

Strategies for Helping Supervisors Succeed with Student Employees

1. **Set an Example:** Model strong work habits through efficient, dedicated work practices. Let your approach to daily work be an example from which students can learn.
2. **Be Flexible:** Understand that student employees are students first and employees second. Therefore, though it is essential to have high standards on the job, it is also necessary to be flexible to accommodate academic obligations.
3. **Communicate Expectations:** Communicate the job standards and expectations to your student employees. One can't assume that these are self-evident to the students, even though they may seem obvious to you.
4. **Give Feedback Frequently:** Provide consistent and appropriate feedback to your student employees. Student employees, like all employees, benefit from feedback in job performance, providing it is communicated with a positive spirit.
5. **Be Fair:** Supervisors who are too lenient are not doing students any favors. Student jobs are "real jobs." Treat student employees as you would like to be treated in a given situation.
6. **Train, Train, Train:** Take time to train your students in essential work skills, attitude, and habits - such as perseverance, time management, phone skills, quality service practices, handling difficult situations. This is the "common sense" from which success is made.
7. **Be a Team Player:** As a team leader, develop and nurture the unique contributions of each team member. Take a global perspective.
8. **Give Recognition:** When you see a student "going the extra mile" or "persevering through difficult situations," acknowledge this in front of; other staff and peers. People need to feel appreciated.
9. **Share the Vision:** Have regular staff meetings with your student employees and inform them how their work fits into a larger purpose of the department and institution. Remember, purposeful work is meaningful work.
10. **Be an Educator** To the degree that we each contribute to the lives of others, we are all educators. So how can you contribute to the education of your student employees?

Common Supervisor Problems

- Failure to use common supervisory skills such as listening and communicating
- Lack of responsiveness to administrative/clerical tasks
- Failure to define the job, establish goals, or set expectations
- Failure to adequately train student employees on job tasks and skills
- Failure to be sensitive to the personal and academic needs of students
- Failure to help students develop habits and attitudes that reflect positively on the institution
- Getting supervisors to see student employees as "real employees."
- Failure to provide ongoing feedback and evaluation
- Inefficient use of student employee's time and talents

Dealing with Conflicts and Complaints

- **Remain Calm** - look at the situation as objectively and fairly as possible
- **Listen** - Let the other person vent. Listen carefully and be sure you get the details right, asking questions if necessary.
- **Try to sympathize** - Imagine how you would feel in the person's position. Let them know that you understand why they are upset.
- **Agree on a Course of Action** - Work with the other person to reach a solution or course of action that is agreeable to both of you.
- **Follow Up** - If action is taken, follow up with the other person and confirm that the situation has been handled satisfactorily.

Dealing with Difficult People

- **Attackers:** People who charge need room and time to blow off steam. Get them into a private area, address them by name, and listen to their position. Do not argue or get into a shouting match; ask them to calm down and present your response in a firm, calm way.
- **Egotists:** People who come on strong often act like subject experts, unlike attackers. Respect their knowledge and ask questions, but do not allow them to "take over."
- **Sneaks:** These people often use sarcasm. Your best defense is to expose them with direct questions about what bothers them. But unfortunately, they often retreat if directly queried about what their sarcasm means.
- **Victims:** People who act powerless and defeated and often whine. Ask them for suggestions to improve the situation. Then, logically refute their negative comments with facts.
- **Negators:** These people are usually suspicious of those in authority and believe that their own opinion is the only legitimate one. Let negators use all their negative "ammunition" before focusing on real solutions.
- **Super-Agreeable:** People who want to be liked and offer to do whatever you want them to do. They over-commit themselves and often disappoint and frustrate others. Monitor what they volunteer to do to make sure they are not overworked. Disassociate actions from their sense of self-worth.
- **Unresponsive:** These people are withdrawn, and it is seemingly impossible to gain a positive commitment from them. Try using more open-ended, indirect questions and wait for them to respond. Please resist the urge to finish sentences for them. Instead, give them tasks that require reports at regular intervals.

Why Students Don't Come to Work

- Inability to get along with other employees. Personality clashes can quickly become major problems with no winners.
- Poor working conditions. Cold, heat, poor ventilation, lousy lighting, fumes or fragrances, a dirty working environment.
- They are bored. There may not be enough work to keep them busy, they may be bored, or the job may be very routine or repetitive
- The work is too difficult.
- They do not feel they are needed.
- They are not motivated.
- Transportation or childcare issues.
- Poor supervision.

