

Typical Experience of a

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PhD | Applies to nonprofits and for-
profits unless noted



First-Time Supervisor

Rarely Have Adequate Training

Often, employees are promoted to supervision because of their strong technical expertise -- expertise in building a product or providing a service. Suddenly, the new supervisor is now charged with a whole new range of responsibilities, many of which have little to do with technical expertise.

Managers often deal with great deal of paperwork and people. Although paperwork is usually the most tedious, it's often the most predictable. People aren't predictable. They have moods, illnesses, career expectations, crises in their family lives, etc. The supervisor's technical expertise is often useless when it comes to supervising people.

Sometimes Intimidated by Wide Range of Policies and Procedures

The new supervisor is suddenly faced with a wide range of rules and regulations -- each of which the supervisor is responsible to enforce. The supervisor is responsible for signing time cards, authorizing overtime, granting compensation time, dealing with performance problems, developing job descriptions, following hiring procedures, dealing with grievances, conforming to a complicated pay system, and the list goes on. It can be quite difficult to conform to today's wide range of employee laws, rules and regulations -- and at the same time, produce a product or service.

New Supervisors Rarely Have Enough Time

No matter how many courses or degrees a new supervisor has completed, they're often surprised that management activities are so hectic and demanding. No matter how thorough the planning, managers rarely get to spend much time on any one activity. The role of most managers, whether new supervisors or executives, is interspersed with frequent interruptions. Any surprise in the work or lives of employees is a sudden demand on supervisors. New supervisors often expect to have complete knowledge of everything that goes on in their group. They don't want to encounter any surprises. So they spend more time reading, thinking, planning, communicating with employees -- new supervisors often spend 60 hours a week on the job. Still, they don't feel they have enough time to do the job right.

New Supervisors Often Feel Very Alone

Each manager has a unique role in the organization. Each organization is unique. Usually there are no clear procedures for dealing with the numerous challenges that suddenly face management. Ultimately, it's up to each manager to get through the day. Faced with a great deal of pressure, little time and continuing demands from other people, the new supervisor can feel quite alone.

The supervisor is responsible to be an advocate for the organization and an advocate for the employee. For example, if the organization implements an unpopular new policy, the supervisor is often responsible to communicate and justify that new policy to the employee. In this case, management expects the supervisor to present and support the new policy, and the employee vents his or her frustration to the supervisor. However, if the supervisor wants to

promote the employee or present some other reward, he or she is now representing the employee's case to the rest of management. The supervisor is often alone, stuck in the middle. The new supervisor wants to come across as having deserved their promotion, as being in control of the situation. It's difficult to seek help from others in the organization. Even when there is someone there to talk to, it's difficult to fully explain the situation -- the new supervisor sometimes doesn't know how things got so hectic and confusing.

New Supervisors Often Feel Overwhelmed, Stressed Out

The new supervisor is responsible, often for the first time, for the activities of another employee. The supervisor must ensure the employee knows his or her job, has the resources to do the job and does the job as effectively as possible.

Until a new supervisor develops a "feeling for the territory", they often deal with the stresses of supervision by working harder, rather than smarter. They miss the comfort and predictability of their previous job.

The stress and loneliness in the role of new supervisor can bring out the worst in a person. If they deal with stress by retreating, they'll retreat to their offices and close the door. If they deal with frustration, they'll become angry and unreasonable with their employees. If they are used to getting strong praise and high grades, they'll work harder and harder until their jobs become their lives.

If the experience of first-time supervision is successful -- it's challenging, but fulfilling -- the supervisor goes on to become a progressive, supportive manager.

