

## Successful Supervisor Part 17

### Leader or Manager

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

In my work, I do a lot with the contrast between leaders and managers. The topic takes on a special meaning for supervisors because the vast majority of time they are called upon to be great managers. In this article I will contrast the difference between a manager and a leader, then I will make a case that supervisors need to be good leaders as well as managers for at least part of the time.

Here is a set of bullets that help describe the pure Manager's mindset:

- Managers try to be a stabilizing force
- Make sure all rules are followed
- No waste – process perfection
- Minimize conflict
- Try to make people happy/satisfied
- Would like to be popular/liked
- Clone everyone
- Main tools – budget, MBO, accountability, process control, 6 sigma, lean
- Main objective – accomplish the **mission**
- Focus is on **today**

The mindset of a pure leader is very different. Here are some bullets on the Leader's focus:

- Often a destabilizing force
- Are we following our destiny?
- Are people rising to their potential?

- Not afraid to be unpopular
- Get people out of their comfort zone
- Strives to be respected/trusted
- Always looking for potential – what could we become?
- Main tools – benchmarking, next wave, balance sheet, technology, resources
- Main objective – reach the **vision**
- Focus is on **the future**

If my contrasts are correct, the world of the pure leader is a very different place from the world of the pure manager. Supervisors naturally gravitate toward the management mindset because of their role.

Supervisors try to maximize the productivity of existing resources most of the time. They want everyone to show up for work on time. They want everyone to follow the rules, so the process runs exactly how it was designed. They sweat the details of making sure everyone gets paid on time and that all workers are properly trained on their function. They also think about bench strength and make sure there is an adequate level of cross training.

Supervisors become the mediators when workers quarrel. They do the reinforcing and coaching of workers so they understand when they are doing well or need to pick up the pace. Supervisors give the performance feedback and help to set organizational goals. All of these functions are management roles.

It would be a mistake for a supervisor to stop at this point, because there is so much more that could be accomplished by the same group of people if some leadership skills were also employed. Supervisors are not usually tasked with creating a vision for the organization, however they should be driving how the vision applies to the group being supervised. In other words, the translation of the big picture vision into a vision for the shop floor is incredibly important.

In reality all supervisors take on management roles at certain times and leadership functions at other times. If you picture a scale from one to ten with one being pure manager and ten being pure leader, supervisors will be at three (dealing with a habitual attendance problem) one minute and then bounce all the way over to eight (envisioning a new method of cross training) the next. It helps to picture this dynamic variety and recognize it when going about daily tasks.

By the nature of her work, a supervisor will spend more time on average doing tasks on the management end of the scale, but there will be ample time to function in the leader role. Try to pay attention to the roles you play during your average day, and you will be surprised with the variety of tasks you do. It will enrich your job understanding and satisfaction as you do this little visualization exercise.

*This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on [www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision](http://www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision) or on this blog.*

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