of success.
- ___ 7. You meet regularly to discuss your work progress with your supervisor and to discuss issues critical to your success.
- ___ 8. You have been observed sufficiently on the job so that your supervisor has a sound grasp of your role, your skills and needed areas of development.
- ___ 9. In light of the areas of development you have identified, you have received necessary help from your supervisor in creating strategies for improving your performance.

___ 10. Your supervisor provides you clear and timely information relating to your own job role.

11. Please identify your supervisor's *three greatest strengths* as a supervisor. Be as specific as possible. _____

12. Similarly, what *three pieces of advice* would you provide which would improve the quality of their supervision for you? _____

Exercise 10 - 3

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY

Directions: For each of the following questions, please rate _____ according to how you experience them in their role within this organization. Use a ten point scale where a score of 8,9, or 10 reflects outstanding performance or a high level of skill. A score in the 5, 6 or 7 range represents a moderate or average level of effectiveness. Finally, a score below five reflects a less than satisfactory skill level or performance in relation to the behavior described.

I. LEADERSHIP / ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORS

1.	Is well organized, well prepared.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
2.	Utilizes own time and that of others effectively.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
3.	Leads from a set of clear goals and a future vision.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
4.	Works to involve others – a true collaborator.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
5.	Assesses problems effectively – a good diagnostician.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
6.	Is decisive – willing to make decisions in a timely fashion.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
7.	Designs meetings effectively – creative, value added, engaging, productive.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding

8.	Communicates ideas and information in a clear and understandable fashion.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
9.	Is recognized as a problem solver – will take charge of a situation and act.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
10.	Continually seeks to improve self and others (seeks out best practices, new training opportunities).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
11.	Supports fun and humor as an essential part of the workplace.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
12.	Shows a strong understanding of the intellectual and technical aspects of the job.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
13.	Builds strong relationships among employees and attempts to build a real sense of team.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
14.	Handles conflict effectively and in a timely fashion.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
15.	Is an effective listener – people feel heard.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
16.	Produces work at a consistently high level of quality.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
17.	Solicits and acts on feedback from others.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
18.	Is willing to provide others with meaningful and timely feedback.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
19.	Acts in a fair and impartial manner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
20.	Acknowledges own mistakes – is non-defensive.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Minimal Average Outstanding
21.	Is consistently honest, trustworthy and ethical in behaviors to others.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

		Minimal	Average	Outstanding
22.	Is approachable and emotionally accessible to others.	1 Minimal	2 3 4 5 6 Average	7 8 9 10 Outstanding
23.	Shows appreciation for the work of others - makes it easy to recognize other's good works.	1 Minimal	2 3 4 5 6 Average	7 8 9 10 Outstanding
24.	Is recognized as a "planner" who, based on data, helps establish priorities, plans implementation then monitors the appropriate implementation.	1 Minimal	2 3 4 5 6 Average	7 8 9 10 Outstanding
25.	Has a customer focus (either internal or external) and assesses their needs and levels of satisfaction as a regular part of this process.	1 Minimal	2 3 4 5 6 Average	7 8 9 10 Outstanding

II. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS AS PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Directions: Please consider this individual in relation to the following questions and provide specific information – with examples when possible – which describe his or her performance as you experience them.

1. What three strengths does this person exhibit which should be maintained?

2. What three specific behaviors would you have this individual change in order to improve their effectiveness?

3. If it was you in their position of leadership, what recommendations would you make in order to improve the morale and, or, productivity of their unit?

4. What several pieces of advice do you believe this individual needs to hear but that others, for whatever reason, might reluctant to tell them?

