

The Industrial Supervisor

By F. L. MIZE
Texas Technological College

Who Is a Supervisor?

A supervisor may be defined as anyone in an organization who is responsible for the work of others, irrespective of the high or low status in the hierarchy of management. However, the immediate supervisors of the working force have been aptly called the key men in industry. Unquestionably they have one of the most difficult supervisory jobs. They must bring to fruition the plans handed down to them, often with little or no opportunity to influence the formulation of the plans or the choice of the facilities with which they are to be carried out. It is their duty to develop a group of subordinates (possibly from personnel they, the supervisors, have no voice in selecting) who can, under any ordinary circumstances, get out adequate production with a minimum of friction, dissatisfaction, injuries, labor turnover and cost.

Any properly organized industrial corporation has a group of top executives to whom we refer loosely and collectively as management. These executives devote most of their time to developing those broad policies of administration that determine the general activities and functions of the entire organization. Immediately below management we find a group of division heads, superintendents, engineers and other staff experts, whose responsibilities deal less with overall administration and more with research activities and concrete problems of design and production.

These executives and staff officials and advisors have the ear of management and are frequently called into conference in matters pertaining to the formulation of company policies, but they usually can depend upon someone higher up for the final disposition of such matters as these. However, they are called upon daily to make decisions or recommendations concerning actual operational plans, procedures, and problems, and they must depend upon the operations supervisor to back up the judgments and justify the recommendations.

The success of the organizations in which they are employed depends largely upon the efficiency of the industrial supervisors. In industry, in business, in government — wherever the work of the world is being performed — first line supervisors are at all times very close to the firing line, and their general responsibilities are concerned with getting the work done. If they fail, all the research and planning of technical experts and the decisions of management are useless. The work must be done.

Management depends on the supervisors to get out adequate production in spite of any difficulties that may arise, and this without increasing costs unduly and without injuring subordinates physically or impairing their morale. Consequently, today's successful supervisor (foreman, section head, office manager, gang boss, department head, "pusher" — call him by any of his names) must be a vigorous leader of men, a shrewd and effective planner of work and methods, a source of practical technical know-how, and a tactful mediator between policy-setting management on the one hand and rank and file workers (and possibly their union representatives) on the other. Small wonder, then, that the cry goes up again and again: "We need better supervisors."

What Are the Major Responsibilities of the Supervisor?

The basic responsibilities of the supervisor are:

1. Making decisions
2. Organizing
3. Directing
4. Controlling

The supervisor is a manager and must perform all the functions of management named above.

Although major decisions involved in the setting of objectives for the organization, forecasting future business and general operating conditions, and formulating policies and general procedures are made at upper management levels and the final results are handed down to the supervisor, he must exercise sound judgment daily in decisions made within the framework of the company policy and concerning operations and personnel problems of his group. Moreover, the supervisor's men will wait for him to make the important decisions for the group. He has the authority to do so, by virtue of his position, and the workmen expect him to accept the responsibility that accompanies that authority. So it is important to the organization that its supervisors know the following essential steps in formulating sound decisions.

1. Gather the facts.
2. Analyze and organize the facts, seeking relationships and definitions of the problems involved.
3. Determine possible solutions or promising courses of action, utilizing technical knowledge and past experience.
4. Evaluate each proposed solution or course of action in the light of knowledge, experience, and forecasts of future conditions, and choose the most promising alternative.
5. Act on the decision, but follow up for control and evaluation of results.

The supervisor that uses snap judgment is likely to be short of facts and is usually slighting other important steps in the judgment process. Hasty decisions made today and reversed tomorrow will cost the supervisor the confidence and respect of his men, will bring embarrassment to the offending supervisor's superiors, and will cost the company money.

Organization is a scheme of purposeful relationships. In an industrial enterprise it means the proper kind and quantity of materials, the right types and sizes of machines and equipment, the correct number and kinds of employees properly assigned and fitted together, ample operating capital, all assembled and available at the right time and place. Without organization, even when purpose exists, there can be only chaos, with any adaptation of facilities or coordination of efforts toward a purpose purely coincidental. Organization enables the supervisor to establish proper relationships — man to man, job to job, and man to job — and to assemble his equipment and materials for required production at low unit cost.

When the supervisor has completed his organization there should be definite objectives and goals outlined for the work group and clearly understood by each man; each job or task should be specifically assigned to the worker

est fitted to perform it; each individual worker should have fixed responsibilities for which he and he alone is accountable; and the supervisor himself should be prepared with proper technical knowledge, official company information, and operational records to enable him to lead and inspire his men and direct and coordinate their efforts.

