

# SUCCESSFUL

## SUPERVISOR

TECHNIQUES, NEWS, AND IDEAS FOR TODAY'S SUPERVISORS

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## 6 Tips To Improve Work Relationships

**A**s the boss, your relationships with your employees can impact their entire work experience at your company. Your employees' loyalty to your company and satisfaction with their jobs rests, for the most part, on the way you lead them.

To improve or maintain your relationships you should:

- ✎ Show interest in your employees' career development by paying for relevant seminars, workshops or other educational activities that will help them to take their expertise to the next level.

- ✎ Always display integrity to earn respect.

- ✎ Let your employees know what time of day is best to approach you with a question or a request. If your employees know this, they'll be more comfortable with approaching you when they need something.

- ✎ Share your vision for the department. This will promote better understanding and help your employees to feel like they're "in the loop."

- ✎ Make the time you spend with your employees positive. Even when you have to reprimand or correct employees, always weave something positive into the conversations so they don't dread talking to you.

- ✎ Walk the talk to be a good leader.

Source: "Quiz: Rate Your Relationship With the Boss," by Dale Kurow. ■

### QUICK TIPS

- **Learn from other departments.** Pay attention to what goes on in other departments to learn about conflict-management, problem-solving and employee relations. You can gain insight from how other supervisors work with their teams.
- **Encourage everyone.** Make sure you are being fair with the praise that you spread around.
- **Show empathy.** If an employee makes a huge mistake, she already feels rotten about it. Help her see how she can learn from this mistake and how it ultimately will strengthen her as an employee.
- **Don't just acknowledge the same employees or you'll be criticized for having favorites.**

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

# Minimize Employee Cell-Phone Usage

*You've finally gotten your employee's company-phone usage under control, but now you have a bigger problem -- cell phones. Almost all of your employees have a cell phone and since you've told them to keep their personal calls on company phones to a minimum, they've resorted to using their own cell phones.*

Cell phone usage among employees is a challenging situation because it can be more difficult to monitor than company phone usage. If you aren't receiving complaints from other employees that cell phone usage is bothersome, you may not even realize the problem exists in your department. This is especially difficult on night shifts when there are fewer employees on staff and far fewer managers on the floor.

So how can you minimize your employee's cell phone usage? Adopt these strategies:

☎ Establish a clear, fair policy. If you don't already have one in place, create a cell-phone usage policy.

☎ Inform your employees. Let everyone know what the new policy is and what you will do to those who fail to follow these guidelines. Then, consider having your employees sign the new policy to verify they've read and understand it.

☎ Follow up with action. When someone breaks the rules, follow through with the consequences. Don't let misuse slide by for one employee and not another. You should enforce the rules to the same degree for everyone or your employees will accuse you of showing favoritism. ■

## Keep Evaluations Relevant

When the time comes for performance appraisals there are two very important things you need to keep in mind:

1. Don't let your personal views of your employee get in the way of him getting the review he deserves.

2. Don't evaluate him on items that aren't listed in his job description.

Doing either of these would unfairly put your employee at-risk for getting an undeserved, poor evaluation. ■

## Clarify Before You Disagree

You may disagree with an employee or other supervisor, but before you make those sentiments known, clarify that you understand what the individual is talking about.

To do this, summarize back to him what he just said to you and make sure you understand his position. Doing this will help you to avoid an uncomfortable confrontation caused by a misunderstanding. It's also a good habit to get into and will help you become a better listener. ■


## INSIGHT

*"People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes."*

~ Abigail Van Buren

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## Create A Resource Library

Continuing-education classes and seminars are great ways to encourage employee growth. Unfortunately, with budgetary restraints, these are not always feasible options. Another less expensive way you can help your employees gain more knowledge in their specialized fields is to establish a resource library someplace in your workplace.

