

The Ten Things That Makes a Supervisor GREAT!

By Paula J. MacLean



After more than thirty years as a line supervisor, manager and senior executive, I learned a few things about working successfully with people. Successful supervision (or management or leadership of any kind for that matter) is more art than science and more high touch than high-tech. While courses focus on skill development, truly great supervisors go well beyond skill and technique to engage, motivate and inspire the people they work with. They are results oriented but not at the cost of human-beings. They are considerate and compassionate with people but not at the cost of getting a job done well and on time.

Great Supervisors:

1. Know themselves. They know their strengths and most also understand and admit their limitations. They engage others to help fill the gaps in their own skills. They teach then delegate and never expect others to do a job without the training and resources to succeed.
2. Have had at least one positive powerful role model. Most have also had some significant negative experiences with previous supervisors. These help shape how they relate to those they supervise, as well as how they interact with their peers and managers. They have learned what *to do* and also *what not to do*.
3. Listen to understand. They know that listening is more an attitude than it is a skill. They care about what people have to say and even when they disagree, they work hard to appreciate the other person's point of view.

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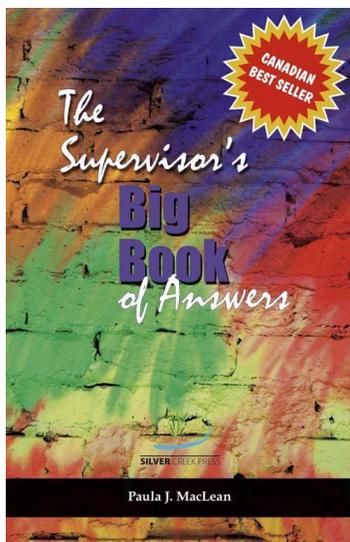
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4. Regularly spend scheduled, uninterrupted time with people they supervise. They invite the employee to set the agenda for these sessions, spending time discussing issues that are the employee's priority.
5. Know when they've made an error, they admit their mistakes and take steps to correct and prevent them in the future.
6. Know getting things done through others (individuals and teams) is necessary and worthwhile. They know they can't do everything or even control everything so they put energy into engaging, teaching, coaching and mentoring others to get the work done.
7. Use kindness and encouragement generously with everyone they relate to.
8. Understand that it is necessary to use disciplinary action with employees who are not doing their jobs well. They manage these difficult situations with calm, grace and humanity. They seek good outcomes from bad circumstances.
9. Know supervision is not simply a matter of technical skill. It is about heart, relationships, respect and genuine caring for people.
10. Know that becoming "great" is a journey for a whole career. They are active learners, through formal courses, life and work experiences and by carefully choosing their coaches and mentors.

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