Directing, for the supervisor, means making fair and appropriate assignments of various tasks, training men in proper work methods for their respective jobs, and providing leadership for motivation and maintenance of high morale. Dynamic leadership is the cornerstone on which the entire managerial process rests.

Leadership is the ability to get other people to work willingly through the leader's influence and example. The workers honor the supervisor's leadership, if they do, because they respect him and want to follow his direction, and it is important for the supervisor to know what his men expect of him. The following characteristics or qualifications are commonly expected of the supervisor by the men and women in his group:

1. That the supervisor know his job — not only have sound technical knowledge concerning the equipment, materials, and the operations assigned to his department, but also have clear understanding of the objectives and purposes of top management as they affect his department.
2. That the supervisor be able to make good assignments — assignments that are reasonable and fitted to the man in the particular work circumstances, with directions that are clear and complete and include explanations of standards of quantity and quality expected, with fair distribution of undesirable or preferred assignments.
3. That the supervisor provide necessary tools, materials, and working conditions to do a good job.
4. That the supervisor follow up on every assignment to give recognition for a job well done or to provide corrective advice or training where needed.
5. That the supervisor be courteous, understanding of the employee's problems, willing to talk things over freely, prompt in handling any grievance, and consistent in his treatment of his men.
6. That the supervisor rate his men honestly and represent them adequately to top management.

Controlling, for the supervisor, means following up on his planning, organizing, and his delegation and assignment of tasks to coordinate efforts and activities toward the accepted objectives and goals. The patterns for control are set during the planning stages and during assignment and training.

The good supervisor controls, always, by comparing performance and results with standards, never by comparing achievement of one person with that of another person. When the supervisor finds results at variance with standards he initiates corrective action, usually advice or training for the worker or changes in methods, tools, materials, or even workers.

Some Specific Duties and Responsibilities of the Supervisor and His Concurrent Rights

1. The supervisor is expected to get the work out — the correct amount, the proper quality, and on time. Acceptance of this responsibility should give him

the right to know what is being planned far enough in advance to enable him to be ready for his part. He has the right to a voice in the selection of his own men and in any status change or other action that affects them. He has the right to make all assignments to his own men and to provide all training, leadership, and supervision.

2. The supervisor is expected to serve as an effective medium of two-way communication between management and his men. He must be carefully informed concerning the objectives and policies of management. He has the right to interpret all communications for his own men and to be heard in their behalf concerning their work, needs, or feelings.
3. The supervisor is expected to discipline his workers and maintain morale. He must be invested with the authority to carry out necessary disciplinary measures and should have the primary right to administer all disciplinary action against his own men. He has a right to expect company working conditions reasonably conducive to good employee morale.
4. The supervisor is expected to protect and care for company property. He has the right to expect authority for control over any property for which he is responsible, during the period of his accountability.
5. The supervisor is expected to supervise, observe, rate, and recommend his men. He has the right to have his ratings and recommendations considered as first evidence in any judgment of his men for wage or salary changes, status changes, or disciplinary action.

Qualifications of a Supervisor

Supervision is in itself a profession, trade, science, or fine art, depending on how you look at it. It is the only profession or trade in which a man or a woman may be asked to turn out a good job without having specifically trained in that field. As a rule, the supervisor is chosen from the ranks because he has proved himself to be an excellent worker, or because some superior feels that he has the makings of a good boss.

If you were the employer trying to pick a good supervisor, you would have a better basis than that. Probably you would look for a man who: knows the best way of doing every job under his supervision; can do each one of these jobs the best way; can train another person to do any one of the jobs the best way; and can get an employee to do the job the best way after he has been trained.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aspley, John Cameron, The Handbook of Employee Relations, The Dartnell Corporation, Chicago, 1955.
- Bittel, Lester R., What Every Supervisor Should Know, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1959.
- Brown, Milon, Effective Supervision, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1956.
- Cooper, Alfred M., How to Supervise People, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1952.
- Freeman, G. L., and Taylor, E. K., How to Pick Leaders, Funk and Wagnalls Co., New York, 1950.
- Halsey, George D., How to Be a Leader, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1938.
- Hoslett, Schugler, Human Factors in Management, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1951.
- Maynard, Harold B., Effective Foremanship, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1941.
- Pfiffner, John M., The Supervision of Personnel, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1958.
- Spriegle, William R., Schulz, Edward, and Spriegle, William B., Elements of Supervision, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1957.