

Managing and Supervising Paraprofessionals

The Supervisor's Role



The responsibility of the supervisor includes employing, training, day-to-day supervising, and the authority to dismiss paraprofessionals.

The supervisor's authority and responsibilities should be clearly defined and made known to all persons involved.

Status within the organization influences supervision. Supervisors should feel secure and know that higher authority will support them. A local supervisor needs support from management so that within the budget and program policies, personnel and supplies will be provided to implement and conduct a program.

The goals of a supervisor are to increase productivity, eliminate problems, and reduce failures. To this end the supervisor will select employees, train them well, counsel them when necessary, and be willing to modify plans to fit new needs.

The successful supervisor will:

- Encourage employees' interest in their work,
- Improve their motivation,
- Evaluate their performance,
- Comment on and reward their good work, and
- Provide opportunities for advancement.

A supervisor who has taken care of these responsibilities may never be faced with the need to discipline. A satisfied worker is rarely a troublemaker.

Morale and Job Satisfaction



Employee moral, although intangible, is important to accomplishing the program objective. Not all studies show a positive relation between high moral and production, but they do consistently

show a direct relationship between turnover and low morale. Recruitment, employment, and training are expensive. Turnover in staff interrupts progress and occasionally it causes the program to be terminated in the affected location.

Characteristics of workers, as well as job factors, must be considered in order to understand why paraprofessionals are satisfied or dissatisfied with their work. Workers usually begin with high morale. During the first year it may drop, but as length of service increases, morale tends to go up again. The relation between personality and work satisfaction has been studied. Some findings indicate that the satisfied worker may be a better-adjusted person, or one who has the capacity to overcome the effects of an inferior environment. A worker dissatisfied with the job is often inflexible, unrealistic in choice of goals, and unable to overcome job-related obstacles. The amount of education does not necessarily affect the employee's job satisfaction.

Factors Affecting Morale

Job Factors:

- Well-defined duties,
- Opportunities to gain knowledge and skills,
- Personal contacts with outsiders and management,
- Opportunities for creativity and self-expression,
- Opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their jobs,
- Variety,
- Mobility,
- Effects on health,
- Distribution of work,
- Recognition, both public and private,
- Self-respect,
- Public service,
- Responsibility,
- Challenge,
- Tension and pressure.

Supervision Factors:

- Consideration and fairness,
- Appreciation, recognition, and praise,
- Understanding and empathy,
- Availability for assistance and consultation,
- Loyalty to workers,
- Manner of criticism and disciplining,
- Courtesy and tact,
- Sincerity,
- Cooperation,
- Encouragement,
- Delegation of authority,
- Consistency, and
- Technical competence.

Factors Affecting Morale, cont.

Working Conditions

- Clean and orderly work place,
- Absence of smoke, noise, and odors,
- Adequate safety,
- Adequate lighting, temperature, and ventilation,
- Adequate equipment and supplies,
- Available parking facilities,
- Convenient geographical location, and
- Access to community resources.

Compensation and Advancement

- Wages or earnings,
- Frequencies of raises,
- Fairness of compensation,
- Provisions for emergencies, such as illness or accident,
- Vacations and holidays, and
- Retirement benefits.
- Promotion policy based on merit and seniority, and advancement within the organization,
- Economic advancement,
- Room to channel ambition and aspiration in order to further advancement such as in education and in a social context.

Social Aspects

- Pride in belonging to a team and team accomplishments,
- Competent and congenial co-workers,
- Cooperation and group effort,
- Size and function of work groups,
- Social approval,
- Interpersonal relationships,
- Prejudices,
- Inter- and intra-agency relation.

Communication

- Information about new developments,
- What the organization is doing,
- Personnel policies and procedures,
- Instructions on program implementation,
- Progress reports and evaluation of employee performance.

Organizational Structure

- Attitude toward workers,
- Size of the program effort,
- Respect it commands in the community,
- Training programs,
- Fairness in program implementation,
- Administrative cooperation and assistance,
- Commitment to the audience it serves.

About Job Factors Affecting Morale

Many of the factors listed above are beyond the supervisor's control. Some of them, however, can easily be modified. An effective supervisor accepts the realities of the situation, but takes action when possible in the areas which improve job satisfaction.

An unwritten rule is, "Supervisor others as you would like to be supervised." Basic needs must be met if the worker is to be happy in the job. Salary should be comparable to that of similar jobs in the community, and the working conditions should be physically safe.

The need to belong and to be wanted continues through life. An understanding supervisor will see that all paraprofessionals are included in group activities, work, training, and planning. Being a part of a group that establishes goals and standards give workers a feeling of belonging. Greater cooperation, enthusiasm, and production can be expected as a result.

The need to feel important must be satisfied. Let workers know how important the total program is and what a vital contribution they are making. This can begin in the employment interview, continue through training, and be included in personal contacts, supervisory observations, and personnel evaluations. Praise good work and good ideas as often as possible at the moment it is deserved. Praise enhances self-esteem if it is given in the presence of other people. Sometimes it can be put in writing to show family and friends. Give some recognition to each worker. The alert supervisor will watch for signs of jealousy and rivalry among employees.

