

Q. I am a new supervisor. What are some important tips to follow, mistakes to avoid, and considerations to think about to help keep me on track to becoming an effective manager and leader?

A. Here is a collection of tips worth considering: Avoid assuming your position gives you the privilege to be pushy and demanding. Admit you need help as a new supervisor, and turn to experienced managers for it. Understand nearly everything you say and do is modeling and will be remembered. This includes what time you come in, how late you stay, how organized you are, how you dress, the loyalty you demonstrate to your employer, admitting what you don't know, and whether you practice work-life balance. Prepare to discover that being a supervisor is more challenging and demanding than you expect. As the boss, you have more control over your schedule, but do not abuse this privilege by doing personal business on company time--especially managing a side business--or taking longer lunch breaks than others do. Don't be "invisible," hide behind closed doors, or have your employees wondering where you are. Do not borrow equipment or supplies for personal use. Engage with your employees. Identify their strengths and yearnings, and then leverage this knowledge to achieve the goals of your work unit. EAP services are available to you as you develop your skills as Supervisor and can support you throughout your career.

Q. On several occasions over the past year, I was told that my documentation was not good enough to support a disciplinary action. Needless to say, I am frustrated. What are the most important issues in documentation for supervisors?

A. Most supervisors have heard repeatedly that writing "the facts" and details--what, where, when, and who--are the critical parts of documentation. The parts to avoid, of course, are your opinions, analysis, and psychological appraisal of the worker. Less discussed, however, is timeliness of documentation, which refers to the lag time between the incident and when you write it. You may be busy, but as more time passes between an event and documentation, the less accurate that documentation will tend to be and the more likely it will contain judgments and overtones of your emotional response to the incident and the employee's personality. The reason is that you will remember how you feel and emotionally respond to the worker or incident longer than you will remember the facts and details of what actually occurred.

Q. I do not always provide an accurate rating of my employee's performance. I tend to grade higher than what is deserved. My purpose is to avoid conflict and the souring of the relationship, which I depend on to get work done. What am I risking with this practice?

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A. The practice of grading an employee's performance higher than you should is called "rating inflation." It's a well-known phenomenon in management, and often the reason it occurs is that the manager is trying to keep peace with the worker whose performance is problematic. Unfortunately, the short-term gains of rating inflation are usually outweighed by the long-term negatives. For example, getting a higher rating than they deserve will give your employee a false sense of pride in their work, and it can undermine their career growth, lower productivity standards, and prevent your employee from realizing their potential in the current position. Consider meeting with the employee assistance professional to examine this issue more fully. Discuss what contributes to your fear of grading the employee properly. Also discuss communication strategies likely to help you meet your goal to establish a more truthful supervisor-supervisee relationship that will benefit you, the employee, and the organization.