

THE 10 KEYS OF
**EFFECTIVE
SUPERVISION**

Building Healthy Organizational Cultures
through Servant Leadership

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Advantage®

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This book is dedicated to the honor and glory of God and to those individuals committed to the joy of servant leadership!

SHARING CONTINUOUSLY

No matter what the situation, Coach always kept the camp counselors as informed as possible. That didn't mean he told them every little detail of every situation; it meant that he always shared whatever information was necessary and appropriate. While Coach would be the first to agree that "information is power," he truly believed that power needed to be in the hands of those closest to the situation.

One summer, during the first week of camp, Coach shared with the counselors that one of the campers was very sick and might not make it through the season. It was heart-related and nothing contagious, he explained. Coach told the group that the young man had attended the camp every year for the past decade and that he and his parents had decided that he should try to spend one more summer there. Some of the counselors asked who he was, but Coach emphasized that the young man wanted to be treated no differently than the others and that the camp would maintain his dignity and confidentiality. Only his individual counselor and group leader would be informed of his identity and the details of his condition.

Halfway through the summer, the young man died of a massive heart attack. Because they had been informed of that possibility, the counselors were much better able to handle

that awful news and focus their attention on helping the other campers deal with the loss of their friend. Coach had told the counselors just enough but not too much. He maintained a commitment to open and honest communication and trust as well as to the dignity of all involved.

Think back to a time when an important decision needed to be made in your workplace. What was your reaction? Did you make the decision on your own, or did you seek the advice of others who reported to you? If it was a group effort, was this typical in your decision-making process? If you felt that you alone needed to make the decision, how did you communicate that to the others?

If employees are to feel valued, communication must be open and honest and must flow both ways. Supervisors and employees must regularly share what is on their minds and in their hearts—and they must share continuously. Successful organizations don't just hope that will happen; they establish a system to ensure it will happen.

FOUR PARADIGMS OF COMMUNICATION

Over the years, we have employed four core paradigms of effective communication, combining our own ideas with some insights of others. We believe that it is virtually impossible to communicate effectively without observing these fundamentals:

Concern for others

- Demonstrate kindness, understanding, and care for others.

- Deal honestly and directly with the issues, while showing concern and respect.

Sense of humility

- “Pride is concerned with who is right. Humility is concerned with what is right.” —Ezra Taft Benson
- Humility is not about tearing yourself down but about building others up.

Service above self

- Give back better than you are given.
- “People who succeed in leadership and life do not go around settling scores. They do not even keep score. They ‘run up the score’ by doing good to others, even when others do not deserve it.” —Henry Cloud, from *9 Things a Leader Must Do*

Success

- Successful communication is defined by others, not by self.
- Successful communication is dependent upon everyone else’s success. Both the sender and the receiver must understand the intent. You can say something repeatedly, but you have not communicated effectively unless the listener “gets it.”

You will note that nothing in those paradigms requires that you must be highly articulate to be a good communicator. Instead, the emphasis is on reaching out to others and listening intently so that they feel valued. You should be striving for positive commu-

nication that is free of manipulation and contention. That is how you encourage employees to participate in the crucial exchange of ideas. The more that others see that you are genuinely committed to listening and the more they observe you responding appropriately, the more committed they will be to advancing the organizational goals and initiatives.

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Proactive supervisors go out of their way to get feedback from their employees, recognizing that they are an important source of information about how to do a job and do it better. Instead of waiting for your employees to come to you with issues and complaints, you should go to them.

You need to create a safe and positive environment in which information flows freely and the employees can honestly express their feelings. Find a private place to talk, and ask for specific examples of how you might do better—and then listen attentively. Never become defensive. Thank the employee for the feedback, and be sure to follow up. Both of you will want to be sure that the message sent was the one received.

You also will need a private place to offer feedback to employees. An important element of that, as well, is to listen attentively to learn what you can before offering your thoughts. We teach a technique that we call the “question-based process.” It’s three simple steps. First, ask questions—probing, purposeful, and open-ended ones. Then, be silent and actively listen, making good eye contact and nodding to show you are paying close attention. Then respond by reflecting what you have heard, including the emotion that you perceived to be behind it.

Let's say it's time to talk to an employee about being late. The conversation might go like this:

"Jerry, I noticed this morning that you were kind of late," you say. "I'm curious what's happening. What's going on? Is there any way I can help you?"

"Stuff at home was kind of crazy. I'm having a hard time getting out of the house."

"I see," you respond. "You're telling me things are kind of crazy on your end and a bit of a challenge. Is that the case?" The dialogue continues in that manner, and you make no assumptions and say nothing to make Jerry defensive. You're just engaging in conversation, but eventually he tells you enough so that you know how to proceed.

In essence, you are taking the high road as you try to determine whether Jerry is on board with the company or not. You start by assuming the best. If it's just a temporary struggle at home, you will soon find out through your gentle questioning. He's trying. He wants to be productive. You can work with someone like that. You can help him overcome the problem. Or you may learn that Jerry has just ceased caring. He snaps at you for picking on him and insists his tardiness doesn't matter. Your approach then will be quite different.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

When we started working together at the school, we often heard complaints from the ranks that they were kept in the dark. In response, the leadership put together glossy folders and programs and conducted hour-and-a-half information sessions on various topics of concern. In short, we went overboard. Many of the employees didn't want all

those details. They wanted their leaders to be open with them about the big picture on a regular basis.