Summary: Steps for Ensuring the Implementation of Successful Performance Management

In spite of the apparent rationality of this approach and demanding only a minimal amount of a supervisor's time, it is essential to explore what has to occur if such an effort is to be successfully institutionalized. Going through the motions of supervision is very different from having it become part of the very fabric of how business is accomplished. The eight items below represent bottom line demands that such a program requires of management if they and staff are to reap the benefits of such a thorough and ultimately valuable supervisory process:

- i) Performance management must be built into the reward system with qualitative and quantitative data used to establish agreed upon standards and consequences. Special awards for excellence should help legitimize the process in the eyes of supervisors.
- ii) A certain commitment and discipline must be modeled from the very top. Unless such a commitment is perceived by everyone, even the best organized and well intentioned program is doomed to typical supervisory mediocrity and inconsistency.
- iii) People respond to real consequences (both positive and negative) and they need to be both visible and immediate in relation to both the administration of this program and the effectiveness of the supervisors responsible for its implementation.
- iv) The basic elements of the program need to be clearly defined – a place of written reference for new and old employees interested in clarifying any particular aspect of the program. This would be supported by an individual at the executive level with a personal goal and the responsibility and authority for its effective implementation.
- v) Further, this assumes that the quality control of the program must be legitimized through a particular department that has the authority to mobilize the support and resources necessary to insure that the program standards are maintained. This would mean the coordination of training, as well as providing coaching for supervisors and counseling for staff.
- vi) Since supervision as outlined here depends on the reality that it is perceived as a developmental process, essential to this is the ability of the supervisor to build trust among his or her direct reports. If this cannot be accomplished, the process itself will be of limited value. This assumes that this ability becomes a standard for all supervisors. Plainly, supervision is not meant for everyone regardless of their achievements in other areas.

vii) Both supervisors and direct reports will need the training to understand the nature of each aspect of the supervisor process including the expectations of Stage I, II and III as well as the implementation of The Dialogue. Some of this requires practice and feedback.

viii) Since the "interview" aspect of the Supervisory Dialogue is so critical to the process, it is recommended that every supervisor be observed periodically as a measure of quality control. This assumes an understanding and agreement of confidentiality with the person being interviewed.

Institutional change depends on creating an acceptable structure to contain the change initiative. It then demands the commitment and discipline necessary to move the idea forward. In addition, it must be sustained through the application of real rewards and consequences as part of its implementation. Finally, it requires the sincere interest of those for whom the process is designed. If any of these givens are missing, success will not be forthcoming. With them, the team or organization can be assured of valuable dividends in the areas of performance including higher levels of morale, greater trust and, quite possibly, greater productivity. In the end, it is the metrics and creative means of gathering and utilizing the data that will spell the difference between success and failure.

APPENDIX I

BUILDING EFFECTIVE GOALS AND MEASUREMENT CRITERIA

Key to A Successful Ten Question Leadership Dialogue

It has become increasingly evident that there is a great distance between the skills necessary to conduct a successful Supervisory Dialogue/Interview and taking it to the next logical step - application. Well -intentioned supervisors agree on the nature of an employee's goals and, generally, how to measure them. However, the breakdown often comes later during a year-end review or during the course of a mid-year review session. Typically, the original Dialogue agreement will have lacked sufficient specificity. This makes it difficult to determine how well the person has actually performed. Here we provide some clear examples of what we mean by performance goals and the criteria necessary to measure them. We begin with the assumption that **if you can define a goal, you can measure it.**

The Game of Unclear Goals and Ill Defined Criteria

Let's face it, most people do not like to be measured in terms of specific outcomes. Hazy and ill -defined goals provide wiggle room. The less specific, the less threatening. Furthermore, as a person goes higher in most organizations, they tend to find goals, objectives and related criteria to be less defined. Often the assumption is that people are skilled and motivated and will do what they verbally agree to do. The truth is that people vary greatly in what it takes to motivate them or hold them accountable. By demanding clearly defined, criterion based-goals, the supervisor levels the playing field and sets a tone of professionalism that cannot be attained otherwise.

So, why then would supervisors not jump at the opportunity to engage in such a positive process? By working with an employee to define clear performance outcomes along with their measures, they have to understand the capabilities of the individual, the nature of the work/project, and the kind of effort it would take to complete the work at a high standard. Many leaders do not have the patience or are not willing to take the up-front time to consider each major project an employee undertakes. Also, by playing it loose, by keeping things less well defined, it is easier to slip in additional projects or make additional demands of the employee at their whim. As strange as it seems, **clearly**

defining work expectations takes away power from the supervisor - the power to be arbitrary and unfairly critical.