Poor Job Performance

There may be instances when the employee's work performance is not acceptable. Therefore, it is essential first to work with the employee to improve their performance. The following are possible reasons for poor performance and suggested strategies for improvement:

- I. **Reason for poor performance:** Lack of knowledge of specific job duties or responsibilities.
 - a. Strategy for improvement: Provide additional training; it may be helpful to develop a job description and manual to make job responsibilities clear.
- II. **Reason for poor performance:** Lack of skills for tasks to be performed.
 - a. Strategy for improvement: Provide training on skill development; another approach is to shift the person to a position where skills can be utilized.
- III. **Reason for poor performance:** Personal problems due to family, academics, finances, personal relationships.
 - a. Strategy for improvement: It May help be a "good listener;" it may be necessary to refer to counseling if problems persist; time and understanding are often the solutions to these problems.

- IV. **Reason for poor performance:** Interpersonal conflict between supervisor and employee or between other workers or staff in the office.
- a. Strategy for improvement: It is imperative to open lines of communication and develop understandings between parties involved; it may be necessary to apply a third unbiased party to mediate the conflict and initiate contact.
- V. **Reason for poor performance:** General lack of motivation on the part of the employee.
- a. Strategy for improvement: More challenging to correct. Some suggestions include:
 1. re-emphasize expectations of the job and appropriate job behavior;
 2. provide frequent Feedback, both negative and positive, on performance (with emphasis on the positive);
 3. vary job responsibilities (i.e., alternate tasks to create variety);
 4. shift the person to another position where skills and motivation can be better used;
 5. if necessary, consider probation, poor evaluations, and poor references as a means to encourage proper job behavior.

Coaching: Strategy for Solving Performance Problems

1. Identify unsatisfactory performance

- What are the things I see and hear that indicate there is a problem
- What is it about this person's behavior that adversely impacts the work?
- What are the things I would have this person do (or stop doing) that would convince me that they have solved the problem?

2. a. Analyze what is influencing the unsatisfactory performance

- Does the employee know what is supposed to be done and when?
- Does the employee know how to do it?

b. Analyze the impact of the unsatisfactory performance

- What impact is the behavior having on the workplace?
- What impact will the behavior have on the employee if the behavior does not change

3. Discuss the performance problem

- Hold the meeting in a private place
- Ensure that there will be no interruptions.
- Allow as much time as necessary to complete the discussion
- Make sure your emotions are under control
- Decide ahead of time what minimum action you will accept due to the discussion.
- Be sure to focus on the performance issue, not the employee's personality (i.e., avoid using "attitude").
- Open the meeting and establish rapport.
- State the purpose of the meeting and agree that a problem exists.
- Be specific when discussing behavior discrepancy.
- Explore alternative solutions - ask for employees' suggestions.
- Get a commitment to act.
- Close with encouragement.

4. Follow up

- Document the discussion.
- Is the action agreed upon with the employee being accomplished? If not, go back to the discussion stage.
- Recognize any improvement - this step in the coaching process has the most significant potential to sustain progress.

Giving Constructive Feedback

Feedback is an essential element for everyone in an organization's workforce. Giving Feedback is a task you perform again and again as a manager or supervisor, letting people know where they are and where to go next in terms of expectations and goals - yours, their own, and the organizations.

Feedback is a valuable tool for indicating when things are going in the right direction or redirecting problem performance. Your objective in giving feedback is to guide by helpfully supplying information to support effective behavior or guide someone back on track toward successful implementation.

Some situations which require giving constructive feedback include:

- Ongoing performance discussions
- Providing specific performance pointers
- Following up on coaching discussions
- Giving corrective guidance
- Letting someone know the consequences of their behavior

Some clues that constructive Feedback is needed are when:

- Someone asks for your opinion about how they are doing
- Unresolved problems persist
- Errors occur again and again
- An employee's performance doesn't meet expectations
- A peer's work habits disturb you

Do's and Don'ts of Constructive Feedback

Part of being an effective manager or supervisor is knowing what Feedback to give. The trick is to provide it constructively to have some value. Constructive Feedback is a tool used to build things up, not break things down. It lets the other person know that you are on their side.

