



The Changing Landscape of Supervision

Supervising/managing employees can be a difficult task especially for water districts and authorities. Events of the past two years have complicated this even more. From hiring to termination, supervisors/managers have had to learn new practices and technology to survive in this new environment. Although some supervisors already managed remote field staff, the landscape of how we operate and supervise has changed for almost every leader.

Hiring is one of the most important but hardest functions supervisors are tasked with completing. In a “45 minute” interview, supervisors must determine if the candidate has the knowledge, skills, abilities, desire, values, and believes in the mission. It is a daunting task. The pandemic has complicated this even more. Virtual interviews are now the norm and supervisors must embrace the new technology if they want to succeed.

Some best practices of virtual interviewing are:

- Dress professionally
- Let the interviewee know the agenda and schedule and be on time
- Conduct the virtual interview as you would an in-person interview
- Ask your prepared questions
- Give the interviewee time to answer
- Discuss your culture and values
- Provide information on what the candidate can expect going forward

Once the candidate accepts the offer, our sense of accomplishment is short lived. Our job isn't finished...it's just starting. Onboarding is vital to the success of the new employee and virtual onboarding can be challenging.

It is so important to keep the new employee engaged during the transition time between when they give their “two week” notice to their current employer and once they arrive on their first day. When the new employee arrives at the district or authority:

- Help Them “settle in”
 - Have a welcome activity in-person or virtually
 - Send them swag if you have it, like logo items
 - Help them build their network by scheduling in-person or virtual meetings with key staff and stakeholders
- Establish the manager – staff relationship
 - Communicate schedule and availability
 - Adjust the timing and format of your check-ins and onboarding sessions

- Don't forget to check in even if they are doing well
- How to set the new employee up for success
 - Set out 30-60-90 day goals
 - Be honest and open on feedback and allow the employee opportunities to give feedback
 - Have self-directed and self-paced onboarding activities in addition to scheduled activities

Supervisors might want to consider rules of engagement after they start. Establish a communications schedule that is predictable. Create an agenda you use every time for meetings. This can help with consistency and allows the employee to prepare. Determine how the meeting will be facilitated. Phone call? Face Time or Skype? Zoom? Microsoft Teams? Google Hangout? Go over expectations, deadlines, and non-negotiables. Focus should be on goals and outcomes, not just activity. Set common "business hours". What are expectations for connecting with employees? What should they expect from you? Trust is a two-way street. Model what you expect. If anyone is taking time off, how will it be communicated? If a Manager or Supervisor is taking time off, what is the back-up plan if employees need an answer or resources?

Regardless of whether it is in-person or virtual supervision, employees are looking to you to set the tone for success. Show employees how to be successful.

- You may need to adapt your leadership style to the needs of individuals
- Communication is key and using the right technology can help
- Clear, concise rules of engagement help ensure communication is predictable and thorough
- Help employees be accountable by knowing what outcomes you will measure
- Assign mini-deliverables or parts of a larger task (interim objectives)
- Define boundaries without becoming overworked or overstressed
- You and employees both need to practice self-care
- Use a daily and weekly plan to keep on track
- Schedule team meetings and individual check ins

Even though you do everything right in setting employees up for success, some employees will not be successful. You must be prepared to hold them accountable, include Human Resources, and follow your discipline policy.

When termination is the final option there are some considerations. Supervisors need to plan ahead regarding what to do before termination, during the termination delivery, and after termination.

If employment termination is the right choice, the decision should be made on well documented facts and coordinated with Human Resources/Office Manager following all appropriate policies. Decide ahead of time who will be included in the pre-termination communication plan. Assignments should be coordinated as to who will be involved in the actual delivery and who will be prepared to cut physical and technical access. This step

should be followed even in the event of a virtual termination and timing is critical. Have a plan on how property, including laptops, cell phones, any keys, key cards, or fobs, will be collected and how personal property will be returned.

Always consider the dignity of the employee when facilitating a termination. Once the termination is complete, a communication plan should be followed letting other employees know only that the person is no longer working at the office. Any other specifics should only be shared on a need to know basis.

Managing the employee life cycle is a difficult task and events over the past couple of years have made this increasingly difficult. Managers/supervisors that embrace the technology and are flexible in their practices will increase their success in these efforts.