A resource library can be as big as a large room with a table and chairs or as small as a bookshelf in your office. It really depends on the space you have to allot to it. But the most important elements of a resource library are the resource materials. Consider stocking your resource library shelves with the following resources:

- \* Trade books
- \* Magazines, journals and periodicals
- \* How-to newsletters

You don't have to spend a fortune on a resource library. See if your company will sponsor a subscription to a few publications and keep those on display. Then, encourage employees to donate materials they don't reference anymore. Other employees will no doubt find the materials useful. Also, keep your eye out for library book sales and garage sales where you can find plenty of books at a low rate. Just check the publishing date to make sure they are current. ■

## Gel With Your Employees

Every employee in your work place may present to you a new batch of obstacles. Some workers may resist change, others may resist policies, and there's always one employee who's unhappy no matter what you do.

Here are some tips for building and maintaining effective relationships with your employees:

- ✓ Ask your employees a lot of questions to find out how all of their tasks are going. Make them your number-one priority.
- ✓ Keep an open-door policy, and really mean it. Never let an employee feel like he's bothering you when he has an issue he needs help with. ■

## Do You Communicate Well With Your Employees?

In the business world, good communication is the key to success. Communicating ineffectively to your subordinates could cause them to seek employment elsewhere. You can show your employees that you care about their needs by how well you communicate.

Take this quick quiz to see if you're communicating in such a way that benefits your employees.

*Answer True or False for the following:*

	TRUE	FALSE
1. When talking to an employee, I phrase everything from her perspective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I don't talk down to my employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I listen more than I talk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I always thank my employees for the great job they do for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The best answers are as follows:

**1. TRUE.** One way to look at phrasing is to use "you" instead of "I." Instead of saying, "What I think you could do to improve," or "What I would do," say, "You could really benefit from this training because ..." or "This resource can help you by ..."

**2. TRUE.** Even when your employee is having a hard time grasping what you're saying, stay patient and find a way to explain yourself more clearly. Adopting a condescending attitude will only put her on the defensive.

**3. TRUE.** When you're listening to what your employees' needs are, you're more able to understand their perspective. This enables you to be a better supervisor and steer them in the right direction.

**4. TRUE.** It's true your employees are on the company payroll and their paychecks are a small reward for the hard work they put in. But a simple "Thanks!" from you will go a long way to boost morale. If your employees see you as someone who appreciates their efforts, they will be more likely to go the extra mile to perform. ■

# Find Out What Your Employees Think With An Online Survey

An online survey can help you find out what your employees really think about what's going on in the workplace, and you don't have to spend a lot of time and money to create one.

## Sign Up And Get Started

Before you create your first survey, you can sign up for a free account at the SurveyMonkey Web site, [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).

To sign up for a free account:

1. Visit the SurveyMonkey home page and click the Join Now For Free button or hyperlink.
2. Fill out the required information and as much of the optional information as you want.
3. Click the Create A New Account button, and SurveyMonkey creates an account and takes you to the My Surveys welcome page.
4. Click on the Example Survey Web site link to view the sample survey.

## Create And Share Your Survey

Here are the basics of creating a very simple survey with the free account option:

1. After signing in, click the New Survey button to start a new survey.
  2. Select whether to create the survey from scratch or from an existing survey.
  3. Click Add Question to add your first question.
  4. On the Add Question page, select a format choice from the Question The Matrix, One Answer Per Row Rating Scale is a great option for questions with responses intended to rate employee satisfaction.
  5. On the next page, follow the prompts to enter your question in the Question text box.
  6. Follow the prompts to enter the answers you'd like to provide to the survey takers.
  7. Click the Add button to add the question. Then follow the prompt to add the next question.
  8. Finish the survey, then click on the My Surveys button in the navigation bar to view your survey.
  9. Click on the brown box icon to the left of your survey to open the survey.
  10. Click on the Collect icon for options to send your survey invitation to your employees.
- Tip:** Make sure you aren't violating company policies by creating an online survey. ■

## Give Yourself What You Really Need: More Time

From CEOs to all supervisory levels, managers are always looking for ways to gain more time in their personal lives and at work. Here's how you can single-handedly create more time for yourself.

One way you can free up more time is to eliminate "meeting mania," says author and management expert **Bob Prosen** in his book, "Kiss Theory Good Bye."

