



## What Great Supervisors Do Differently

*Wally Bock, June 2008*

Great supervisors work directly with the people who do the frontline work of the company. They are the key to company productivity and morale.

There are all kinds of great supervisors. They're tall and short, fat and thin. Great supervisors come in a variety of styles. Some are loud and some are quiet. Some are volatile and some are calm.

Great supervisors are responsible for groups that out-perform their less effective peers on two key dimensions. Their groups are more productive, often by huge margins. And their groups have high moral.

Great supervisors get great results because they do things differently than their less effective peers. If you want to get the results that great supervisors get, just do the things that great supervisors do.

After more than a quarter century of training, coaching and research, I've got a pretty good idea of what those things are. Here's my list, in no particular order.

Great supervisors show up a lot.

This is such a simple thing, but it generates great results. When you show up a lot, good things start to happen.

You get to know your people by seeing them in action. That's the best way there is to learn what they do well and what needs improvement. Showing up a lot gives you many opportunities to help your people improve.

Your people also get to know you. You become a natural part of the working environment. That, in turn, leads to more natural conversations and better communication.

Great supervisors tell their people why their work is important.

People want to do important work. They want to be part of something that's bigger than they are, something that matters.

Great supervisors tell individuals how what they're doing contributes to team and company success. They tell the team how their work makes a difference to the company.

Great supervisors do things to keep work interesting.

People want to enjoy themselves at work. There are two key ways that great supervisors help them do that.

Great supervisors help individuals learn and grow. Learning is actually like play for most adults and the great supervisors help their people keep learning.

Great supervisors keep things interesting for the team by setting up competition. Sometimes individuals or parts of the team compete with each other. Sometimes the team competes with other teams. Sometimes the team competes with its own prior performance or goals.

Great supervisors rehearse mentally.

Great athletes prepare for competition by imagining a great performance. Great generals prepare for battle by imagining what might happen and how they'll respond. Great supervisors do the same thing.

Great supervisors practice encounters with subordinates or presentations or handling emergencies in their head. They determine what might happen, and then they figure out what they'll do if it does.

That mental rehearsal pays off when the real situations occur. By then, the great supervisors have already developed and considered alternatives and can easily choose the best course of action.

Great supervisors work hard to assure understanding.

Your people need to know what you expect of them. You need to understand the messages they send you.

Great supervisors know that understanding rarely happens naturally. That's why they use techniques like active listening to make sure they understand what others are saying. They check for understanding when they give instructions.

Great supervisors manage the consequences of performance.

Consequences are the natural outcome of performance. They should work this way. If someone does something good, something good happens to him or her. If they do something bad, something bad happens.

Great supervisors deliver the consequences of performance effectively. That means that they use positive consequences like praise, reward and recognition to get people to try something new or to continue a behavior. They use negative consequences like reprimand or punishment to get people to stop something.

Great supervisors take every opportunity to communicate and counsel.

Those moments when you contact a subordinate are precious. Great supervisors try to use every one to improve performance, stop unwanted behavior and help people grow.

Great supervisors help people grow.

Great supervisors strive to help and encourage everyone who works for them to become an ideal employee. That means helping them develop their skills and try new things.

Great supervisors get feedback on their supervisory performance.

You can't get better if you don't know how you're doing. That's why great supervisors seek critique from many areas. They ask their boss and their subordinates how they're doing. They ask their peers. And they critique their own supervisory performance.

Great supervisors ask for advice.

Supervision is a demanding art. It's also an apprentice trade, one that's learned mostly on the job. Great supervisors read and take courses, but they also seek advice from other supervisors.

It doesn't take magic or in-born skill to do these things. But it does take consistent and concentrated effort.

Now that you know what it takes, you can become a great supervisor. Just do what they do and you'll get the results they get.

***About the Author:***

*Wally Bock is an author, speaker, and coach who helps leaders improve the performance and morale of their teams. Wally is the author of Performance Talk: The One-on-One Part of Leadership (<http://www.performancetalk.com/>) and the Three Star Leadership Blog (<http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>).*