Think of it this way. If you plan to paint the hallway, will your employees care very much about how you choose the brand of paint, whom you will hire as the contractor, or whether the brushes and rollers are premium quality? Or will they just want to know what color it will be and when the painting will occur?

Supervisors need to understand how much information their employees want and need to know. If you tell your employees too much, you waste their time and yours. If you tell them too little, they may suspect that you are keeping them out of the loop. Not everybody will feel the same way, of course. Some employees thrive on all that talking. They want the details, and they want to know how you and everyone else feels about it all. Others just want you to tell them what they are supposed to do and then get out of their way so they can do it. They want effective communication, not excessive communication.

It's a shifting balance that requires sensitivity on the part of supervisors. Generally, it is better to share information and allow your employees to sort through what is most significant to them in being able to do their job. You create an atmosphere of secrecy when you withhold important information—or commonly known information. The outdated philosophy of sharing information only on a “need-to-know basis” will simply breed mistrust. Employees are experts at seeing through that game.

A much better approach is to share with them whatever you believe they might want to know. Make that the priority over what you think they need to know. Let's say your organization is changing a key strategy. You realize the importance of letting the employees

know—but you also recognize that not everyone will want the same amount of background and all the details.

To strike that balance, you can set up a meeting with the employees where you give them the short story and the bottom line. At the same time, you offer them a document that includes all the details. The document itself will be divided into sections on various aspects of the new project that will be of interest to different groups of employees. Some might want to delve into the technological innovations of a new project, for example, while others only want to hear about the financial aspects. The nitty-gritty, in its various forms, is there for anyone who wants it. Anyone who doesn't want it can ignore it.

In short, when in doubt, share more, not less—and share continuously. That's how you build trust and a sense of culture. Instead of withholding information and making decisions for your employees about what they need to know, give them the details and let them decide for themselves how much they want. In that way, you communicate that you value their discretion.

If you want to create a culture of paranoia, you can instead do what many organizations have done: Hire somebody to come in and do a culture assessment and survey, interviewing staff at every level, and then never share the results with your employees. What is there to hide? If the survey points to areas for improvement, are you not all in this together? If you go to the trouble of commissioning a fifty-page report, then you should at least summarize the key issues to your employees in a half-hour presentation and offer them the full report for the asking. If you tell them nothing, then they will guess at what it says. You will be far better off if you are open about it.

Yes, some information is sensitive and confidential, but most is not. Most employees will understand and accept that you sometimes will be in possession of information that is not for dissemination. Tell them that. Reassure them that you would need a very good reason to keep anything from them. If you have been forthright with them over time, then they will trust you. Your track record is golden. You have engendered loyalty and commitment.

THE POWER OF SHARING

It is often stated that information is power, and that's true. Unfortunately, many leaders and supervisors hold on to information so that they can remain in control. They mistakenly believe that they will be viewed as the expert when they are the sole possessor of knowledge. Instead, employees typically see that type of leader as arrogant, mistrusting, and uncaring about the staff.

Leaders who hoard information as they try to maintain power tend to be the same ones who become irate with employees who do not share information with them. In other words, they exhibit a behavior that is very different from what they expect from others. That's not what you would call being a good role model.

Good supervisors lead by example. If you want your employees to be transparent, motivated, and concerned about the direction and success of your organization, then you need to become the respected role model for those behaviors and attitudes. You do that by building strong relationships. Camaraderie and loyalty grow as you get to know your employees as people, as they get to know you, and as they get to know one another.

You're not trying to be everyone's best friend. Rather, you are revealing yourself as a caring human being with a real life of your

own. You are showing yourself to be a supervisor who is transparent and attentive. You are a leader who respects the employees enough to ask them to participate in decision making. If they are to do that right, you need to share what you know with them. Together you can build something better than anyone can accomplish alone—and that’s the true spirit of “information is power.”

Here are some things you can do to share continuously:

- Engage in regular feedback, both positive and negative.
- Actively listen.
- Be transparent.
- Avoid hidden agendas.
- Encourage two-way communication.
- Communicate generously.
- Share rationales for what you do or don’t do.
- Share what is going on daily.
- Keep it simple and heartfelt, not technocratic.
- Respond with empathy.

Applying the principles:

- Choose an employee for a talk about his or her performance, whether good or in need of improvement.
- Outline how you will approach the conversa-

tion. Be specific about the issues you will address and the questions you will ask.

- Ask how you can support them in their continued growth and improvement.



*“People will always work harder for something
they feel they have ownership of.”*

— P E T E R E C O N O M Y 

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Rising Sun Consultants views all consulting opportunities from a holistic/systems approach. Focusing on our commitment to servant leadership, Rising Sun Consultants places strong emphasis on appropriate stakeholder involvement from the very first step. We believe that it is essential for any organization's success for them to focus on the growth and development of their people. It is our goal to serve organizations in creating, developing, and maintaining a culture which inspires and motivates people to reach new horizons—both personally and professionally.



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