Use the following tips to structure meetings and you'll get more done in less time:

🔗 **Organize a meeting only when necessary.** Deciding whether a meeting is necessary sometimes can be a tricky judgment call. *Solution:* Every time you organize a meeting, use a meeting action-item report. If you can't think of any action items for a particular meeting, chances are the meeting is unnecessary.

🔗 **Assign tasks.** Write up the meeting agenda ahead of time, and include the names of those responsible for each action item, Prosen advises.

🔗 **Keep an eye on the clock.** Begin and end the meeting on time, even if you haven't addressed all the agenda items.

🔗 **Track the action items.** Write down action items developed in the meeting, along with the name of the person responsible for a given item, the due date and how many times the due date changed, Prosen suggests.

🔗 **Encourage accountability.** Begin each meeting with a review of the previous meeting's action items. This will help you to make everyone accountable, Prosen says. ■

## Pay Attention To Your Micromessages

You could be devaluing and discouraging your employees' performance at work without even knowing it, experts warn. If you skim your e-mail while an employee is trying to talk to you or if you always forget an employee's name, you could be sending your subordinates negative "micromessages," states Stephen Young in his book, *Micromessaging*.

These subtle and usually subconscious negative micromessages (also called MicroInequities) can hurt employees' self-esteem and impair their performance in the workplace, says Young, a diversity and leadership expert. But positive micromessages, (also called MicroAdvantages) can have an equally powerful impact, he notes in his book.

"While most of us are unaware of the 2,000 to 4,000 micromessages we send each day, they are the cornerstone that determines short- and long-term performance, employee loyalty, and organizational culture," Young explains. "The intrigue is how senders are mostly unaware of receiving them, yet mysteriously they are sent, received, and most importantly, acted on, blindly altering workplace performance and collegial relationships."

Doing something as simple as looking at your watch when an employee is speaking can send a negative micromessage to him, Young warns.

The first step to eliminating negative micromessages that could harm your workplace environment is to be more aware of what kinds of micromessages you're sending to employees.

✘ **Don't** turn away, shuffle papers or look at something on your computer screen when an employee is talking to you. This sends the micromessage that what he has to say is not important to you.

✔ **Do** give the employee your full attention to send a positive micromessage. Make and hold eye contact with him while he's speaking, and lean forward to show that you're interested in what he's telling you.

✘ **Don't** chit-chat with one employee or lavish special attention on one worker in particular. Doing so tells other employees that they aren't as important.

✔ **Do** give equal time and attention to all your employees. If you say "Good Morning" to a few of your employees, be sure to say it to all of them. ■

## Learn An Easy Way To Relax Without Leaving Your Desk

If work's putting the squeeze on you, taking a few minutes to relax can do wonders for your state of mind. Freelance health writer **Cathleen Henning** suggests stressed workers try this quick relaxation exercise, which you can do easily right at your desk:

⊙ Sit straight with your back against your chair and your feet firmly planted on the floor.

⊙ Close your eyes if you like and if it won't make you sleepy.

⊙ Take a deep breath, letting your lungs fill completely with air. Count to five slowly as you exhale. Repeat this deep breath two times, or until you feel yourself becoming calmer.

⊙ Tense the muscles in your feet as hard as you can without pain. Keep them tensed for five seconds, and then relax them for five seconds. Feel the relaxation flowing through your feet.

⊙ Now, do the same with each group of muscles in your body, moving from your feet up to your shoulders. Tense your calves, thighs, abdominals, lower back and upper back.

Then tense your hand and arm muscles by clenching your hands into fists. Tense your shoulders by raising them up towards your ears. To tense your neck, tip your head back for five seconds and then return it to its normal position.

⊙ Finish the exercise with five slow deep breaths. ■

## Tell Me What You Think!

Every issue of *Successful Supervisor* includes a mix of topics I believe will be of interest to you. But, coming up with this mix is no easy task. To help me ensure this newsletter is filled with articles you care about, please write to me at [teenaa@elijournals.com](mailto:teenaa@elijournals.com). I'd love to hear from you! ■

## Ask The Right Questions To Get The Right Answers

If you've grown weary interviewing applicants and you're not finding any with aspiring success stories to share, perhaps it's not the candidate. Maybe you're simply not asking the right questions.

