



Project Managers Need to Be Supervisors Too

Project Managers require many skills in order to effectively manage projects. So many skills are necessary, that often the most obvious one gets lost: *Project Managers need to be Supervisors too.*

Of course, staffing arrangements aren't always neat and clean. Quite often in projects, there are matrix arrangements in the reporting structure. Project staff may be loaned to the project, and are still managed by their "home base" manager. For extensive projects, staff members may be assigned directly to the Project Manager for supervision for the duration. There are many permutations. Regardless of the structure, project people still deserve high quality supervision, 1. Because it's the right thing to do, and, 2. Because it lowers project risk.

Lots of Project Managers have spent career time as conventional business managers or supervisors, but some don't have any formal training in supervision. For the latter, recognizing that an entire team now depends on them for leadership of both the project and their day-to-day needs, can be a weighty insight.

INSTANT SUPERVISOR

Avoiding panic, how does one become an instant supervisor? Well, first off, it's best to let go of that expectation. Second, leverage the resources already

in place to help. You can immediately contact the "sending" supervisors of your incoming staff. See if you can make an agreement to have the sender retain a portion of the supervisor duties. You might say, "If you [sending manager] will be responsible for Joe's annual evaluation paperwork, I'll contribute input in relation to his performance on my project."

Third, move to establish a relationship with the Human Resources department and any non-project supervisory talent you can find, as your mentors. Most HR folks love to be asked for help and are happy to take you under their wing. Resist their tendency to want you to go to three years of supervisor classes, and steer their support to things like orientation. Ask, for example, "What are the top three policies where I'm likely to run afoul, and can you help me understand my obligation as a supervisor in relation to them?" At the very least, you need to become aware of the existing supervisor policies, and this is where HR folks can be a big help.

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*I've been reviewing our planning session meeting notes... they help me get grounded.”
- A State Agency Executive.*

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In your new role you have a higher duty of care to others. If this is your first time leading others, get clear on how your role changes from being part of labor to being part of management. Ask your HR about the principles needed to drive your relationship to your team, like fostering a healthy work atmosphere. That sounds pretty vague, but someone with experience can help you determine what that is and how to best achieve it. If unions are involved, ask for specifics about them. There are many traps you can fall into if you don't know the difference between “working conditions” and “management discretion.”

IMPORTANCE OF PAPERWORK

Determine the mundane, routine deadlines for supervisory paperwork. Though boring and sometimes maddening, be absolutely crisp about doing it. It demonstrates respect for your staff, and the company. Lean on others to help you. If you need clerical support insist on it as a project expense.

THE UNSPOKEN CONTRACT

Perhaps most important of all, be aware of the unspoken contract between supervisor and supervisee. It goes something like this: “I'll treat you fairly and try to keep the world out of your way, and you do the work to the best of your ability.” When you can bring this to a discussion between the two of you, you'll have a good base

for the relationship. Try this, it works. And remember, as the supervisor, you always go first. Here are some ideas to get you started:

PROJECT MANAGER: “I WILL...

- Tell you what I expect
- Keep your path free of obstacles
- Do all that I can to set you up for success
- Listen to you
- Respect that you have and need a private life
- Negotiate estimates and assignments with you to ensure you can be accountable for them

SUPERVISEE: “I WILL...

- Ask for what I need to be successful
- Speak up when I'm in trouble
- Participate in estimating and planning my work
- Commit to my deadlines
- Speak up about my interests and goals
- Be willing to share the burden of the “unfun” stuff

And finally, one of the best-kept secrets to becoming a good supervisor is: remember your own favorite supervisor and *copy, copy, copy!* 🐺

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