

# Managing

MARCIA PENNINGTON SHANNON

## Resolve to Become a Better Supervisor: One Year Later

**T**his column debuted in the January/February 2003 issue with a call to become a better supervisor in the coming year. Why? As a supervisor, you have the responsibility and gift of assisting others in their professional and personal development. A good supervisor makes the difference between an effective staff and one that is disenfranchised. A good supervisor is one of the top five reasons individuals stay in their positions. More importantly, a bad supervisor is one of the top reasons individuals seek new employment. Lost revenues in recruiting and training, as well as poor morale, are the results of poor supervisory skills.

For those who resolved to develop their supervisory skills during 2003, it's time to see how you are doing by filling out our Supervisor's Report Card (in the box at right). For those who want to make it a New Year's resolution to hone their skills in 2004, you can use the same report card to assist you in setting specific objectives.

### Reviewing Your Report Card

First, fill out the report card. Think carefully before you check a "Yes" or a "No" box. Be completely honest with your answers—and yourself. Next, to make use of your report card, you want to look at the criteria for which you answered "No." From among those

criteria, select the three to five that you consider most important in contributing to your goal of becoming a better supervisor.

Now, create steps to accomplish each objective. Many people find it helpful to write down these steps on paper and then tape up the paper someplace they'll regularly see it (such as the inside of an appointment calendar or by a telephone). You then have an always-handly reminder of the goals you have set for yourself.

### Implementing Upward Reviews

When assessing your strengths, weaknesses and goals as a supervisor, it can be quite valuable to include the input of those you supervise. This process of collecting feedback about one's supervisory skills from those individuals being supervised is known as upward review or appraisal. Upward reviews can either be done informally or through a more structured process.

■ **Informal upward appraisals.** If you supervise only a handful of individuals, the best way to get their feedback about your managerial effectiveness is simply to ask them, "How am I doing as a supervisor?" Tell them that you take this role very seriously and would appreciate any feedback that will help you to become a better supervisor. If you can effectively deal with all feedback, including criticism, you have a great opportunity not only to obtain valuable information but also to fur-

ther connect with those you supervise. There isn't a single person who doesn't appreciate the sincerity of a boss who wants to be a *better* boss.

■ **Formal upward appraisals.** Larger firms that are made up of several teams or departments may want to consider a more formal or structured review process.

This can be done in several ways. For one, you can create a written survey whereby individuals evaluate each of their supervisors. To obtain the best results and ensure that employees feel comfortable providing honest criticisms, you want the survey to be completed and collected anonymously.

Alternatively, depending on your firm's resources, you may find it effective to use an outside consultant to collect and analyze the upward feedback. Consultants can collect the information through focus groups; various written survey formats; or through individual, confidential meetings with supervisees.

Regardless of the particulars of the process, it is important that the firm's leadership set clear goals for the results before the reviews begin. One important goal is to identify individuals who need assistance enhancing their supervisory skills. (Even senior attorneys with exceptional lawyering skills may need training to develop people management skills.) Firms that have taken this process seriously have found it to improve overall morale throughout the organization.

# The Supervisor's Report Card

An effective supervisor has an assortment of management skills that fall into three areas: time, people and process. This report card will help you grade your skills in those areas. Assess which criteria under each area are your greatest strengths and which criteria are in greatest need of improvement.

## Time Management

YES NO

- I have a clear sense of my priorities and those for my staff.
- I properly estimate how long a project will take to complete.
- I plan as much as possible to reduce unnecessary emergencies.
- I am good at assessing the workload to be completed and how it is to be delegated to create a reasonable amount of work for everyone.
- I believe there is a time for everything, including life outside of the office, and I assist my team with achieving that balance.

## People Management

- I am an empathetic listener and not only hear the words being said but also understand the meaning and emotion behind the words.
- I look for opportunities to regularly communicate in person with each individual, understanding that the human connection is essential to establishing and maintaining strong working relationships.
- I have learned the strengths and weaknesses of each member of my team, while looking for ways to use each person's talents.
- I provide professional development opportunities through work assignments and training for each member of my team.
- I look for ways to improve the work environment, including ensuring that the work is challenging, encouraging friendly and cooperative behaviors in co-workers, offering reasonable salaries and benefits and providing opportunities for increased responsibility.

## Process Management

- I have created or improved the processes that lead to effective team management, including recruitment, assignment distribution, professional development and performance reviews.
- I regularly check with team members to make sure these processes are effective and to ask for suggestions for improvement.
- I tie these processes together so that expectations are clear to those I supervise.

## Take It from Dusty

Resolving to be a better supervisor and then taking the necessary steps to do so can result in many positive outcomes for you as the supervisor. In addition to a more effective and productive work team, there can be no better compliment than to be considered one of those beloved supervisors people love to work with and learn from.

Last fall, when the Chicago Cubs were playing the Florida Marlins for the National League championship, I noticed a column by *Chicago Tribune* writer Mary Schmich, describing the management style of Dusty Baker, the Cubs' manager. Baker's players were quoted as saying, "Just about every guy in this room would run through a wall for him."

The column went on to describe a man who clearly motivates his team members by showing them respect, understanding each person's strengths and weaknesses and focusing the team on its priorities. Any supervisor can benefit from considering these great motivational quotes attributed to Baker:

■ "Try to let people have the freedom to be themselves."

■ "Nothing is perfect. All I ask is that you come ready to play."

■ "I have to continue to realize how hard this game really is."

These nuggets of managerial wisdom are food for thought as you work on those New Year's goals!



Marcia Pennington Shannon ([www.shannonandmanch.com](http://www.shannonandmanch.com)) is a principal in the Washington, DC, attorney management consulting firm Shannon & Manch, LLP. She is coauthor of *Recruiting Lawyers: How to Hire the Best Talent* (ABA, 2000).