



Safety Leadership for New (and not so new) Supervisors

by Carol Vincent, Arcis Corporation

Photo: Seismic In Motion 2005

At some time in the past, your employer found you dependable, worthy and highly skilled at your job—so you were promoted to supervisor. You were chosen because you knew how the company likes to do things, you had experience keeping production up, you had superior knowledge in your craft and you were skilled at solving operational problems when they came up. But how much training and experience in *supervising people* did you bring to your new position? Production skills and people skills are very different talents. Doing a good job yourself is often easier than making sure *others* do a good job.

Challenges

As a supervisor you may have suddenly found yourself managing an entire crew of people that were your peers a few days before. Along with more pay, and a more important role in the company, came a whole lot of new responsibilities. You now had a multitude of duties associated with production, quality and employee safety, plus all the paperwork associated with a management position.

Unfortunately, supervisors don't always receive the necessary tools and training to help them manage the people-problems that often arise on the job. Some newly promoted individuals were lucky—they had an extraordinary role-model to follow. But others need to study the best ways to handle people, just as they had to study how to handle a new tool or piece of equipment. It can be an uphill climb.

Getting the Most Out of Workers

Your job as a supervisor is to get the job done with the least amount of resources. So how do you get the most out of those you supervise—individually and as a group? How do you get them to perform safely, so you don't lose this valuable resource to an accident or fatality?

Do you use the carrot or the stick? Do you use authority or persuasion? It is true that you can sometimes get a lot done with "the big stick" approach, but this style of supervision leads to poor morale, reduced work quality, and higher turnover. The most successful supervisors do the following:

- **Lead with assurance** - Outstanding supervisors are confident in themselves and their skills, while recognizing the individual strengths of their staff.
- **Set the example** - They know and abide by the company policies and programs. They follow all safety rules and model how to be a responsible employee.
- **Reinforce good performance** - They notice such things as quality work and safe attitudes, and praise employees who demonstrate these.
- **Develop coaching skills** - When performance problems are identified, they coach and train the employee, using discipline as a final recourse.
- **Value crew member safety** - They show this with sincere concern, actions and attention to safety & health issues.
- **Learn what motivates employees** - In order to strengthen both work performance and safety performance,

they strive to understand employees' values and try to *connect those values to work practices*.

What Motivates People?

As a supervisor, your job is to get work done through the efforts of others. How well you succeed depends on how well your workers are motivated to do a good job. Note, this does not say how well *you* motivate *them*, because motivation comes from within a person-it involves values that they hold and bring to a job. They may not even be consciously aware of these values. The best you can do is try to learn what drives them internally, and then connect to this. Usually, a combination of motivators exists in all of us but some are more important than others. For example, a key motivator of your crew members could be a need for:

- A Larger Paycheque - Someone with a large family to support, or expensive hobbies, may care most about financial gain.
- Popularity - Some people have a strong need to be in the limelight, or to be seen by their peers as a leader of the work group.
- Close Friendships - A person may be content with a job- or even change jobs-in order to work with a buddy they feel loyal to.
- Advancement- Those with ambition want chances to do things or learn things that can lead to promotion.
- Job Security - When this is a worker's strongest motivation, they will often give up chances for pay increases or other rewards to keep a job they can count on.

Supervisors Can Be Wrong About Worker Values

A research study asked both workers and their supervisors to rank the items listed in the table below, as to what was most important to them.

WHAT WORKERS VALUE MOST		
What Workers Value Most	Worker's Ranking	Supervisor Ranking
Credit for their work	1	7
Interest in their work	2	3
Fair pay, with increases	3	1
Understanding & appreciation	4	5
Promotion on merit	5	4
Counsel on personal problems	6	8
Good working conditions	7	6
Job security	8	2

In this survey, crew members wanted most to receive credit for their efforts and to have work that interested them. Supervisors guessed that pay and job security were most important. This demonstrates that if supervisors are not in touch with the values of the people they manage, they'll have a hard time understanding what motivates them.

If credit for the work they do is an employee's highest

value-but they don't receive it-what will motivate them to perform well? Some people work mainly for their paycheque, but others want a lot more out of the 8-10 hours a day they spend on the job. A good supervisor tries to understand *what that is*.

Why Would A Person Want To Work Safely?

Try to find out why safety might be an important value for those you supervise. Is their strongest motivator connected to money, power, fame, friendship, family or security? To determine this, you must *get to know your workers*. You have to find their motivational "button" and push it! What inspires one person may have just the opposite effect on someone else. Suddenly, you realize that being a good supervisor is a very complex matter.

How can you find out what workers think, feel or need, when they may not be aware of these things themselves? You can learn a lot by just watching, listening and asking questions. What they *value* is what tends to motivate them. Strike up a conversation now and then just for the purpose of getting to know them better. Listen to what they say. Show an interest in their hobbies, interests, family situation, etc. When you show a personal interest in them, they'll have more interest in doing a good job for you. When you talk about safety, they'll also tend to listen more carefully to your suggestions.

Connect Accident Prevention to a Lifestyle

When you know something about your crew members' lifestyle and values, you can connect this knowledge to your safety messages. During safety meetings or work discussions, you can *remind* them what a broken leg, amputated finger or back injury would mean to them personally. You can talk about the effect this would have on their sports, hobbies and outdoor activities. If you know they have hopes of getting ahead in the company, point out that setting a good safety example will be important for getting that promotion. If some individuals tend to be rather "macho" about their own well being, perhaps they can be inspired to watch out for their buddies.

Show interest in things crew members do with their children and encourage their health and safety for the family's sake. In other words, don't require safe work practices because it's the *rule*. Make safety a *personal* matter.

A Supervisor's Role - Leader, Coach and Motivator

Some supervisors may have had a good role model to follow in the past and have grown "naturally" into their leadership role. Others must work to gain skill in leading and motivating. The following checklist may help identify both your strengths and some supervisory skills you need to work on. Perhaps it will also lead you to understand what motivates you to become a respected supervisor and leader. Check it out....

SAFETY LEADERSHIP & MOTIVATION CHECKLIST

No.	Item	Seldom	Sometimes	Always
1.	Have you taken steps to understand the interests and values of your crew members so you can better understand what motivates them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Do you "catch people doing things right" as often as possible, praising their performance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	When you offer recognition for good safety performance, do you try to link it to the employee's values?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do you give thorough orientations and personal attention to new employees for several days, since they are statistically at high risk for accidents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Do you "coach" work behaviors by acknowledging your crew members' strong points, along with things that need improvement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Do you emphasize teamwork and the need for everyone to set good safety examples for new workers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Are you aware of the high cost of accidents to your company and do you convey this to employees in term of job security for all?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Do you consistently lead with a "carrot" instead of pushing with "a big stick"?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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daryl@on-sitecamp.com www.ess-global.com