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Active Supervision

Active supervision challenge: Managing performance

As a supervisor, your primary responsibility is to provide both prescriptive and corrective performance management. Here's how to do that effectively.

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Hello again, Coach Paul here. I want to thank all of you for your interest in taking the active supervision challenge, [which debuted on Police1 last month](#).

Over the course of this year, I will outline the 10 skills of active supervision, help you create a plan for developing each of those skills, and discuss a few special considerations that may apply to your situation

In this article, I discuss the first of our 10 active supervision skills: performance management. I explain why performance management is the most important active supervision skill, describe the steps for effectively managing performance, and provide some tips and techniques to improve your performance management skills.

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

Performance management has two sides, the prescriptive side and the corrective side, and both sides are equally important.

Prescriptive performance management is the process whereby you, the active supervisor, provide your followers with the information they need to successfully do their jobs. An example of prescriptive performance management would be sitting down with followers at the beginning of the new deployment period and developing training and professional growth goals with them.

Corrective performance management involves providing your followers with immediate remedial consequences when their behavior so warrants. For example, issuing a follower with a verbal warning when they arrive late to briefing or the start of their workday.

Most of us are comfortable with prescriptive performance management. It's usually a fun and positive experience for both the supervisor and the follower. The same cannot be said for most supervisors' enthusiasm for engaging in corrective performance management. In the immediate term, it is not a pleasant experience for either the offending follower or the supervisor. But when corrective performance management is warranted, it must be done. Here's why.

PROMOTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

When your agency's management or command staff team member promoted you to being a supervisor, I am pretty confident that they did not emphasize the critical role into which they were placing you. So, let me tell you what they should have told you (or repeat it if they did): *Case law now considers you to be an official policymaker of the larger entity for whom you work.*

Your promotion is not about more money or better perks, it is fundamentally about more responsibility. And your primary responsibility is to provide both prescriptive and corrective performance management. If you didn't realize the gravity of the role you accepted with your promotion, do yourself, your family, your followers, your agency and your community members a favor and voluntarily step down. Every job in every agency has purpose and nobility. Not everyone can supervise well. If you remain up to the active supervision challenge, read on to learn the steps for effectively managing performance.

STEPS FOR EFFECTIVELY MANAGING PERFORMANCE

These are the three steps for effectively managing performance:

1. Set clear expectations for your followers
2. Evaluate your follower's performance against your expectations
3. Reinforce or correct as needed.

On the face of it, these seem pretty standard and simple to achieve. But the majority of thousands of officers and professional staff members I have interviewed or worked with over the past two decades tell me that their supervisors have not been doing this for them. Let's take a look at the two most-common reasons supervisors don't take these steps and learn how to change that trend:

- **I don't have enough time.** This is the most common excuse for not managing employee performance. Over the years, supervisors have told me that they have too many reports to review, correct and approve; or that they have too many ancillary duties. My response to them has always been the same. You must make time to effectively manage your follower's performance.
- **I don't want to be a micromanager.** This is the second most common excuse for not managing employee performance. The Oxford Dictionary defines micromanagement as "controlling every part, however small, of (an enterprise or activity)." Managing employee performance does not involve controlling. Managing employee performance involves influencing and shaping a follower's behaviors. In my experience, those who are reluctant to engage in corrective performance management often hide behind the fact that they don't want their followers to consider them to be micromanagers. To those of you I say, give the three steps a try. If you do them as listed above, you will never be in danger of being considered a micromanager.

BONUS CONTENT: TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Before we close this article, I would like to share a few tips and techniques for those supervisors working in those special consideration areas that I [mentioned in the first article](#).

Working supervisor (splits their time between supervising and performing line-level duties): The key for you is proactive communication. As a working supervisor, your role will constantly shift between being a partner one moment and a supervisor the next. Meet with your followers at the beginning of each shift and reinforce the fact that although you may be working side by side with them during different periods to handle calls or dispatch calls, you are still their supervisor, and as such you will actively monitor their performance and provide them with feedback as needed.

Small agency supervisor (supervises a small group of paid and volunteer followers spread out over a distance): The key for you is repetitive communication. You are probably not going to have the daily or face-to-face contact that your counterparts in larger agencies have. So, you are going to have to do a lot more checking-in with your followers. Set multiple alarms on your watch or phone to remind you to contact your followers to ask them how they are doing, what they have accomplished so far, and what they need help with or guidance about. Don't worry if they tell you that they are big boys and big girls and don't need you constantly checking on them. They do and that's your job.

Minority supervisor (supervises a group of followers who are different in regard to race, gender, ethnicity and age): The key for you is personal communications. You will want to spend some of your shift time building bridges between yourself and your followers. We tend to be afraid of the unknown. And that includes people who are different from us. Share personal things about yourself and inquire the same of your followers. It may take some time, but eventually, you will be less of a stranger as you discover the things you and your followers have in common.

CONCLUSION

If you downloaded or printed the free active supervision checklist provided in the first article, go ahead and update it. If you didn't have a chance to download it yet, [complete the box below to download now](#).

Add two lines:

- Prescriptive performance management;
- Corrective performance management.

Give yourself a new rating now that I have better defined these skills for you. Give yourself a + (plus sign) if you believe that you are good at the skill, a ✓ (checkmark) if you believe that you are ok at the skill, or a - (minus sign) if you believe you need to work on the skill. And then write down your plan for improving your performance management skills.

If you have any questions about this skill or any of the 10 active supervision skills, [submit your questions here](#). We will gather them up and answer them for you.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this article. I'm Coach Paul, and I'm looking forward to communicating with you again next time. Keep your eyes, mind and heart open out there.

NEXT: [Active supervision challenge: Critical thinking](#)

Want a list of the 10 active supervision skills to chart your progress? Fill out the form below to print out a chart.

Thank you for downloading. Good luck with the active supervision challenge!

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About the author

[Coach Paul Conor, Ph.D.](#), is an organizational psychologist and management consultant who has been working with law enforcement leaders for more than 20 years. He is a former US Marine infantry officer, who led Marines in combat during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Coach Paul is an award-winning author, California state-certified Team Building Workshop facilitator and former university professor. He is also a reserve lieutenant with the Orange County (California) Sheriff's Department.

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