

SUPERVISION

Supervision For The 90's: How To Do It

by Robert E. Wubbolding, EdD
Director, Center for Reality Therapy

There was a time when a boss could tell employees to do something and they did it unquestioningly. At least that is what many managers say when they compare their problems of today with those of "the good old days".

And though we probably choose, with a selective memory, to recall the pleasant parts of our own history, nevertheless, there is probably a large element of truth that employees, in the past, were more docile than they are now in the late 1980's or will be in the 1990's.

To use a metaphor, there was a time when the army sergeant said "Take the hill", the troops took the hill. Now, the troops might say that they want to first discuss the issue among themselves; they might want to know what is on the hill that is so valuable; they might want to know what is in it for them if they choose to take the hill. And so, if managers or supervisors attempt to be military sergeants they are doomed to frustration and burnout.

Some managers, aware that they can no longer take the authoritarian line, go the other extreme of being overly "nice". This person gets bogged down in excuses and smoke screens thrown at them by employees. This manager "lets things go", turns his/her head the other way, ignores situations that require intervention, or accepts excuses for ineffective, non-helpful and even irresponsible behavior. This managerial behavior of avoidance is based on the mistaken notion that being liked and being effective as a manager depends on being "nice".

A Workable System

Fortunately, there is an alternative to being an army sergeant or a floor mat. It is the result of skill in asking questions. The effective manager puts responsibility on employees by asking questions that prevent him/her from yielding to the temptation to lecture and give orders on one hand, or to

non-assertively give in to excuses on the other hand.

This results-centered, burn-out preventive, down-to-earth method is called "Radio Station WDEP". Each of the call letters of this mythical radio station stands for a procedure or series of procedures that if used properly results in enhanced employee responsibility, better worker communication, increased worker initiative, less burn-out, and increased productivity.

W. Ask employees what they WANT from their jobs. They are not accustomed to such a question and will at first be stumped by such an inquiry. Ask them what they want that they are getting and not getting. Ask what they expect from their co-workers. Ask what they want from you, the manager. Remember, you are helping them define their wants, their hopes, their needs. Do not feel the obligation to provide everything they want. In fact, part of the "W" is telling them what you want, what you think is realistic, etc. In my training sessions for "Radio Station WDEP", I do not stress this part, however, as many managers are already skilled in this aspect of the "W". The more important side of the "W" is to ask about employees' wants.

D. Ask employees about their direction and what they are doing. One part of this is global and the other is specific. Asking them about direction implies asking some employees where their tardiness, absenteeism, and inaccurate work is taking them? If they continue to do these things, what will happen? Keep in mind, though it is easy and even sometimes necessary, it is less effective to tell them what will happen. Rather, the key is to elicit judgments from the employee. It is through such efforts that inner responsibility is built.

Additionally, a global discussion is often not sufficient. And so, it is useful to help the employee explore specifically what he/she did. "What did you say, what did he say.

Give me the details." Time management experts say that in order to use time more efficiently, the first task is to keep a log of how your time is spent. The reason is that while we are aware of our feelings and frustrations about not having enough time, we are less aware of the "Doing" aspect of our behavior. So too, with employees who socialize too much, are careless and inefficient, are abrupt with patients, or tardy, etc. This behavior is not as obvious to them as it is to you, the observer. Thus, it is crucial to ask them about what they are doing. This is especially useful in any disciplinary situation; ask them what happened. Make NO attempt to judge or evaluate their excuses as to why their behavior seemed appropriate to them.

E. Ask the employees to evaluate their behavior. This component is the cornerstone. If you attempt to implement the ideas contained in this article you will be tempted to jump to the plan too quickly. You will want to solve their problem by pushing too abruptly for a plan. To avoid this mistake be sure to elicit evaluations from the employee. Ask whether their wants are realistic. The following questions illustrate EVALUATION. "If you come late for work and argue with the patients, will it help you to get a promotion?" "How realistic is it for you to want 'flex' time when we have decided not to allow it?" "What effect does your inaccuracy have on the other workers? . . . on the work itself?"

It is clear that there are three criteria to use in helping employees make inner evaluations:

1. What effect does your behavior have on the other workers?
2. What effect does your behavior have on the work to be done?
3. What effect does your behavior have on what you want from your job?

