

# Frontline Supervisor

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## The Imperfections of Perfectionism

**Q. I have never tried to hide the fact that I am a perfectionist. All of my colleagues and employees know this about me. I obsess over trying to do things right. Yes, I know there is no such thing as perfection. However, I can't just walk away from things I see that need improvement. How does this affect the people I supervise?**

A. Your perfectionism has likely brought about many successes in your career; you won't lose these skills and abilities by giving up perfectionism. Seeing things "that need improvement" is a matter of opinion. Remember, there is always more than one way to do things 'right.'

Your tendencies toward perfection may make it harder for you to try new things or to allow input from others. You may become overly concerned about what you imagine as others' overly critical view of you, and therefore avoid giving (positive or negative) feedback to employees. These behaviors can affect how well you work with and get to know your employees. You may be robbing yourself and those around you of feeling happy about the work and having fun while at work.

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## Predicting the Future: Finding a Star Performer

**Q. What is the most important signal a supervisor will get that a new employee is likely to be a valuable performer in the future of the organization?**

A. Although intelligence, skills, and abilities all play key roles in an employee's success, one outstanding ability that reinforces all others is effective workplace communication. Unfortunately, utilizing effective communication skills is an ongoing struggle for many people – both personally and professionally. There is no end to supervisors having to intervene when communication breaks down. Safety, productivity, morale, trust and interpersonal relations at every level depend on effective communication. Consider the information, ideas, thoughts, opinions, and plans that must be conveyed to drive productivity and increase morale while maintaining trust and safety. Consider the important role communication has when addressing conflicts, inspiring creativity, giving/getting feedback, and channeling motivation. An employee who can intuitively judge how much information you need, as well as when and how often you need it, or is able to tactfully address conflicts while nurturing interpersonal relations, is a real gem.

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# Frontline Supervisor

## The Imperfections of Perfectionism (cont.)

These tendencies can affect those you supervise by causing them to interpret your comments and actions as being distrustful of them, viewing them as incompetent, or even considering yourself superior to them. Being a supervisor/manager doesn't mean you're responsible for controlling the way things are done, just that they *are* done satisfactorily. In fact, a supervisor or manager who effectively leads his/her staff is one who – despite the possibility of mistakes – mentors, coaches and encourages employees in such a way that they may outshine you. This is a positive reflection of your management skills!

Perfectionism is not incurable. Call your EAP to discuss your management habits and learn techniques that are most effective for you in your workplace.

## Build Your Skills

### ~ Tame Perfectionism ~

To practice curbing perfectionism habits, delegate a task to a reliable employee. Allow her/him to make progress, relying on you for support and information as needed. Allow the work to be done according to the employee's style – even if it's never been done that way. Once it's completed, require a final check-in with you to ensure accuracy.

You'll soon see that others can get tasks done, and done well. Each time others' capabilities stand out, you'll gain trust in their work, allowing you to relinquish control.

## Predicting the Future (cont.)

Without communication, nothing works... at least, not well. During the interview process, pose questions and scenarios, such as those in the skill box below, that will help you evaluate the efficacy of the candidate's skills to resolve (or better yet, avoid!) conflicts.

## Build Your Skills

### ~ Find a Star Performer ~

Try asking candidates these interview questions to learn about their communication style:

- Identify a challenging moment you had with a coworker and describe how you communicated to work through the situation.
- Think of a time when a customer spoke loudly, called you names and/or cast insults at you. How did you respond and what was the outcome?
- Remember a time when your supervisor assigned you a task you'd never done before, gave you a short time frame to complete it, without the ability to seek his/her support and knowledge to do it. How did you manage?

Warning signs to look for? Passive styles such as: biting their tongue, asking someone else to intervene, or avoiding the person in the future. Aggressive styles such as: raising their voice, tit-for-tat retaliatory comments, jumping chain of command to complain - without any attempts to resolve things with the person first, or resisting future work assignments. Although these are natural responses for some, they are not assertive skills you'd find in a star performer.

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