Do you think the best tradesman would make the best supervisor? He may, but then again, he may not. There are five major areas that require special attention in managing subordinates:

1. Thinking like a leader.
2. Being flexible to change.
3. Developing a style of leadership.
4. Keeping communication open.
5. Being decisive in responsibilities.

We all have different ideas as to what a leader should be and how he should act. Most literature stresses that a leader should plan, organize, control, coordinate and motivate his/her respective organization. We all agree with this concept in one form or another. However, a leader must also be willing to go the “extra mile,” like spending time off the job in performing his duties. One should not only be willing to devote personal time to his own self-development, but also be interested in the study of human behavior, needs and feelings.

A leader learns to be open-minded and adaptable to the constant changes in the industry. The difference between an amateur and a professional leader is that the amateur sees that the job looks tough, and says “I’ll wait until it gets easier.” On the other hand the professional says, “Regardless of today’s circumstances, I’m committed and I’ll make it happen because it’s my
job." That is what you call attitude and tenacity.

The leader must not only be secure in his own job knowledge and technical skills, he should also be able to communicate those skills to others. This is not a simple transition for many to make.

Being Flexible to Change . . .

Most people are afraid of change. Nearly everyone wants to improve and get ahead, but even changes that may produce personal benefit may cause a degree of anxiety in most of us. We are very secure in our own world, and we are unsure of what change will bring.

There is no doubt that change is a part of life. Constant breakthroughs in science and technology are followed closely by changes in business and industry. Where would the trades be today if new materials and tools had not been explored?

A leader must not only be able to cope with change, but often be willing to initiate it. A leader has opportunities to make improvements and to make suggestions to his supervisor. A leader should not be afraid to use his power, and the boss or owner has to be receptive to these potential improvements. People are resistant to change. The three major reasons for this are:

1. Change may bring financial loss;
2. Change may bring a loss of status, which affects egos;
3. Change may result in implied criticism. This implies that the existing system is not effective.

A poor leader tends to ask, “Aren’t they ever satisfied?” “What else do they want from me?” Good open communication helps reduce the effects of change. Five suggestions for coping with change are:

1. Never announce a change without preparing, or involving, the workers beforehand.
2. Take the time to plan. Never assume that the reason for change is obvious to all.
3. Be prepared for objections and, if you’ve planned properly, you won’t be flustered by worker anxieties.
4. Concentrate on the benefits of the change for the employee and the company.
5. Follow-up on the change after it has been implemented. Often, the change does not work out and no one follows up to modify the procedure.

A leader’s continued concern and understanding can go a long way in building support and can pave the way for better acceptance of future changes. Most employees are concerned about employers who make changes because they are threatening, but in reality the real threat to them probably comes when a company does not institute necessary changes.

A Style of Leadership . . .

Leadership styles range from authoritative to participative. The authoritative leader assumes that people are lazy, have to be controlled and coerced to perform, and that such people desire to be directed rather than accept responsibility. On the other hand, the participative leader assumes that the average person is not lazy, is strongly motivated by the desire to achieve his potential and is willing to seek out and accept responsibility. Studies have shown that older supervisors and younger new leaders tend to be authoritarian. Being authoritarian in nature is not necessarily negative because some workers want and need the direction, structure and the security that authoritarian leaders offer.

Supervisory style is also described as being employee-centered or job-centered. The employee centered leader is interested in people. He is normally a
good listener, genuinely interested in human relations, and believes that time spent dealing with the human side of the job is most productive in the long run. The job-centered leader is likely to be very concerned with the technical aspects of a job. He tends to believe time spent on human relations is just so much time taken away from productive work.

Both of these theories result from basic personality or philosophical differences, and there is no right or wrong way. However, most successful leaders agree that a person who neglects the human dimension and concentrates entirely on the mechanical and technical side of leadership has little chance of developing into a first-rate leader. With this in mind, let us next discuss communication.