- **Don't:** If you can't think of a constructive purpose for giving feedback, don't give it at all.
- **Do:** Focus on description rather than judgment.
 - Describing behavior is a way of reporting what has occurred, while judging behavior evaluates what has happened in terms of "right or wrong" or "good or bad." By avoiding evaluative language, you reduce the need for the individual to respond defensively.
 - For example: "You demonstrate a high degree of confidence when you answer customer questions about registration procedures, "rather than, "Your communication skills are good."
- **Do:** Focus on observation rather than inference.
 - Observations refer to what you can see or hear about an individual's behavior, while inferences refer to the assumptions and interpretations you make from what you see or hear. Focus on what the person did and your reaction.
 - For example: "When you gave that student the Financial Aid form, you tossed it across the counter," rather than describe what you assume to be the person's motivation, "I suppose you give all forms out that way!"
- **Do:** Focus on behavior rather than the person
 - Refer to what an individual does rather than what you imagine they are. To focus on behavior, use adverbs, which describe the action, rather than adjectives, which describe qualities.
 - For example: "You talked considerably during the staff meeting, which prevented me from getting to some of the main points," rather than "You talk too much."

- Do: Provide a balance of positive and negative feedback. People will distrust it and become useless if you consistently give only positive or negative feedback.
- Don't: Be aware of feedback overload.
 - Select two or three essential points you want to make and offer Feedback about those points. If you overload an individual with Feedback, they may become confused about what needs improvement or change.
 - For example: "The number of applicants and the time it takes you to enter them are both within the expected ranges. The number of keying errors you are currently making is higher than expected."

Giving Feedback constructively benefits everyone. Use this ongoing exchange of information as a way of getting to know your people and providing them with valuable guidance in their work. It will do your job and theirs easier.

Six Step Method for Giving Constructive Feedback

1. State the constructive purpose of your Feedback.

State your purpose briefly by indicating what you'd like to cover and why it's essential. For example, if you initiate Feedback, this focus keeps the other person guessing what you want to talk about. Likewise, if the other person has requested Feedback, a focusing statement will ensure that you direct your Feedback toward what the person needs.

For example: "I have a concern about."

- "I feel I need to let you know."
- "I want to discuss."
- "I have some thoughts about."

2. Describe specifically what you have observed.

Have a specific event or action in mind and say when and where it happened, who was involved, and what the results were. Stick to what you observed, and don't try to speak for others. Avoid talking vaguely about what the person "always" or "usually" does.

For example: "Yesterday afternoon, when you were speaking with Mrs. Sanchez, I noticed that you kept raising your voice."

3. Describe your reactions.

Explain the consequences of the other person's behavior and how you feel about it. Give examples of how you and others are affected. When you describe your reactions or the consequences of the observed behaviors, the other person can better appreciate the impact their actions are having on others and the organization or team as a whole.

For example: "The staff member looked embarrassed, and I felt uncomfortable about seeing the episode." "Shouting at our students is not acceptable behavior in this department."

4. Give the other person an opportunity to respond.

Remain silent and meet the other person's eye, indicating that you are waiting for an answer. If the person hesitates to respond, ask an open-ended question.

For example: "What do you think?"

- "What is your view of this situation?"
- "What is your reaction to this?"
- "Tell me, what are your thoughts?"

5. Offer specific suggestions.

Whenever possible, make your suggestions helpful by including practical, feasible examples. Offering suggestions shows that you have thought past your evaluations and moved to improve the situation. Even if people are working up to expected standards, they often benefit from ideas that could help them perform better. If your Feedback was offered supportively or neutrally, in the "for your information" mode, or

suggestions may not be appropriate depending on the situation's circumstances. Use your common sense and offer an idea if you think the other person will find it helpful. Don't drum up a suggestion for improvement just for the sake of it.

For example: "Jennifer, I sometimes write myself notes or put up signs to remind myself to do something." "Jill, rather than telling Ed that you're not interested in all the details, you might try asking him specific questions about the information you are most interested in."

6. Summarize and express your support.

Review the major points you discussed. Summarize the Action items, not the negative points of the other person's behavior. If you have given neutral Feedback, emphasize the main points you have wanted to convey. For corrective Feedback, stress the main things you've discussed that the person could do differently. End on a positive note by communicating confidence in the person's ability to improve the situation.

For example: "As I said, the way the group has figured out how to cover phone calls has lessened the number of phone messages to be returned. You've followed through on a challenging problem. Please keep taking the initiative on the issues like that."

By summarizing, you can avoid misunderstandings and check to ensure that your communication is clear. In addition, this summary is an opportunity to show your support for the other person - a way to conclude a negative feedback situation on a positive note.

For example: "At least we understand each other better since we've talked. I'll do what I can to make sure your priorities are factored into the schedule, and I'll expect you to come straight to me if the schedule is a problem."