The biggest thing to keep in mind is to minimize the amount of questions you ask that have a simple yes or no answer. These types of closed-ended questions don't offer a nervous employee an outlet to really describe her strengths. Some people might feel awkward jumping right in and telling you about something wonderful they helped their company achieve. That is, unless you ask.

To find the diamond in the rough, you need to get to the core of their competencies. For that, you should rely on behavioral-based interview questions.

Before the interview you'll need to compile a reasonably short list of questions to give the candidate the chance to describe situations showing the key competencies you're looking for. Consider asking the following questions:

- Can you tell me about a time when you had to work under tight time limits?
- Have you ever had to motivate others, and how did you accomplish that?
- Can you describe the last project you worked on that caused you frustration, and how you did you remedy the situation?
- What was the last project you worked on, and can you step me through what your role was?
- What area do you excel in, and can you explain how that expertise made a significant difference in a situation?

These types of questions gain you access to the core of an individual's work ethic, problem solving capabilities, methods, values, vision and enthusiasm. Once you've delved into the world of behavioral-based interviewing, you'll never ask another job candidate to simply tell you their best and worst quality. You'll find that out on your own! ■

## Command Respect Through Your Presentations

Not too long ago, audiences believed men were more credible presenters than women, says communications consultant **Dave Zielinski** of the journal *Presentations*. Today's business world operates on a more neutral playing field, but old habits die hard.

You want to command the respect you deserve — despite your gender — when you're delivering a presentation, especially in front of your employees. Here's Zielinski's advice on how professional women can deliver more effective presentations:

\* **Lower Your Voice.** Men's voices are naturally lower, which both sexes perceive as authoritative. Use your normal voice in the presentation, but drop your pitch when you're making an important point.

\* **Don't Doubt.** Phrases such as "in my opinion," "possibly" and "I'm not sure" are fine for personal conversations, but these "minimizing words" suggest uncertainty in public. Use decisive phrases like "we've decided," "the plan is" and "this will work."

\* **Own Your Authority.** Control your body language to send a confident message to your audience. Don't shrug your shoulders, fiddle with papers or touch your hair. Use body language to enhance your words.

\* **Master The Basics.** Preparation and delivery are still the center of any good presentation. ■

## Encourage Quick Motivation In Your Employees

Has one of your employees recently turned in her first company report? Print out a high-quality version of the document and have it professionally bound. Then, present it to her as a memento at your next departmental meeting. You'll encourage your subordinates to produce quality work, and you'll show them that they're important to your department. ■

# Promote Your Hot Idea For Big Career Points

You have a terrific idea that you truly believe will springboard your company into the big leagues. But you can't make the idea a reality without support from the higher-ups, so you'll need to convince them that your proposal is brilliant.

Some of today's top executives got where they are by knowing how to sell their ideas. Make your own big career leap with some idea-marketing advice from **Geoffrey James'** article "How To Sell An Idea":

◆ **Recruit an ally with credibility.** If your idea is way out of your league, you may need help from someone who's more likely to get things done. For instance, the CEO is more likely to listen to a pitch from his Chief Information Officer than the office manager. You need to sell your idea to someone with experience and clout who can help.

◆ **Have a persuasive argument.** Put yourself in your CEO's shoes. Why should she care about your idea? How does it align with the company's goals? These are the questions you should ask yourself before you present the idea to her. Tie in your plan with the current market and company environment. Persuade the executives that your proposal is in line with their own opinions and goals, suggests James.

## Case Study

Gene Frantz of Texas Instruments sold an invention in the 1970s that launched his career. His computer chip could synthesize speech, and he pitched it to the bigwigs as an educational toy called Speak and Spell®. **His pitch:** The technology aligned with his company's goals and products, and Speak and Spell also catered to a society concerned over television's negative impact on children's reading skills.