The greatest protection an employee can have against being unfairly treated is a clearly defined job role along with clear, outcome based measures of success.

also

The greatest protection the employer can have against poor work performance is the establishment of clearly defined goals and the agreed upon criteria of success.

The reality is that in a litigious, critical and sometimes unfair world, both the boss and the employee are more secure if clear, unambiguous, descriptive goals exist. They must be supported by measurable criteria that detail rather unequivocally what success is. For employees, goals of this nature, with accompanying criteria, provide standards against which their own performance can be measured. The more descriptive the better. To have reached an agreed upon outcome is difficult to deny when such performance can be weighed against predetermined standards of success.

For the employer, how well an employee attains agreed upon goals and their behaviorally based criteria can aid in distributing rewards and recognition, providing timely and specific coaching, or, in some extreme cases, taking other steps - including the possibility of termination - when previous counsel has been of no avail. Clear goals and measurable criteria go hand in hand with gaining the documentation necessary to take such actions. Whatever the case, the details create objectivity and provide a climate of fairness based on something other than subjective judgments and gut feelings.

Work at the front end of the supervisory process can pay huge dividends to both parties at the other end when accountability is being evaluated. Good employees welcome such standards. The development of criterion-based goals allows them to pace themselves and celebrate their own successes. Too often good, driven employees need such boundaries to help them focus and not to abuse their own tendency to overwork, to lack balance and, eventually, to burn out. It is part of an effective supervisor's role to help such individuals and providing clear, measurable, time-bounded goals can help enormously.

Where performance management often fails is when the employer is not encouraged to re-negotiate new goals and criteria after substantial new work and additional responsibilities arrive on the scene. The result is often an exhausted, frustrated and unappreciated employee for whom complaining would be a breach of loyalty or simply a negative act in their own eyes or, perhaps, the eyes of their boss.

Too often, the boss, anxious to meet the demands made on him or her by their own boss or, perhaps, a board, piles additional work on the employee most easily influenced (the individual who complains least, and, often, is most capable). The result is that both

morale and the quality of performance often decline. Worse yet, what appeared on the surface to be an objective, goal based process of performance management, becomes subjective and arbitrary. Employees find themselves distributing their time according to how they believe success will be measured. This leaves them increasingly vulnerable and dependent on the whim of the boss. Almost certainly, employees learn from the experience and negotiate "down" the next time goals are being established. The tendency then will be to commit to as little as possible so that "when" the additional work is thrown their way without regard to previously contracted "goals," they will not feel punished for negotiating a full plate of goals in the first place.

The integrity of the ten question Supervisory Dialogue depends on the credibility of the original goal negotiation process. Goals can change during the course of a year, but, then, outcomes and expectations must also change to reflect these new realities - a new contract must be agreed upon.

Obviously, emergencies happen, and most workers will attempt to adapt to such extraordinary situations without complaint. The problem is when the exception becomes the norm and the original goal negotiations become a farce. With it will go the integrity of the supervisory process itself and the trust upon which all effective supervision is based.

Establishing Clear, Descriptive, Measurable, Outcome Based Goals

The saying goes, if you can't see it, taste it, smell and measure it, it's not worth much and you shouldn't trust it. While a "slight" exaggeration, employees at all levels need to know when they have succeeded at accomplishing a goal as well as when an agreed upon standard has been attained. Like anything else, if I am a dedicated supervisor, I will do the best I can to create the most objective evaluation process possible. The closer I come to that end, the more I will benefit both myself and my employee. After all, it is the goal and criteria of success which guide the efforts of each employee and become a source of motivation, satisfaction and measurable accomplishment.

