

Successful Supervisor Part 94

Knowing When to Leave

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

One of the most vexing issues facing any supervisor is knowing when she is better off leaving a job rather than trying to soldier on in a miserable situation. Of course, the answer is that it depends a lot on the situation and the specific person involved. In this brief article I will share a few observations I have made over the years that may be helpful to some people.

I am not trying to make the decision for supervisors, but rather offering some food for thought that may help guide the analysis. Here are six things to consider while making your decision.

How miserable are you really, and how consistent is it?

If you literally dread going to work each day because of the situations that routinely face you, that is a sign of needed change. If you have tried to make things better using all of your rational powers and patience but nothing has any impact on the problem, you may find a better existence elsewhere. Be careful, because you could be even worse off.

Is the outlook in another organization any better, or might you be even more miserable if you leave and start with a new organization?

Finding a better fit for you is rarely as easy as it seems ahead of time. That is because it is next to impossible to understand the true situation in an organization from the outside. One thing I would do before quitting to go to another entity is to discuss the culture at length with some people living in that culture and performing the supervisor role there.

Don't be satisfied if you just hear positive things; probe deeply to understand how the supervisor role is supported by upper management. Keep in mind that finding the right "fit" is a matching process where both the person and the organization need to feel well served. Test to be sure you have an excellent fit and an actual job offer in hand before quitting your current position. Do not quit and then go looking for a new position. Remember, the best time to get a job is when you have a job.

Is the source of the problem above you or below you? Or is it you?

If you are getting no support from above and experiencing daily pressure to gain more control, then you could be working for an ogre, but you need to test carefully if the source of the problem is you rather than the boss. One good way to gain some insight

is whether most of the people in the organization feel the same as you do. That is often the case, and it signals you are in a no-win situation if you cannot get the boss to change. However, getting the boss to change is a risky path for sure. My favorite quote on this is: "I learned long ago to never wrestle with a pig. You get all dirty, and besides the pig loves it." (George Bernard Shaw)

If the problem is below you, and you have good support from above, then you can work with the individuals who are being disruptive and also with HR to address the issues. If the effort to change things is unsuccessful, then progressive counselling and perhaps separation can be a solution.

You also need to do some soul searching to find out what percentage of your problem is your own behaviors. In this aspect, it is very difficult to perceive an objective view of the situation without help. I recommend you get a trusted coach or mentor who can help you see yourself from a different angle. This person may be from inside the organization or from outside. It is important to find someone you trust and who will level with you. In some cases, pairing up with a particularly successful peer might be the way to go.

How well honed are your listening skills?

Listening well is a skill that is hard to master when you are in a pressure cooker every day. It is the one communication skill that most supervisors need to improve. If you are not adept at reflective listening, then get some training on that technique and learn to "put on your listening hat" whenever you are dealing with an emotional subordinate, superior, or peer.

Are you highly skilled at Emotional Intelligence?

Most professionals have heard about Emotional Intelligence and think they know what it is and how to use it. I have found that there are very few people who really understand this skill deeply and are getting the mileage out of applying it daily. My favorite book on building this skill is "Emotional Intelligence 2.0" by Bradberry and Greaves. This book focuses on a brief review of the theory along with many skill building techniques and a road map on how to gain the skills efficiently.

Take time to be human and learn to not be hard on yourself

Being a supervisor is difficult work. The pressure for performance is always in your lap. People will routinely test your resolve and try to push the envelope of what you will tolerate. Make sure to give yourself some outlets for the tension. Get a couple hobbies that you love and surround yourself with people who love you outside of work. Know your hot buttons and also be aware of the internal stress. Have some way to know when you are reaching your limit for stress so you can get some help.

For example, I monitor my blood pressure in the morning every day and have a plot that goes back about 15 years. I know when the pressure of the world is creeping up on me and I can modify things to build in a break when I need it. Some people have a friend or family member who becomes the signal when it appears stress is getting the better of them. You need something or someone to tip you off when things are untenable.

Don't quit your job just because you are unhappy. Seek to understand the source of your frustration, and work with a coach to make changes in your own behavior to lower the pressure. Quitting is a last resort, and it may be the solution, but there is a finite chance it could lead to even more stress in your life.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Successful Supervision." The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

*Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals* (2003), 2. *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online* (2006), 3. *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind* (2009), and 4. *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change* (2014). In addition, he has authored over 500 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at** www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763*