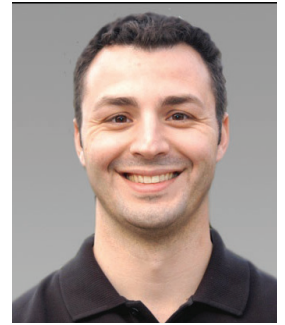


Supervisors with SuperVision

By Scott Heillman, P2



Scott Heillman

Not totally forgotten, but frequently taken for granted are the critical roles production supervisors play in the work environment. If supervisors are the gateway and voice to the production floor, why are they often left on their own to figure out how to become great leaders? Successful supervisors are those with the training, experience, trouble-shooting abilities, and people skills to see things other can't - they have SuperVision.

Normally supervisors are the employees that pass along information from upper management and the front office to the production floor staff. They are the managers that are closest to the product, spending 8 to 12 hours a day ensuring that it gets produced to customer expectations and demand. They are the first line in the decision making process when it comes to the production floor. Supervisors may make the only decision on whether or not product makes it to the customer on time and is either shipped or scrapped; and this only looking at a small snapshot of their responsibilities.

Supervisors are not only charged with ensuring product quality and timeliness, but also a multitude of other tasks such as scheduling, interviewing, discipline, coaching, teambuilding, measuring, and continual improvement. All of these supervisory roles are expected to be executed on a daily basis but are unfortunately often weakly laid out in a job description with minimal or no formal training. How can we expect an individual holding one of the most critical positions in a company to be successful, when they have had little or no formal training provided by their company? Before we answer this question, let's take a step back and ask who normally becomes a Production Supervisor?

It is not uncommon to see a supervisory position filled from within by a longtime employee that has worked his or her way up through the ranks eventually earning the shot at becoming a manager. Frequently we ask our one-time best operator in the plant to take the reigns of the production floor and make things happen. Or we hire a new employee right out of college and say, "Here is second shift. You are now responsible for \$10 million in machinery and 50 employees. I hope those four years earning that degree in business or engineering pay off." We may also go out on the waiver wire and snatch away a veteran supervisor from another company, along with their established strengths and weaknesses, which may or may not work out. It is difficult to expect even a supervisor with the best credentials to hit the ground running when surrounded by different machinery,

different people, little standardized work, and a new company culture.

Now these are three stereotypical storylines on how supervisors are hired within our industry and each can ultimately result in a very valuable asset to the company. But the opposite can just as easily be true if one of these individuals is thrust into an environment without being properly prepared. A new supervisor needs to be armed with the right tools and training or they can quickly become a bottleneck within the production process. Therefore, it is critical that a company is prepared to invest the necessary time and resources into its new supervisors. Know that there is a window of opportunity at the onset of a new hire to set company expectations. If a company waits too long, habits begin to form and the bad ones become harder to break. So where do we go from here?

Understand your candidate: pre-qualification

The first step toward growing a successful supervisor is to start early with a candidate pre-qualification process. Simply put, if a candidate does not pass your pre-qualification process then do not put them in the position. A candidate should have the potential for, or be able to fulfill within a given timeline nearly every part of the job description. If there isn't a job description written for the position, get one. Industry associations/organizations and employee placement companies usually have job description outlines that they provide for a small fee, to their clients and members. A well-constructed job description is a simple way to start shaping a candidate's understanding of the performance requirements for that position. Pre-qualification tests are next and should vary depending on the supervisor job description, product requirements, internal/external customer demands, and company culture. Most human resource managers have access to a pool of these types of tests to choose from. So assume the candidate applying for the position is either an in-house veteran, rookie out of college, or a seasoned supervisor from outside the company. Each individual will have a different set of strengths and weaknesses that need to be discovered. Be sure that you know what strengths are desired for the position and what weaknesses are not. This step is critical for pre-qualification. A robust interview process will help uncover an applicant's strengths and weaknesses. It will also give a better understanding about a person's experience level and familiarity with the process and product. A good interviewer might also be able to find out if the candidate will be a good leader, a

continued on page 12

“

... it is critical that a company is prepared to invest the necessary time and resources into its new supervisors.

”

Supervisors with SuperVision

continued from page 11

team player, a hard worker, and if they can be counted on. Aptitude and preference type tests plus annual reviews for internal hires will also provide useful data on the candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

Company focused leadership training

Once the pre-qualification step is finished and the candidate receives an offer and takes the position, training should begin. Investment in a quality-training program

for a new production supervisor is very important and worthwhile as that individual can take on their new role more quickly and effectively. It also shows an employee that the position and the individual holding that position are important to the company. The challenge is finding the right managerial training program for your company. There are many management-training options available, such as junior college courses, training consultants, industry association courses, training videos, books, and webinars, but the key is finding training that

matches up with the goals of the company. If company goals are unclear or undeveloped then basic training may be the place to start since there will be useful tools in each of these courses. However, it should be no surprise that companies with clear goals and good vision tend to train and grow better supervisors. These companies have found or built training courses that correspond to company goals and align with where the company plans to go in the future.

The most successful companies today are not only looking to grow their supervisors as employees, but as leaders. The training course chosen by your company should be one that trains your supervisor on how to be a successful leader. The advantage of a leader versus a supervisor is that a leader has the ability and training to inspire, empower, and coach employees. A leader is accountable, follows up, and follows through, not only to the boss, but all employees. They set personal goals, ask for feedback, and try to learn like a teacher. They find problems before they occur and are constantly being proactive. They facilitate by removing obstacles to help create a continual improvement environment that makes it almost seem like they have SuperVision. If your company uses its supervisors as a gateway and voice to the production floor and as a first line response to your product; then please do not make the mistake of not providing the necessary training and resources to grow supervisors into great leaders with SuperVision.

P2 is a multi-disciplined improvement team with expertise in engineering, business management, and organizational psychology. Their approach is to address the policies, procedures and personalities that support the organization. They assess, train, coach, manage, measure and build in accountability systems to ensure that administrative and production best practices endure.

Scott may be reached at 530-263-2017 or scottheilmann@psquaredusa.com. ■

**P2 will be offering
AICC Production Leadership
Courses in 2010.**

**Dates are:
January 26-27, Dallas TX
June 29-30, Chicago, IL**



T-BUCK, INC.

Easi-Set™ Folder Arm Upgrade
Easier to Use — Quicker to Set Up
Stronger Design — Higher Quality

Having problems with your flexo folder-gluer? Slow/difficult set-up? Scuffing? Rolling score issues? We have the solution!

- Durable, fully adjustable, dual pivot folding arms make set-up easy.
- Proprietary UHMW folding rods virtually eliminate friction which causes folding issues.
- Easy to use locking handles for quick and easy fine tuning adjustments.
- Friction discs which eliminate "creep" caused by machine vibration.
- Investment casting for a stronger arm.
- Low cost plus increased productivity and less waste means a quick ROI.
- Works on up-fold and down-fold machines:
- Works on: Ward S&S McKinley Martin
Grant Langston Koppers/United
- And many other machine brands.
- T-Buck, Inc. also specializes in service, repair, maintenance and training.



T-BUCK, INC.

715 SW Brim Street, Lake City, FL 32024 USA

(386) 755-4790 / fx: (386) 758-8870 / t-buck.net