Outcome based goals, like the ones we will be discussing, are defined by what must be accomplished and, if possible, at what level of specificity, efficiency or quality. The reason we have both the boss and the employee define the individual's goals and the criteria separately is because there are many ways to frame a goal and many ways to measure its success. Defining and then negotiating the best definition of success can have a lot to do with how well individuals understand the task, how motivated they will be to complete it, and how good they feel once it is achieved. Following are a few of the terms helpful in doing this part of the Supervisory Dialogue:

Outcome or product based: The outcome or product defines what we are attempting to accomplish. Dollars earned, attitudes shifted, paper written, conflict resolved, building completed, course taught. There is clear evidence that what was agreed to was accomplished.

Descriptive: The more we can describe the outcome, the less chance there is for confusion. Being "descriptive" and specific are the two pillars of effective feedback. Any good evaluation process includes a descriptive picture of what has been accomplished. The more specific the better. Being descriptive removes critical or judgmental language from the process. It allows us to stick to the facts and reduces the tendency for people to become defensive or have to justify themselves. What is, is.

Measurable: If we can quantify what it is we are attempting to accomplish, it removes a great deal of subjectivity from the evaluation equation. To increase earnings by so much, raise standards by a third, implement something by a particular date or measurably improve my ability to listen, it makes it much easier to determine how successful a person is.

Any particular goal or the criteria for measuring the successful accomplishment of the goal will utilize these and other terms to varying degrees. There is no set formula. What we do know is that establishing an effective goal and the accompanying measurable criteria for determining how effective the individual has been is crucial to any successful performance review.

The usual assumption is that the kinds of goals outlined here demand a considerable amount of the employee's attention--over and above normal day to day activities. It is these, however, which will provide the individual with challenge, personal growth, and the opportunity to contribute significantly to the forward movement of the organization. The one exception is the goal of supervision. As we will discuss later (see Example #9), without measured accountability in this area, supervision will predictably be undervalued and underutilized. Without consequences, other ways of expending our energy and time will simply matter more to us.

Examples of Effective Goals and Accompanying Measurable Criteria

Sometimes a goal will have the measurement of its effectiveness imbedded in the goal itself. In other instances, the measurable criteria specify certain critical benchmarks or outcomes of greater specificity. For each of the following goals, a rationale will help you understand why it has been presented.

EXAMPLE #1 To hire a new director and two new associate directors by the first of the year.

Additional Performance Measures: A group hiring model will be utilized during which the final candidates in each instance will be measured against common criteria by means of their performance in behavioral vignettes and questions common to each of the other finalists.

Explanation: In this case the goal itself is unambiguous. The supervisor and the employee agree that a particular hiring strategy will be utilized. The assumption is that the employee is skilled in this process. Otherwise, learning this skill set could be one of the employees commitments agreed to in Question Eight of the Supervisory Dialogue -- strategies for overcoming blocks to their effectiveness in the coming year.

EXAMPLE #2 To develop a strategic partnership with _____ corporation in order to maximize our resources and reduce our costs within _____ unit.

Additional Performance Measures: By June I will have laid out an agreed upon strategy for this initiative with our Executive Council. By September I will be in negotiations either with _____ or _____. By November the Executive Council will have the proposed contractual relation in hand for their deliberation and decision. Our goal is to begin the alliance by the first of the year realizing success could be influenced by our future partner. Based on our estimates of the potential for savings, our aim is to save _____ by June, 2006.

Explanation: Clearly this goal is predicated on substantial pre-work and discussion. Again, as in the first goal, it is assumed that the individual has an understanding of the complexities of creating such a strategic alliance. Otherwise the use of a consultant could be legitimized. A less aggressive goal might be framed around "an exploration" of the pros and cons of such an alliance including potential partners. Often the more specific and concrete a goal is, as in this case, the more motivating it becomes. The negotiation by the employee is in the detail of being sure there are sufficient knowledge and resources available to allow success.

EXAMPLE #3 To reorganize the _____ office in order to increase efficiencies and better utilize our current resources.

Additional Performance Measures: By this time next year, operational expenses will be reduced by a full 15% while, at the same time, measurably increasing service in the department. This would be measured by a 10% reduction in unsolicited client complaints and, a similar 10% increase in client satisfaction as measured in our annual client survey.