If the evaluation of the process is to be
(continued)

effective the supervisor first holds an imaginary mirror before the employee by asking "What are you doing on the job? Be specific in what you tell me. And tell me if what you are doing is helping you, helping this office, or helping the patients." As with the first component, W, it is acceptable for the supervisor to express opinions about the worker's effectiveness. In fact, it is a responsibility of the supervisor to evaluate. But truly effective work habits are built from the inside. I believe that most human beings need assistance from time to time in evaluating their behavior. It is a rare employee that needs no supervision.

P. Ask the employee to make a PLAN. This is the goal of supervisory conferences. The employee should have a plan to do better. This plan should be a "SAMIC Plan". S = simple. The plan should not be complicated. A = attainable. Both the employee and the supervisor should be realistic. Help the worker make a short range plan. A plan to do something "from now on..." or "forever" is unrealistic. Often the best plan is made for one day or one week. M = measurable. It should be exact and precise. It should answer the question "when?" "I'll arrive at 7:45 AM" is better than "I'll try to be here early." I = immediate. The plan should be implemented as soon as possible. To delay in executing the plan is to ensure

failure. It is best that the plan be written down. The writing can be the beginning of implementation. C = controlled by the planner. The plan is not contingent on what others do. "I'll get along with Lee if Lee is cooperative" is not a good plan because it depends on what someone else (Lee) does. Incidentally, it is not a measurable plan.

Dealing With Supervisors:

The above system WDEP is useful to use with superiors. It is direct, non-manipulative, and results in everyone fulfilling their needs. I suggest the following guidelines:

1. Get your superior to define what he/she wants from you. Confirm it in writing so that you both are in agreement as to what is expected.

2. Present yourself as helping your superiors get what they want. You are not trying to undermine their position. If you have a new idea or policy you wish implemented it will be accepted if it is seen by your superior as fulfilling something he/she wants.

3. Tell what you want from your superior. Let them know that you need their support and backing. You want to avoid the "good cop, bad cop" game where you are the "bad cop" and your superior gets the employee off the hook. Encourage them to refer employees to you when they take their problems to your superior.

4. Remember Andrew Carnegie's famous motto which was written on his desk for all to see, "Bring me solutions, not problems."

When you approach your superiors, bring them plans that you have evaluated and that you believe are more effective than other plans. Don't use "upward delegation" by which you present the boss with a problem and expect him/her to take responsibility for carrying out a solution when you share a problem. Present some alternate solutions and your evaluations of them. And especially remember, the best solutions in your boss' minds result in less work for them. If your conferences with them habitually result in more "hassle" for them, they will want to talk less with you and will be less supportive of your managerial effort.

In summary, the WDEP method can be used to put responsibility on the employees. It is direct and straightforward. It has been used with the passive employee, the careless person, irascible employee, the disgruntled worker, and the highly motivated person. It is eminently useful as a clear and precise system for dealing with your superiors. For they generally want freedom to utilize their technical skills rather than to manage the intra office problems that are present whenever two human beings are present under one roof. □

ROBERT E. WUBBOLDING, EdD Director, CENTER FOR REALITY THERAPY

Bob is also director of the Center for Counseling & Managing, a private psychology practice that specializes in applications of Reality Therapy. In addition, he is Professor of Counseling at Xavier University. He has taught Reality Therapy to people who deal with nearly every type of client in schools, probation and parole departments, recovery program, churches, hospitals, business settings, etc. He is an internationally known teacher, author, and practitioner of Reality Therapy.

He has served as consultant to the drug and alcohol abuse programs for the US Army and Air Force. He was a group counselor at Talbert Halfway House for Women ex-offenders and has been an elementary and secondary School Counselor and a Teacher of Adult Basic Education. He has served as a consultant to the Management Institute of the University of Wisconsin where he taught effective management skills. He is a Psychologist and Nationally Certified Counselor.

Dr. Wubbolding has over 70 publications and is a Senior Faculty Member of the Institute for Reality Therapy in Los Angeles, and is Chair of the Professional Development Committee. He is author of *Changing Your Life for the Better*, a book designed for clients and he is author of *Using Reality Therapy*, 1988, Harper & Row, NY. This is a major contribution to Reality Therapy as well as a summary of Control Theory.