

7 Skills for Supervision Success

All of these skills are simple and basic. For some of these, you're going to think "Obviously – of course that's what a supervisor should do." However, just because they are simple does not mean they are EASY. If they were, everyone would be an amazing supervisor.

1. **Listening** – This one is simple right? Well as I said before, simple and easy are not the same thing. Try this: the next time you're talking to someone, try forcing yourself not to speak for 2 full minutes. Really listen to what the person is saying. And let me know how difficult it is for you to stay quiet.
2. **Availability** – Availability can mean a lot of things, both tangible and intangible. On the tangible side, it means being physically present at work. Of course, you're not going to be at your desk every second of the day, but being away all day, every day by traveling too much, having too many off-site meetings, etc. isn't productive. That also means keeping your calendar updated regularly. Personally, I'm a fan of making your calendar 'public' through Outlook. On the more intangible side, availability means being mentally present and available – and being clear about when you can't be. If you are under a lot of stress for a major project, you need to let your supervisees know that you won't be able to help them think through a project. But don't let the 'can't' times take over the 'can' times or you'll create problems.
3. **Mission-focus/priority-setting** – Here is what priority setting comes down to: *Figure out what is most important. Do that first.* It is that simple and that difficult. In a nonprofit environment (every environment really) it is essential. We are mission-focused organizations and everything we do, every day, should help us achieve that mission.
4. **Transparency** – Not every decision needs a full, 360 degree explanation, but lots of secrecy is frustrating and ultimately dis-empowering to those you supervise. Being transparent also means admitting when you're wrong or when you don't know the answer. No one is perfect and if you constantly try to hide behind a perfect image, the downfall will be that much harder.
5. **Delegation** – Delegation is arguably the hardest of these skills to learn and perfect. Delegation basically means transferring decision-making authority to another employee for a task not necessarily within one's job description while still retaining ultimate responsibility for the task. There are three key pieces of this:
 - a. Responsibility – setting clear expectations, but not step-by-step instructions on how something should be done
 - b. Authority – the delegatee is given the right to make decisions
 - c. Accountability – delegatee is responsible for the work, but delegator has ultimate responsibility
6. **Taking Responsibility and Giving Credit** – When you delegate authority, you are responsible for what your supervisee does. You must take responsibility for the mistakes. BUT – you must also give credit for the good things.

7. **Realism** – Again, simple: DO NOT make commitments that you and your staff can't keep. Promising the world to a funder, sponsor or partner does no one any good – especially if you can't deliver. Putting that extra pressure on your employees (not to mention yourself) just creates all kind of unnecessary stress. You also need to be realistic about what you can do as a supervisor – don't be a bottleneck.

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