

PREPARING FOR YOUR NEXT GENERATION OF SUPERVISORS

by Vicki L. Beatty, Esquire

Campbell Durrant Beatty Palombo & Miller, P.C.
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Over the next decade the baby boomer generation will move toward and into retirement. While this means that your County will be replacing many employees in rank and file positions, it also means that many of your management and supervisory positions will be left vacant. For some positions, this may be the first turnover in these positions in more than a decade. If so, is your County prepared? True supervisors are both born and made. Getting a new generation of management ready to do the hard work of supervision is no small task. If you anticipate filling these positions from within, do you have a transition plan in place? Whether you fill from within or hire from the outside, do you know what you are looking for in a new supervisor? The odds are that you have had little time or inclination to consider this eventuality, but there are steps you can take now to ensure that your current and new supervisory employees provide your County with the best opportunity for an efficient and effective workforce.

It is not worth much time debating the critical nature of good supervision within any workplace. While we can all dream about the department where every employee knows his/her job and does that job without question or complaint, that is, all too often, only a dream. Employees must be hired, trained, monitored, motivated, evaluated and sometimes disciplined. There are many skills that your supervisory employees may bring to the table but frequently you focus on the candidate's skills in the substantive area, e.g. hardest working probation officer, carried the heaviest caseload, good team player, in making promotion or hiring decisions to the exclusion of those skills which are predictive of success in management. The team player who has the ability to organize a team, effectively delegate responsibility and bring a project together

inside a deadline has more to offer a supervisory position than a team player who stays late to pick up the work that others have failed to do.

In addition, it is unrealistic to expect that new supervisory employees, even those with prior management experience but in other organizations, will come to the table with all of the skills necessary to perform the job. The “management fairy” does not drop down from the bell tower of the courthouse to anoint your new supervisors with perfect knowledge of your organizational structure, the authority granted to the position in personnel matters, your policies and collective bargaining agreements, and the myriad of laws applicable to public sector personnel management in Pennsylvania on their first day in the position. Your new supervisors will need training and this training will require planning on your part.

Selecting Your New Supervisors

What are the qualities you are looking for?

- ✓ Reliable attendance
- ✓ Good communication skills – written and verbal
- ✓ Well-organized
- ✓ Ability to delegate and ‘follow-up’
- ✓ Ability to identify, adapt to and juggle priorities
- ✓ Willingness to impose discipline, where necessary.

While there may be certain specific skills you will desire for any particular position, these qualities will be almost universally beneficial. Rather than focusing your interview questions and selection process solely on the applicant’s background in the substantive area of the department, emphasis should be placed on identifying the applicant’s abilities in these areas as well.

Planning for the New Supervisory Position

As a first step, care should be taken to create job descriptions that accurately set forth the responsibilities of the position, particularly as to the employee's authority to hire, fire and discipline or to recommend such actions. This will be necessary to establish the position as managerial, and therefore not part of the bargaining unit, and exempt under the FLSA.

Serious consideration should be given to the level of authority you plan to give to a supervisor, before he/she steps into the position. The confusion that can be generated by a lack of clear direction in this area can range from a supervisor exceeding his/her authority, oftentimes exposing the County to liability, to an absence of supervision where no one is taking responsibility. Consider the following:

What level of authority are you giving for the following:

- a. Discipline – verbal warning, written warning, suspension without pay, recommendation only?
- b. Scheduling
- c. Call offs – do call offs come to the supervisor? If not, how is the supervisor advised? What obligations does the supervisor have for record keeping, advising payroll, advising HR regarding FMLA issues?
- d. Overtime – can the supervisor approve overtime? Are there limits? Who decides whether comp time can be given? How is that tracked?
- e. What is the supervisor's role in hiring – interviewing, decision-making, recommendation?
- f. Does the supervisor have a role in grievance processing – if so, what authority does the supervisor have to settle a grievance?
- g. Does the supervisor have the authority to order a drug or alcohol test for reasonable suspicion? If not, how is that to be done?
- h. Can the supervisor perform bargaining unit work under your CBA? Under what circumstances?

- i. Will the supervisor be responsible for completing performance evaluations? What is the impact of the evaluation – merit increases, improvement plans, etc.?
- j. What are the supervisor's record keeping requirements?

Once you are able to answer these questions, the orientation and training of the new supervisor will flow from there. [Note: If you cannot answer these questions for your current supervisors, you already have a problem which should be corrected.]

Creating the Training Program

A supervisor's training should not be limited to the standard personnel orientation. There are two tracks you need to consider when developing the training program.

There are aspects of a supervisor's responsibilities that will have legal implications for an employer. Even if you do not want a supervisor to have final say on such matters, it is necessary to provide adequate training to make supervisors aware of their obligations when such issues arise. These include the following:

- a. Drug and alcohol issues
- b. FMLA
- c. Workers Comp
- d. Overtime
- e. Sexual harassment/discrimination
- f. ADA
- g. Misconduct

The other track relates directly to your own policies, procedures, CBA's and organizational structure. A new supervisor should not learn about the provisions of the CBA from the Union anymore than he/she should learn about the FMLA from a Department of Labor Investigator.

The time, money and effort you expend in hiring and training good supervisors will provide your county with the biggest payoff in the long run.