Explanation: None of these measures appear difficult to obtain and could be easily developed even if there was no precedent. The idea is never to create busy work or create roadblocks for the employee. Rather, the intent is to provide clarity and focus through the specifics of the performance measures.

EXAMPLE #4 To create and implement a prototype course in distance learning which connects our national offices with a low cost training program in _____.

Additional Performance Measures: The technology investment will remain below \$25,000 based on comparable information from our research of other organizations. The content of the training program will be developed in-house with an estimated expenditure of no more than \$10,000 on a consultant specialist to help us format the program. Our aim is to air the first one hour module by March 1 with successive modules to be aired at two week intervals over a ten week period.

Explanation: An effective goal should be more than a wish list or based on conjecture. While a goal can be exploratory in nature, most are the result of a specifically identified need and where there is sufficient knowledge to include some important specifics. This is just such a case. The distance learning has been explored at some depth, best practices in related fields have been studied, and the current goal allows the employee to mobilize the resources necessary to insure forward movement.

EXAMPLE #5 To oversee the development of a system-wide strategic planning initiative which will help us increase our competitive advantage over similar institutions. More specifically, the year long effort will examine resource allocation and measured return on investment, best practices in the areas of marketing and client retention and involve futurists to help us expand our own views in these critical areas.

Additional Performance Measures: Key to the success of this initiative will be the creation of a highly credible Steering Group to guide the process and determine critical time lines, consultant resources, and levels of stakeholder involvement. This group will be convened by Sept. 15. By Nov. 1, a complete schedule of events and levels of projected participation will be available along with the projected cost of the entire planning process (agreed to be less than \$125,000).

Explanation: Many goals represent a work in progress and cannot be detailed beyond a certain point. Even so, as in this case, the employee has an interim deadline. It would be at that time that a re-negotiation of the individual's own goals might be in order depending on the demands resulting from the work of the Steering Committee.

EXAMPLE #6 To display a high level of competence in the utilization of effective design strategies during all meetings of an hour or more.

Additional Performance Measures: Each such meeting will be evaluated, minimally, in relation to what worked, what failed, as well as recommendations for improvement. Both task and process goals will be outlined in advance of each meeting with design strategies linked to them. Review of the evaluations will be utilized to determine overall success and general level of effectiveness.

Explanation: In this case, a senior management team had agreed that most meetings had been a waste of time. Often the wrong people attended meetings and the resources attending the meeting were generally underutilized. It was agreed that for a period of two years, key leaders, after being trained in the utilization of design strategies to increase meeting performance, would be evaluated on a regular basis. The leadership group would reconvene periodically to explore how to continue developing their skills and to clinic the design strategies of other members. There was a sincere commitment by these leaders to use performance measures as a means of stimulating change in the organizational culture regarding meetings.

EXAMPLE #7 To improve the ability to listen and, so that those I influence feel their ideas are being heard.

EXAMPLE #8 To show a measurable increase in my openness to receive feedback.

Additional Performance Measures: At two points in the fiscal calendar year (September and February), I will benchmark my progress in these two areas using data from my recent 360 degree feedback as the baseline against which to compare my current performance. A brief, anonymous, scaled item questionnaire will be developed and distributed to from ten to fifteen of my direct reports and others with whom I deal on a regular basis. HR will help me develop the instrument, gather the data and organize it for my review. I will then share it with my supervisor. Following are several examples of the kinds of items I plan to include in this brief instrument.