**Keeping Communication Open...**

The primary reason for poor communication among people is due to their different sets of experiences and values. From this we can draw the conclusion that meanings are in people, and not in the words they use. The meanings that people attach to the words they use are always in context with their particular sets of experiences and values. Based on this theory, leaders may get these responses to faulty communication, “The other guy is stupid. He just doesn’t understand English.” “The employee’s attitude is wrong. He doesn’t give a damn.” “I’m inadequate, maybe this job is getting too big for me?” In the job situation these three responses to faulty communication can be devastating and can result in one or more of the following situations:

1. The leader and employee may lose respect for one another.
2. Employees may feel threatened when the boss says or infers that their best may not be good enough.
3. Loss of production due to mistakes resulting from misunderstanding of instructions given.
4. Loss of morale.
5. Boss and employee may become defensive about their part in the faulty communication.

Here are some suggestions for avoiding faulty communication:

1. Create an open climate in which
employees believe they can, without risk, admit that they do not understand the message.

2. Obtain immediate feedback from employees on what is communicated.

3. Avoid attaching blame for faulty communication. “I know what I told you”—only starts arguments.

In order to minimize these communication breakdowns, a successful leader has to relate to employees both as individuals and as groups. Individuals are unique human beings. Many leaders tend to forget that each employee should be treated differently. Leaders must be fair and impartial in dealing with employees. This does not mean that they should not use different approaches with their employees. They should attempt to understand what motivates each individual, and make exceptions to rules when special circumstances seem to justify them.

Treating people as individuals with different needs, abilities and goals, is one of the characteristics of effective leadership. People are unique in the way they see the world. The value systems of both the 20 year old and the 45 year old are probably very much at odds. Leaders have to accept the fact that people see the world according to their own very personal points of view. Their outward behavior reflects their personal values, not necessarily the leader’s values.

A work group is a structured formal group organized to perform one or more specific functions on the job. Within this group, informal groups and leaders emerge. These members tend to share very similar opinions and interests, and have considerable influence in the workplace. As a leader you will be called upon to deal with these groups, and with the individual employees. It is human nature for people to form groups. These informal groups always establish certain standards for behavior, or group norms, and have informal leaders. These groups could have high or low production standards for the group. It is most important that a leader recognize, accept and maximize the group’s cohesiveness in getting the job done. For example, if a change is being considered, involving the informal leader during the planning process would be a good strategy. Once the informal leader’s commitment to the change has been assured, the leader will face less resistance from the entire group. Effective leaders do not fight the formation of groups, but rather learn to understand them and to take advantage of the constructive benefits they offer.
Issues associated with administrative duties include important items such as: training and development, motivation, giving orders, discipline, decision making, organizing, safety and health of employees and, most important, planning. Without effective planning the administration of a leader’s duties cannot be performed successfully. Someone once said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll probably end up somewhere else.” A leader must have a plan or goal, which will allow a job to be completed in the most cost effective manner possible. In various workshops since 1980, groups of tradesmen at all levels, were asked what they thought were common causes of wasted time in the construction industry. The list included, and was not limited to, such problems as: sending people to the wrong job site, painting wrong colors, incorrect blue prints, material not on the job, poor allocation of manpower, lack of proper equipment, poorly estimated jobs, leader-less work crews, poor materials, unmotivated workers, tired employees, poor supervision, weather, bad night before, painting an area prematurely, too many non-work related discussions and haste. Poor planning seemed to thread its way throughout the entire list.

According to most experts, advance planning is the area too often neglected by leaders. They seem to consider work at a desk as just so much time away from real work on the job. Effective leaders do not make this mistake. Advance planning may be brief, and may take as little as 10 to 15 minutes before or after the work day. It is considered one of the most important responsibilities. Planning is simply thinking in advance. It establishes what, when, where, and by whom something is to be done, and with what materials and equipment. Dealing with these five factors requires organized and systematic thinking, which invariably requires writing. All experts in management and successful leaders agree that the leader will accomplish more if operations are planned and written in advance. Failure to plan leads to trouble for the leader, crew and boss, and causes emergencies and constant manpower or equipment problems, which eventually delay jobs. Planning is personal and unique to each individual. No two people approach planning in the same way. Planning does not guarantee success, but it certainly leads to it. Planning is the chief way a leader achieves his primary goal, which is not to do the work himself, but to arrange matters in such a way that the work is accomplished by others with their own approval and support.

Remember, to be effective, think like a leader, be flexible to change and be predictable in your leadership style. Keep communication open and be decisive in administrating your responsibilities. Also believe: “No one of us is smarter than all of us!”