

## Leadership Skill: Project a Positive Image

Being a supervisor demands a special set of skills that touch on: being a leader, delegator, mentor, facilitator, communicator and listener. A supervisor's effectiveness depends on a number of variables, including his/her knowledge, experience, goals and motivation(s). Furthermore, each supervisor has his/her own "management style." Some are naturally "people oriented" and participative in their approach. Others may be naturally directive and more comfortable with machinery and production processes. There are many possible orientation styles as well. Regardless of the style or approach used in working with people or directing their activities, a supervisor's effectiveness may be significantly enhanced or limited by their "Image" that others perceive.



Image is not necessarily reality, it is a perception which may or may not be accurate. As a supervisor, have you ever wondered just how you are perceived through the eyes of your subordinates? Have you ever asked yourself whether the employees you manage like you, respect you, fear you...? Some supervisors take pride in being known as a tough, hard-driving boss, while others wish to be seen as impeccably fair and reasonable. Of course there are a variety of views that could be held or impressions that can be created. While some supervisors are seldom concerned about their image, others work at creating a certain persona.

Image is very much about interpersonal actions (actions), how you see yourself (ego), and how you wish others to see you. Image can be created or used to mask insecurities, such as when a person uses image to put distance between themselves and others. The "distance supervisor" may find it easy to be aloof but yet approachable. In conversation he simply sticks to business topics and issues or engages in discussions

about the weather, sports or other generic subjects. In supervising others, he/she simply avoids personal risk by being direct, giving orders, delegating little, and spending substantial time and effort following up to make sure things were done as he/she dictated. This type of a supervisor sees personal relationships as a risk to be avoided. They may see themselves as superiors, or they may actually be insecure. The point is, they keep distance between themselves and their people. They may even work hard to create the image to accomplish such.

In contrast, an "open supervisor," or one who seems to really care, may have opposite styles. This supervisor may be, or seem to be, more confident and assured. His/her actions typically apply focus toward employees. This type of supervisor will ask, "How are you doing today?" and truly want to know. This supervisory style gives direction, delegates freely and provides support along the way in order to reach organizational goals. These supervisors see the development of personal relationships as necessary to establishing trust and mutual respect which are the prerequisites of teamwork. They see themselves as equals. Their subordinates perceive them to be honest, have integrity and openness.

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Ironically, the conclusions you reach through observations of an individual's characteristics and interactions are in fact very often the opposite of reality. The tough, individualistic and fiercely independent supervisor may well be using a style of people "management" which allows him to remain above it all and insulates him from the risks associated with maintaining personal relationships. On the other hand, we may perceive some weakness in the supervisor who is open, involved and interdependent. As a result, the open supervisor who has the self-confidence needed to establish personal relationships may also bear the risk in that his open style can be threatening to some people or damaging if he/she is viewed as too weak.

It is unlikely that any supervisor fits neatly into any of either of these examples. Each supervisor has his/her own style, technique and comfort level in working with people to get a job done. A supervisor who accepts himself/herself, and understands how his/her style may affect employees, can significantly improve his/her effectiveness as a leader. Knowing how employees perceive a supervisor can help the supervisor incorporate small changes that can have a large impact on the way subordinates perceive him/her.

Everyone has some unique talents and limitations. Use your talents to the fullest extent possible. Do not try to cover up your limitations by trying to create false images. If you are concerned about having a positive image you need to start by being yourself. No one is perfect; a few mistakes will happen. Being human and admitting mistakes often develops respect in subordinates. Allowing others to have a different opinion is also a positive image builder. A supervisor who feels that he/she is always right, or should always be right, is only kidding himself/herself.

**DEVELOPING A POSITIVE IMAGE**

Despite good traits in projecting a positive image, everyone can do better. Supervisors who wish to improve their image may conduct their own "Self Image Assessment" using the following five easy steps:

**Step 1:** Determine what kind of image you currently have. A good way to do this is by asking employees or staff you trust to give you their perception of you. Make sure that they are being frank in this description. You may be surprised at how you are viewed as a supervisor as opposed to how you view yourself. Another way to determine your current image is by paying close attention to how people deal with you. If you take some time to step outside of yourself and observe the reaction of the people around you... it may give you some interesting insight into your current image.

**Step 2:** Determine the type of image you need to be more effective. The way you would like people to perceive you will affect how you go about improving your image.

**Step 3:** Determine how your current image differs from your desired image. You have to identify areas that you need to change before you can work on actually changing them. This requires being very objective about your perceived image and your desired image.

**Step 4:** Start taking steps to change your perceived image. Small changes work best. For example, move toward employees through positive interactions. For starters, ask for employee input or how an employee's day is going, then honestly listen to their comments and feedback.

**Step 5:** Work on making your new image a direct reflection of who you are. This isn't an easy or quick process but it is important and must be done. Take your time with it and enjoy the journey.

Remember that "Image" is a factor that affects how we relate to others. Having a feel for the image you are projecting will help you develop better working relationships as you hone your leadership skills. Image should not be created to increase your power or influence. It is simply something you establish and improve upon through the little things you do, day in and day out.