◆ **Speak to the individual.** Frame your idea in the language that represents the person you're pitching to. For example, if you're selling an idea to the CFO, talk about return on investment and budgets. But when you pitch the same idea to the sales guru in the company, talk to him about why your idea will increase the company's customer base.

◆ **Anticipate objections and prepare a response.** No idea is foolproof. You should analyze your pitch and try to think about what problems may arise. Then, prepare a response that will satisfy the person you're pitching to. It's a good idea to have a peer help you pinpoint downfalls and give you honest feedback, says James. ■

## Give Your Bored Employee A New Task

As a supervisor, it's your job to notice your employees' strengths and weaknesses. And sometimes what you perceive as a weakness is really a sign of boredom. If you have a team member who seems apathetic and doesn't participate in group discussions, maybe he's just bored and needs a new challenge.

Of course, this now becomes your new challenge: Find him something to do that will get him

involved with the project. Consider the following suggestions:

☛ Is he organized and detail-oriented? Perhaps have him take notes at the next meeting, then make copies and distribute them with a follow-up email.

☛ Is he a wiggle worm who can't sit still? Choose him to go pick up the bagels and coffee before the meeting. That should help expel any pent-up energy he may have before the meeting begins. (Until he drinks

the coffee anyway.)

☛ Is he quiet and reserved? Have him do some online research to aid the project and summarize his findings in a brief memo.

Giving him a specific task to accomplish, even a minor one, may help him feel more involved in the assignment. Once he takes ownership of specific tasks, you may be surprised at how much he now cares about the project. ■

# De-Stress Your Subordinates

Is your office a constant whirl of high-strung, overworked employees? If so, you can lead your team to be less stressed and more productive.

Here's how, according to business consultant **Dr. Joanne Sujansky** in her article "The Overwhelmed Office: Six Fixes for the Stressed-Out, Productively-Challenged Workplace.":

➤ **Assign Reasonable Tasks.** Strike a balance between menial gruntwork that needs to get done and challenging opportunities for professional development. Your subordinates need a combination of the two in order to maximize their job satisfaction.

➤ **Measure Productivity.** There's no use in wondering whether your department is reaching its productivity goals. Institute a measurable system to tell you if you're on track or not.

➤ **Add Meaning.** Your team needs to see the value it adds to the company, or it won't be inspired to work.

➤ **Reward A Job Well Done.** Once you've measured your department's productivity, don't forget to reward the team for reaching its goals. This goes for individuals on your staff as well.

➤ **Encourage Time Off.** Make sure your employees break for lunch, take vacations and enjoy periodic mental health days. That way, they'll be more productive when they're back on the job.

➤ **Lead Exercises.** Start a power yoga club at lunch or offer weight-lifting classes on the premises. Fit employees are more productive and less stressed than their out-of-shape colleagues. ■

## Call For Case Studies!

I want to hear about your finest supervisory moment! How have you motivated your employees in the midst of layoffs, coached your team to greatness, or boosted your team's profitability for your company's bottom line? Please write to me at [teena@elijournals.com](mailto:teena@elijournals.com), share your success story, and I may feature you in an upcoming Case Study column!

Not sure if you handled something appropriately? Our team of experts will critique your performance and offer valuable tips you can put into action with your next employee encounter, right away! ■

# Resolve Conflicts Efficiently

According to a poll from Cornell University, a majority of Fortune-1000 businesses use mediation or alternative dispute resolution ("ADR") because it creates long-term partnerships benefiting both parties.

What's true for the big companies is true for your department: you can use mediation instead of disciplinary action to create a more stable and healthy workplace. The most important mediator qualities are:

➤ **Formal Training.** Complement your professional experience with education or training in fields like psychology and communications.

➤ **Professional Experience.** Know the ins and outs of your industry so that you can provide an appropriate solution. A mediator who has never worked with public utility companies wouldn't be a good choice to resolve a dispute among an electric co-op.

➤ **Listening Skills.** Have the patience to let both sides air their grievances. Don't rush to a solution.

➤ **Personality.** Establish a good relationship with both sides at the start. In a tense matter, avoid unnecessary problems caused by personality conflicts. ■

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