

3 Essential supervisory skills

Job Relations, Job Instruction & Job Methods

Introduction

The three essential supervisory skills (as defined in the [Training Within Industry Program](#)) are key to getting the operational results all organisations seek.

Many production or service results stem from the actions of immediate leaders (e.g. leading hand, foreperson, supervisor). In this article, 'supervisor' means anyone accountable for the work of others.

Rather than *do* work in an area, a supervisor *leads* the people who do it (the workers). A good supervisor must be a good leader.

Supervisor needs

The [TWI Institute Australia](#) recognises five supervisor needs.

1. Knowledge of the work

A supervisor must understand the work in their area. While this doesn't mean they must be best at *doing* it, they must know what happens and how.

2. Knowledge of responsibilities

A supervisor must understand and follow organisational policies and rules.

3. Skill managing work area relations

To lead people doing and improving work, a supervisor needs respect.

Many say this can't be taught. Yet, while deep respect may depend on the person, the Job Relations (JR) skill can be learnt.

While 'natural' leaders who use JR will be highly respected, even non-natural leaders who use JR can earn respect.

4. Skill teaching the work

To get others to do work, a supervisor must be good at *teaching* it. This is vastly different from being able to *do* it.

The skill of teaching is special, but it too can be learnt. It's called Job Instruction (JI).

The best *teacher* of work, isn't usually the best *doer* of it. Yet many employers put learners with their best doers.

Instead, we should put learners with the person who's best at JI. Why? Because, by using JI, someone with reasonable knowledge of the work can become a brilliant teacher.

5. Skill improving the work

Many think work improvement is all about *tools*. Hence courses on Kanban, Just In Time and so on.

But with no vehicle to *apply* these tools, they're generally used for a short time only.

Genuine work improvement means improvement *forever*. To achieve that, a supervisor needs the Job Methods (JM) skill.

Learn, do, excel

As the JR, JI and JM skills can be learnt, people can become brilliant at them with practice.

Yet many organisations assume supervisors already have these skills.

If a worker is promoted to supervisor for being good at *doing* the work, it doesn't mean they'll be good at *leading* workers. They need to be taught JR, JI and JM.

The TWI Institute Australia teaches these skills and mentors their application until they become habits embedded in a supervisor's work.

Timing is everything

Not all these skills should be learnt and practised at once.

JR and JI build work area stability (i.e. consistent supply of a product or service with little variation in quality and productivity).

Quality variation means rejects and rework – which can exceed original production cost by up to 400%.

Productivity variation can mean late deliveries and unhappy customers (who switch to competitors).

Stability thus reduces costs while optimising customer satisfaction.

With stability achieved, JM can improve operational performance.

The focus here is to increase productivity by simplifying tasks. In many cases, solutions lie in common [lean manufacturing](#) tools.

The 3 skills in detail

Job Relations (JR)

People must be treated as individuals. JR builds positive staff relations, increases cooperation and motivation and resolves conflict.

JR teaches four foundations of positive staff relations which, when applied, develop and maintain good relationships. This reduces problems and is key to earning loyalty and cooperation from others in the work area.

When problems (inevitably) arise, JR gives a proven way to get facts, weigh options, make decisions, take action and check results.

JR thus improves staff attendance, morale, productivity and retention.

Job Instruction (JI)

JI quickly trains staff to do a job correctly, safely and conscientiously.

The demand for a flexible workforce – despite scant training time – requires a strong, reliable work teaching method.

Jl teaches a supervisor:

- How to prepare for staff training by breaking down tasks.
- An effective, proven four-step task-teaching method.

A key preparation element is the Job Instruction Breakdown (JIB). A supervisor uses this tool to teach a task. A JIB contains 3 columns:

1. Important steps – the *what*.
2. Key points – the *how* (the 20% of work critical to quality, productivity and safety).
3. Reasons for each key point – *why* the how is critical.

Key point variations can undermine quality, productivity and safety.

Explaining key point reasons to learners helps embed them, while understanding raises the chance of key points being done.

The JIB-based four-step teaching method has two key aspects:

1. Task demonstration by a supervisor is based on ‘tell, show and illustrate’ – listen, watch and understand why.
2. The learner is given information gradually, not in one big lump.

Jl thus reduces training time, rejects, rework and accidents and increases job satisfaction.

Job Methods (JM)

JM improves how jobs are done for continual productivity, quality and safety improvement.

JM produces more quality products, in less time, by making best use of *available* resources (e.g. people, materials and machines).

‘Available’ is key. JM doesn’t mean spending money; it means making the most of what’s already there.

JM shows how to break jobs down into their constituents. Each part is questioned in a strict, systematic way to generate improvement ideas. New methods are developed by eliminating, combining, rearranging and simplifying parts.

JM reduces cost through productivity gains, increased throughput and reduced work in process.

Summary

JR, Jl and JM are essential supervisory skills which lead workers to reliably produce a quality product or service and continually improve.

Supervisors need to learn and practise these skills until they’re a habit – thus forming a strong foundation for genuine (i.e. sustained) continuous improvement.