

# Management & Supervisory Notes

February 2008

## THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF AUTHORITY

*"You can have power over people as long as you don't take everything away from them. But when you've robbed a man of everything, he's no longer in your power."* – Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

*"The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority."* – Kenneth Blanchard

One of the most important responsibilities that a supervisor has is "setting the stage" for their employees to succeed – both as individuals and as members of a team. This is often a very difficult aspect of a supervisor's job. Some employees seem to continually challenge management with great intensity and the misguided assurance that they have the "legal" right to do so whenever they disagree with the supervisor's direction. So, what's a supervisor to do?

Most of us, supervisors and employees alike, want to know, "What's in it for me?" Working to understand what an employee's career-related hopes and dreams are is essential to matching their personal goals to organizational goals. The ideal situation is when a supervisor is able to fill vacant positions - selecting employees whose career goals are in line with the organization's goals and whose interests intrinsically match the content of their jobs. Often, however, the supervisor must work with existing employees who may or may not be ideal matches to their jobs. To help both new and long-term employees, a supervisor should:

- identify and clarify for the employee where the matching points are between their goals and those of the organization;
- capitalize on the employee's strengths and identify what aspects of the job genuinely excite them – potentially using those tasks or functions as rewards to energize them; and
- make sure that the employee understands their scope of responsibilities and has been given the training necessary to successfully perform those responsibilities.

A supervisor must clearly understand the scope of their own authority and not be afraid to assert it even when challenged. Examples:

- Supervisors should know they have the right and responsibility to make legitimate job assignments and/or changes in job assignments. Supervisors should also know they have the right and responsibility to require employees to perform their jobs even if the employees do not like the assignments.
- Supervisors should know they have the right and responsibility to require employees to attend County-sponsored, work-related training. Supervisors shouldn't leave this to chance. These are also legitimate assignments and supervisors are responsible to assure their employees have the development necessary to successfully perform their jobs.
- Supervisors should know they have the right and responsibility to ask appropriate questions to determine an employee's eligibility for coverage under the Family Medical Leave Act. (See <http://ups.co.pinellas.fl.us/benefits/fmla.htm> for more information and guidance on FMLA.)

Supervisors should be willing to listen to reasons an employee may have for objecting to an assignment and, if valid, be open to making changes. They should also be willing to explain their reasons for giving the assignment. But at the end of the day, if the assignment still stands, a supervisor must not be intimidated by an employee's passionate opposition.

Perhaps the most important thing that a supervisor must do is to accord all employees the respect and dignity each of us deserves as a thinking and feeling human being. In time, most every employee will

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