

Characteristics that Make a Good Supervisor

Below you will find a summary of the responses my office received to the question: “What makes a Good Supervisor?” Dean of the Faculty Bob Cooke asked me the question and offered to place my answer to it on his website. I decided to turn the question over to my colleagues on campus and see what the collective response looked like. We emailed the question out to 300 colleagues across the campus and received an incredible 25% response rate.

A Good Supervisor:

Upon reading the responses, which were very consistent in themes, there were some very striking messages.

- First, treat others as you wish to be treated (or as you wish your loved ones to be treated) – namely with respect.
 - Second, remember that staff are multi-faceted human beings, with needs, interests and lives that are important to them.
 - Third, be honest and ethical.
 - Fourth, recognize that problems are a normal part of life and approach them in an effort to find solutions rather than place blame.
 - Fifth, give praise and recognition when it is due.
 - Finally, show those who work for you that you too are human – laugh, share, apologize when it is called for and let them get to know you. No one expects a supervisor to be perfect.
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- o Acknowledges and/or rewards their employees for their efforts in a timely and public manner
 - o Has the ability to attract, select, and retain a diverse staff
 - o Is available and approachable
 - o Is a good communicator and listener
 - o Clearly communicates the following during orientation:
 - The work unit’s mission and how it is related to the organization’s mission
 - The focus of the incumbent’s position and how it supports the unit’s mission
 - Specific expectations about the level and quality of work required for the job
 - o Has the ability to empower their employees and delegate authority
 - o Encourages and supports the personal and professional development of their employees
 - o Has high ethical standards and integrity
 - o Is fair and honest
 - o Is an empathetic listener and has compassion for others
 - o Has a sense of humor
 - o Can act as a mentor and coach
 - o Is a successful problem solver who is able to balance his/her own needs, the needs of employees, and the needs of the organization
 - o Motivates others to pull together to meet goals and objectives
 - o Is a role model
 - o Provides feedback (both when things are going well and when improvements are needed) to individuals in timely, meaningful manner

- o Seeks to find out all sides of an issue before making a decision that affects staff
- o Engender positive, mature relationships with their staff members, characterized primarily by mutual trust, respect, and the recognition that each individual is unique
- o Uses good analytical and problem-solving skills together with their “emotional intelligence” (maturity).
- o Has passion for the career that they have chosen and an infectious energy level
- o Knows that if the unit is not changing, evolving, or improving, then the unit is falling behind
- o Believes in hiring people who are stronger than they are, or have the potential to be stronger than they are, so that the organization can grow talent.
- o Promotes team efforts and team recognition
- o Is innovative
- o Comprehends the demands of the employee’s job and the skills required to successfully complete assigned tasks
- o Is willing to work as hard if not harder than their subordinates
- o Aggressively provides a safe work environment

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