

Succession planning: What makes an effective Supervisor?

Fact Sheet #



What is this Fact Sheet about?

- Some companies in the Australian Meat Industry feel they have some Supervisors who are not quite right for the job. Yet, it is often these Supervisors who are later called upon to identify and recommend the promotion of others into the role.
- Developing effective Supervisors is not just about enrolling people in a formal training program. It's also about selecting people with the appropriate attributes—and the potential to acquire the appropriate skills—to represent you as a front line manager.
- This Fact Sheet provides advice on how you might identify people suited to the role—and ways to offer support and manage their early development process so that they eventually can become effective Supervisors.

Why effective Supervisors are so important

- Research tells us the key factors that attract people to apply for work with a company include the image of the workforce.
- We also know that factors affecting staff retention include a supportive management style by managers at all levels, who are perceived as competent.
- Specifically, we know that one of the most common reasons people leave their jobs is because of a sense of being treated 'unfairly'. This sense of unfairness can come from many things, including a perception they are 'not listened to' or a sense of 'bullying' by management or peers.
- Supervisors also have an extraordinary impact on workplace culture—they have what is known as '*expert power*' because they commonly have technical expertise; they have '*earned power*' because they're generally older and have been at the site longer—and then you give them '*legitimate*' power by appointing them in the role.
- It's critical these people with such huge capacity to impact on your business are chosen wisely—and given the tools to do their job effectively!

To do the job well, people need effective work organisation and effective work relationships...

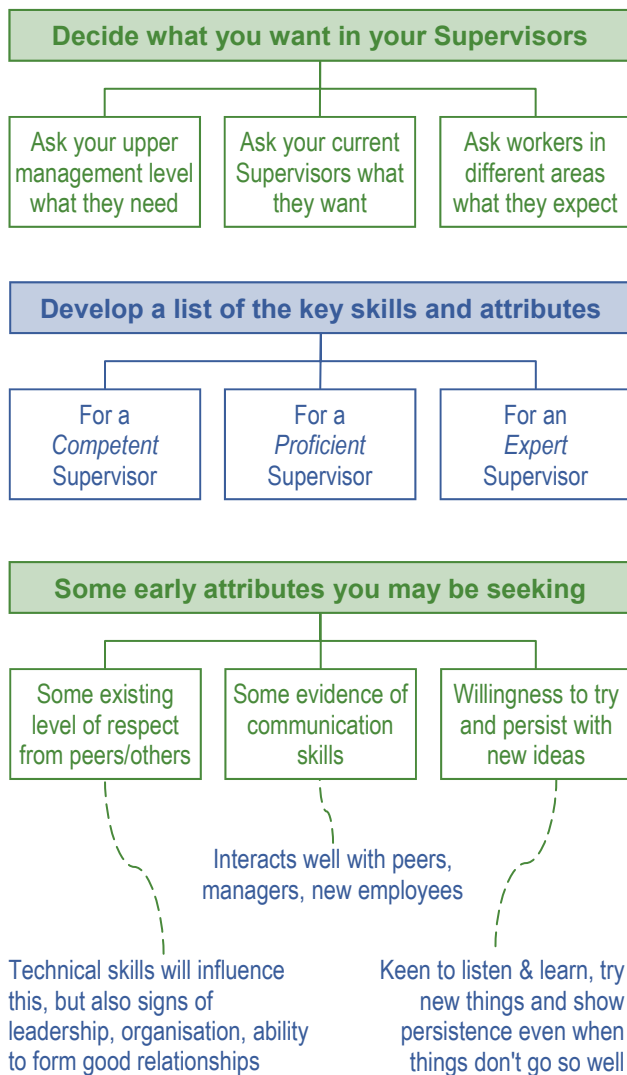
Supervisors are the key players in both work organisation and work relationships!

Good leadership behaviour is essential to good teamwork behaviour...

...and people need leadership deserving of respect before they will give their best.

That's why the saying '*People join companies and leave managers*' most commonly applies to frontline managers!