*** The degree to which _____ is an effective listener**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

***The degree you feel "heard" by _____**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

*** The degree to which she or he openly solicits feedback in a work setting**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

Several open ended questions will also be included such as:

*** As you currently experience _____ as a leader, what several pieces of advice can you provide him which will help him further improve his listening skills?**

Explanation: In this case, the person had discovered through his 360 degree data feedback, that he needed to make considerable improvement in these two areas of communication. Motivated to improve in the short term, he had identified these two areas on Question Seven of his Leadership Dialogue as areas that might block his success in reaching his other leadership goals. He then suggested in Question Eight during the same review that such a questionnaire could be utilized to benchmark his progress. When individual behaviors are shown to be blocking a leader's ability to succeed, as in this case, it is a logical use of the Supervisory Dialogue to help structure such change as a legitimate part of his performance review. It also gives him or her the opportunity to model such a risk taking strategy for their own employees. Such a developing culture of openness and trust must necessarily be modeled at the top. In our experience, it is not the ability to measure a particular outcome or, in this example, behavior that is the problem. Rather, it is the courage to publicly own the problem and to move toward needed change with accountability being open to public view. (It is assumed that, as in the case of the 360 data) the results are shared by the leader with those most influenced -- such as the individual's direct reports.

EXAMPLE #9 To perform my supervisory functions at a level of excellence agreed to by our leadership group and detailed in the Supervisory Evaluation.

Additional Performance Measures: The Supervisory Evaluation Instrument will be distributed anonymously to all of my direct reports a month prior to my year end review. In addition to the ten-scaled items, it will include three open ended questions agreed to by leadership group. These will be tabulated by HR, analyzed by me and utilized as part of my Leadership Dialogue with the supervisor. This goal will have a weight equal to any of my other key leadership goals.

Explanation: Similar to Example #6, this goal is meant to focus this organization's leaders on the importance of supervision. It is intended to create the necessary leverage to alter norms which give little importance to the supervisory process. Building these into the evaluation process of each leader with supervisory responsibility will dramatically increase the chance that improvement on a system level will, in fact, occur. Key to this is the gathering of data around agreed upon criteria of effective supervision. It is also assumed that each supervisor has had the necessary training to be successful.

Knowing, however, that the discipline of doing supervision had often been superseded by virtually any other demand on the supervisor's time, this goal was established to increase quality and commitment.

Examples of Supervisory Questions Used to Evaluate Supervisory Effectiveness

With this organization, ten specific behaviors were identified as core to their perception of effective supervision. Behaviorally defined, the items lend themselves nicely to a scaled item review. They are similar to the behavioral examples used in Examples #7 and #8 above. In addition, with this review being provided for each supervisor, it is easy to use the results, without the names of the individual supervisors, to benchmark how the organization is doing as a whole in the areas of supervisory improvement. A number of examples of these criteria follow.

Directions: Please place a check on the line where you see this supervisor's level of competence in relation to the specific behaviors identified. Each of these items corresponds to a standard to which we have committed as an organization to move toward. Each supervisor will be evaluated regularly as part of their yearly review.

1. Clearly defines his or her limits of authority.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

2. Jointly works with you to determine the criteria of success upon which your own performance will be measured.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

3. Actively helps you focus on your own career development and the opportunities available to you both within and outside our organization.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

4. Solicits information from you and those you impact on your job concerning your own effectiveness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Somewhat Completely

5. What are this person's greatest strengths as a supervisor?

6. What advice would help increase their effectiveness? Please be specific.

Summary – Establishing Criterion Based Goals

How well individuals set their sights on particular goals and achieve agreed upon results can say more than anything about their on-the-job performance. Removing the arbitrariness from the process of evaluation provides security for both the employer and the employee. The vast number of goals are measurable in concrete and observable terms. Such measures can focus strictly on the product side of goal achievement, or equally important, may include measures of how effective the individual was in carrying out the steps toward the ultimate outcome. Such process measures are not difficult to develop and often provide the clues concerning issues of motivation and leadership potential.

Selecting from four to seven goals of importance to the individual and to the organization can provide a profoundly rich picture of how the individual goes about his or her business. The evaluation data represent the seedbed for each person's individual growth and development. It is for the supervisor to work closely with the each direct report to actualize their potential. In addition, while routine day to day work can be assessed, what will differentiate people is their work on specific goals felt to be important both to them and their supervisor. Here is the playing field upon which merit pay can be determined in a fair and equitable manner since it is criterion based and includes a broad band of behavior and achievement.



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