Good Supervisors Get Better Productivity

By Norb Slowikowski

The key to improving employee productivity is the development of good supervisors. They help management to control labor costs and quality. In turn, this generates the profits needed to bid successfully on additional jobs.

The development of good supervisors is a joint responsibility of contractor management and field supervisors themselves. Management can’t do this task alone. If a journeyman wants to become a supervisor, he should look for ways to learn, and train himself to be ready for the opportunity.

Training starts with technical skills. This must be a way of life in any contracting organization. These are basic training steps:

- Set an atmosphere where people expect and want to learn.
- Explain and demonstrate key technical skills.
- Let the employee apply these skills on the job.
- Follow up to determine whether the job is being done properly and correct or retrain as needed.

Technical training should be ongoing. It should continually be reinforced. This training can never stop.

Foremen and superintendents also need training in functional supervision. This includes planning, leading, organizing and controlling. It also means dealing effectively with people, communicating with others, motivating oneself and others, building teamwork, appraising performance and administering discipline.

If line supervisors fail to refine these skills, increased productivity will never become a reality.

When choosing supervisors, management should look for both the ability to lead and an interest in leading. Supervisors need direction in how to lead, encouragement to lead on their own and the opportunity to apply what they’ve learned on the job. Supervisors must be proficient in a number of areas if they are to lead effectively. The first is a thorough mastery of all job skills, including the equipment and tools used by their crews. Obviously, a trainer can’t train others if he doesn’t know what he’s teaching. Technical proficiency is the basis of any contracting business.

No leader can expect others to follow unless he sets a good example. By practicing good work habits, a supervisor will gain respect and be more likely to inculcate these qualities in his crews. It’s hard for a supervisor to tell others to do things that he doesn’t.

The good supervisor plans the job before it starts. The same applies to the day’s work and the task at hand. Unless he knows what is to be done and in what manner, he can’t give proper instructions to the crew. This means organizing each task, at least to the point that the supervisor can help or correct crew members when necessary. It means anticipating problems and solving them effectively when they arise. It means using pre-job planning sessions for training purposes. A good supervisor quickly adapts to change (Murphy’s Law usually runs rampant on construction jobs). He is willing and able to make decisions.

Effective supervisors express care for their employees. It is far better to show the employee how to correct a mistake than to criticize and badger him. Most people find it hard to learn when they’re angry because they’ve been put down personally for what is, most often, unintentional. The good supervisor wants to avoid the next mistake.

Supervisors need to make certain their crews have all the tools and equipment they need. They make suggestions and encourage feedback from their crews. Above all, they give support to show that the entire crew is a team.

About the Author
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