How to do it: Begin planning early—because it will take time!



- ➔ **Fact Sheet No 2** in this series included a model and discussion about how employees progress through stages (with time and support) from *novice* to *advanced beginner* to *competent*, then *proficient*, then *expert* in their field.
- ➔ An effective Supervisor does not come 'ready made'. When you promote a technical *expert*—a boner, slaughterman, packer—into a new role, that person becomes a *novice* all over again. There's no way of avoiding this—and it can take two or three years to become *competent* in a new role and more years again to become *expert*.
- ➔ How quickly and how well a novice Supervisor develops depends on three things:
 - Personal motivation
 - Support
 - Time.
- ➔ Although motivation is a personal thing, the drive to succeed is influenced by how people feel about their performance.
- ➔ New Supervisors will make mistakes—but it is the response to those mistakes that will either help them to learn and grow from them—or simply feel they aren't making the grade!
- ➔ That's why the 'support' and 'time' are so important. Starting early, before you need new Supervisors, means you can provide both.

How to do it: Develop a pool of people 'with potential' to draw from

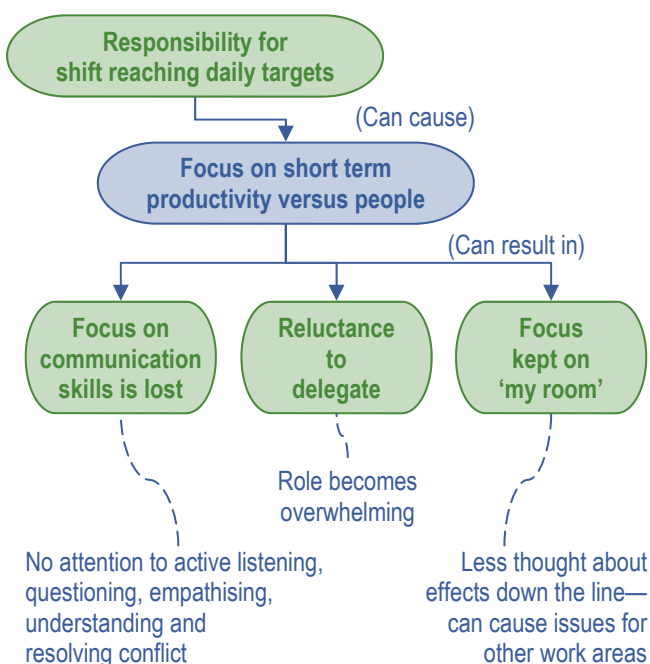
- ➔ The best person to teach a *novice* is a *competent* worker—not an *expert*—and this applies equally well to Supervisors.
 - ➔ Appoint a competent Supervisor to mentor a 'potential'—and provide time for them to meet and talk as part of their jobs. (This in turn provides others with opportunities to practice their supervisory skills.)
 - ➔ Invest in some formal training—Frontline Management components will benefit employees (and the plant) even if participants don't continue to eventually be appointed to a Supervisor's role.
 - ➔ Make sure you deliver a clear message—you expect it to take time to develop skills and you expect them to ask for advice along the way.
- ➔ Identify a group of workers who you believe to have potential and invite them to be part of an on-going trainee Supervisor program.
 - ➔ While this can be a morale booster, take care not to raise expectations that may not eventuate—and to explain to others why they weren't invited to participate in this round.
 - ➔ Apart from off-floor training in critical Supervisor skills such as communication, create opportunities for them to practice in higher duties with a coach.
 - ➔ Provide experience in various work areas so they know how the plant works as a whole—how performance in one area affects others.
 - ➔ During the process, watch for evidence of the attributes you identified (above).

