

# Making the Step to Supervisor Successful

*How to become a Leader*

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Many public works managers are promoted from within their department. For people good at their jobs, being promoted is easy. The next part is hard: making the successful move from taking orders to giving them and becoming a leader. This article will discuss how to gain the respect of the crew, along with delegation, and leadership styles necessary to become a successful leader.

## Earning Respect

As a new supervisor, it is vital to gain the respect of the employees. There are several things to consider when attempting this challenge. Good managers:

- Know that trust is fostered through good communication.
- Stand up for the ideas and work of the employees.
- Are positive in their assessments and judgments.
- Cultivate a sense of fairness and demonstrate competence.

## Delegate

It is impossible to do many jobs well. Therefore managers must learn the art of delegation. They must let go of their old job and delegate tasks not related to planning, organizing, staffing, leading or controlling. Although the ultimate responsibility for work is the supervisors', they should recognize employee strengths and delegate based upon them.

To cultivate a strong team spirit, delegate work and responsibility based on employee's strengths, not weakness. People enjoy doing things for a supportive manager. This insures cooperation and pride in the work. Supportive managers:

- Understand the needs and expectations of employees.
- Ensure that employees are clear regarding what is considered improved performance.

- Establish an objective system for measuring progress.

Managers become role models by setting a personal example of doing things "right" and doing the "right things right."

## Qualities of Leadership

Effective leaders serve several critical roles in an organization. They display the following abilities:

1. Articulate a vision that compels people to commit their time, energy and resources to complete it.
2. Determine the strategies and goals that will best serve the vision.
3. Create the structures and processes for an organization from which results are produced.
4. Engage and enlist employees to achieve the vision quickly.
5. Shift self-limiting beliefs and frames of reference to a culture of possibility rather than constraint.

## Forms of Leadership

Understanding leadership qualities is important to those making the transition to supervisor. According to most experts, there are three major methods of leadership:

**Democratic**--This manager seeks ideas and suggestions through discussions. Whenever possible, good leaders will treat individual problems and situations on a democratic basis.

The democratic style works best when people are lacking information. Employees can provide input to help make the best possible decision. It also works well with a large number of experienced, cooperative people.

**Autocratic**—The autocratic leader assumes full responsibility for all actions--individual and group. This manager seeks obedience to specific orders, determines policy, and considers decision-making his/her prerogative.

The autocratic style is best when quick decisions and fast actions are necessary. Staffs of largely untrained and undisciplined people require an autocratic leadership. Firm and decisive force can make such organization productive.

**Free Rein** This leader exercises little direct control, but is the prime source of information, suggestions, and authority. This works best if the staff is well trained, responsible and professional. This is successful in public works when people working in the field have to make decisions with little direct supervision. Within certain limits, individuals are allowed to set their own goals. This often results in outstanding performance.

With a highly trained and professional staff free-reining leadership is most appropriate. These individuals are generally creative and solve problems as they encounter them, requiring much less guidance.

A mixture of styles works best with a dispersed organization that seldom meets and is made up of strong individualists.

## Methods of Leadership

The best approach to leadership may have to be tailored to the individual requiring leadership. Therefore it is dependent upon the person, situation, and organization. A good leader should base their style upon the following:

**Individual.** Some people only perform well when a certain type of leadership is used. When leadership is a problem, review the personality characteristics of each employee. Experiment to determine what style of leadership to use with each person. Reevaluate if problems arise.

**Situational.** Changes in the services, customer crises, and policy changes can make new demands on the type of leadership required.

**Organizational Flavor.** The total make-up of an organization reflects the type of leadership that should be used. Sometimes group needs and individual needs are quite different.

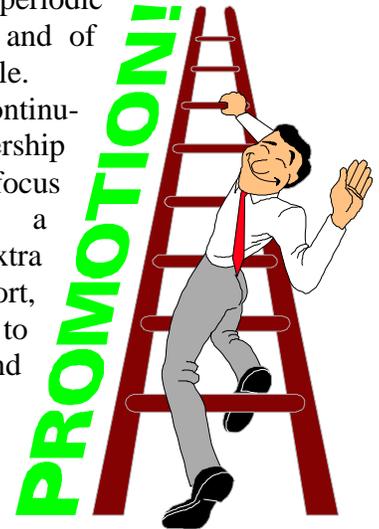
## Combining Methods & Styles

Leadership success depends on the flexibility of the leader to recognize the employees needs and their willingness to change gears. Leaders determine what is best for each individual and each

situation, with periodic employee evaluations and of their own operating style.

The best leaders continually refine their leadership to build loyalty. They focus on developing a successful team with extra effort and support, demonstrating loyalty to both the department and employees.

## How to Get There



To facilitate leadership skills, new supervisors should:

- Recognize that leadership is an everyday occurrence. A leader influences results as well as employee beliefs and behavior.
- Learn facilitative leadership skills such as listening, coaching, managing group dynamics and conflict, and leading with confidence.
- Regularly measure the results in context of the departmental goals. Set specific goals that have a direct link to the strategic goals.
- Ask daily: "To what degree does this program or initiative move the department towards its goals?"
- Rely on regular feedback from residents, employees, and management. Recognize that part of the department's success is measured by those served.

Managers who lead with distinction create rather than manage change. They are perceived as decisive and responsible risk takers. They change their leadership style based upon situations that arise and the employees they manage. With leadership, one-size doesn't fit all. Knowing that is the biggest hurdle for leaders to overcome.

"How to Improve Your Leadership Ability," HR Focus, Jan 2000, Vol. 77 Issue 1, p 9, 2p.

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