How to do it: Take development to the next stage

- ➔ By identifying a group of people with the appropriate attributes to make a good Supervisor and developing that potential in all of them, you have effectively given the plant a number of choices when a leadership position becomes available.
- ➔ This will mean you can avoid the common mistake of promoting people only because they have excellent technical skills—which would mean you may concurrently lose a good worker and appoint a poor Supervisor.
- ➔ Because you have exposed your potential leaders to various work areas across the plant, you will have broadened the choice—so that you don't necessarily have to draw from within a specific room when a leadership position becomes available suddenly.
- ➔ And, because you have given this group some useful training and experience, they have at least a 'grounding' to fall back on when the first challenges present themselves.
- ➔ However, even with this strong start and formal 'Leadership' training, it can take years to develop a 'competent' Supervisor. The next steps (to *proficient* and *expert*) can be expected to take even longer!

- ➔ **Competent Supervisors** know the rules to follow, know how to implement them and can plan within them.
- ➔ However, some Supervisors struggle when required to move past this stage—they don't know what to do when things don't go according to plan.
- ➔ These people can sometimes blame factors apart from themselves and may behave as if they 'know it all'.
- ➔ But they need help to develop their ability to 'read' a situation so they can make good decisions—to transfer their formal learning to unique situations in the real workplace.
- ➔ Bringing Supervisors together as a group to talk about and 'workshop' issues will help to transfer ideas about what works and what doesn't—in *your* plant, with *your* workforce.
- ➔ Involving Senior Supervisors (*your experts*) will enable them to casually share their wisdom in a less formal environment.
- ➔ Appointing a 'coach' can help put new strategies in place and assist competent Supervisors to grow in specific aspects of their role.

How to do it: Consider what stops a Supervisor from being effective



- ➔ Supervisors, especially in the novice to competent range, need clear messages that they lose effectiveness as frontline managers if their sole focus is on achieving the daily target.
- ➔ If they feel pressured to just keep the line moving, they will forget learned behaviours—such as taking time to actively listen; pausing to understand that people have problems that impact on them at work; conflict resolution; considering how the work of their room impacts on others.
- ➔ They need to know the company values these other components of their role—and that they are in fact *an investment in tomorrow's daily target* because of their capacity to impact on absenteeism, retention, morale and workplace culture.

Where you can find help to make it happen

- ➔ This Fact Sheet supports information in a booklet produced by the FTH Skills Council and MLA called *'How to become an employer of choice in an industry of choice'* which is a practical guide to workforce development in the Australian Meat Industry.
- ➔ The booklet includes a section on *Workplace Culture* which may help Supervisors understand how their actions and behaviours can have a snowball effect. Likely to be particularly useful is a model which shows:
 - What people need to know
 - What people need to be given
 - What people need to feel.
- ➔ Notes in the *Recruitment* and *Retention* sections will improve Supervisors' understanding of what attracts people to jobs, what encourages them to stay and what prompts them to leave.
- ➔ The National Meat Industry Advisory Council (MINTRAC) has a number of resources designed to assist Supervisors in specific aspects of their role, with some topics available on-line. For further information about these resources or formal training products:
Go to: www.mintrac.com.au

'Adopt-a-person' technique

- ➔ **Fact Sheet No 3** in this series included a model and discussion about how performance can be assessed as being *on-the-line* (working to the job description); below; above; or way above *the line*.
- ➔ The *'adopt-a person'* technique was developed by a group of Supervisors at one company who felt frustrated that much of their time was spent with a small percentage of workers whose performance was *below-the-line*.
- ➔ Continually tackling these people as a group was not only disheartening—it distracted them from being able to provide support to advance *on-the-line* and *above-the-line* workers to the next level.
- ➔ The *'adopt-a-person'* technique focuses on one person at a time. It's about taking time to ask questions and listening to what's really happening in people's lives that could be affecting their work performance—and to work together toward mutually beneficial solutions.
- ➔ It's a more manageable way of putting leadership skills into play—together with other daily tasks—and produced measurable results for the company.
- ➔ Using this one-on-one approach is particularly helpful for novice Supervisors and could even be used by your 'potentials' group. It allows them to practice communication skills such as active listening and giving effective feedback.

Want to know more?

For further information about workforce development resources for the SA Meat Industry, please contact:

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