Employees today are not motivated only by the necessities of life. Forces that motivate are complex, including group participation, shared decision-making, and personal growth. An effective supervisor will try to satisfy those psychological needs.

Rules are Necessary



Paraprofessionals, like any other workers, are likely to shudder at such words as “control” and “discipline.” Supervisors may dislike the words even more. Yet the professional responsible for the program will sometimes need to take corrective action.

The positive approach to supervision entails employing the right people, involving them in setting standards, and providing adequate training. Frequent personal contacts, careful reading of reports, and periodic observation of the paraprofessional at work can provide information about the quality and quantity of the work being done. Having clients evaluate the teaching of the paraprofessional gives additional information, but it is a double-edged sword which must be used carefully. When the supervisor must criticize work, it is best to do it in private. Relate criticism to standards and goals previously set, to methods taught in training sessions, or to organizational policies that have been explained to the worker.

Grievances may arise between workers. Even when the supervisor feels the issue to be trivial, it should be handled at once so it will not “snowball” into a big problem. Get all the facts and then ask the people concerned to meet to talk it over. If more than one person is involved, give each an opportunity to explain the situation. Sometimes talking it over will clear the air.

Personality problems can be disruptive. In case of personality clashes, all parties should take an honest look at their personal characteristics.

Management Styles

The worker’s inability to get along with people and to handle personal problems is more often cause for dismissal than is the inability to do the work. Control through orders issued from the top, carried out to the letter by those at lower levels, is autocratic. It is unacceptable to many workers and ineffective in most work situations.

Psychological influence is quite different. Here the supervisor is employee-oriented, stresses training and counseling, and de-emphasizes discipline and enforcement. When this human relations approach is used, it does not mean that the supervisor gives up control or discipline. It simply means that the supervisor is seeking to reconcile conflicts peaceably. The supervisor should understand the undesirable effects of punishment:

- Workers are probably frustrated if they feel the punishment was unfair.
- Reprimand and the thought of reprimand create a hostile attitude. If one is reprimanded for doing a poor job, unfavorable attitudes toward the work may develop. Rewards for good work create the opposite effect.
- The threat of reprimands creates fear and reduces acceptance of suggestions. This is destructive rather than constructive. Training for staff in how to do the job should replace the need for “don’t do that” statements.

Counseling Interviews



A counseling interview to get at the cause of the problem is probably the best way to start. The employee must be told kindly but honestly what the interview is about. If you have acquired some skill in nondirective

counseling, the meeting may result in better understanding for both the worker and supervisor. Follow-up is important! Notice improvement or lack of it, and discuss it with the worker.

If work continues to be unacceptable, the first-line supervisor may want to bring in a second-line supervisor to determine the next step. Keep a

record with dates and brief notes of each discussion. In the few cases where an employee must be discharged, the supervisor should have some evidence concerning the period of time the work was unsatisfactory and the steps that were taken to try to correct the situations.

If the counseling session reveals a need for specific assistance, provide it promptly. If improvement is not evident in a reasonable length of time, contact the employee for another interview. The third session, if needed, should probably include both the first- and second-line supervisors or the personnel director.

UF Performance Management Initiative

Performance Management is UF's appraisal process to evaluate employees across campus.

On-Line Information

You can visit the Performance Management Initiative website at www.hr.ufl.edu/performance. This website contains the PMI video conference, PowerPoint presentation, appraisal form, and frequently asked questions regarding the initiative.

Annual Appraisals

All appraisal periods are the same for all employees: March 1 through the last day of February. Appraisals are due by March 31 of each year.

Probationary Appraisals

Probationary Appraisals are for new employees and should be completed during the sixth month of employment. If the appraisal's due date is before December 31, you will also complete an Annual Appraisal in March. If the appraisal's due date is after December 31, you will skip the Annual Appraisal in March. Any gap will be covered by the previous rating.

Special Appraisals

Special Appraisals are requested as needed and cover up to six months of time. Supervisors should speak with Employee Relations if they believe a Special Appraisal is required.

The Appraisal Form

Employees will be evaluated in five categories: work performance; attendance and reliability; customer service; initiative and productivity; and teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Employee Self-Assessment

This is an opportunity for employees to evaluate their own job performance and identify goals for the coming year. The form should be provided to the employee before the appraisal interview. Employees may decline to complete this, but they should be given the opportunity to complete it.

Supervisor's Assessment

The Supervisor will evaluate the same criteria as listed on the self-assessment. Supervisors will assign a rating of 1 to 5 for each criterion. You may only use whole numbers. The overall rating is based on the total score of the assessment. An additional sheet is provided to allow for more

space for more comments from the supervisor if needed.

Five Ratings

Ratings include: exceeds, above average, achieves, minimally achieves, and below performance standards. Supervisors should contact Employee Relations prior to assigning an **overall** rating of "below performance standards" or "minimally achieves." Supervisors may use any of the ratings on individual evaluative criteria without speaking to Employee Relations, but are asked to discuss issues of concern with Employee Relations if the overall rating will drop to "minimally achieves" or "below performance standards." The Ratings Guide gives guidance as to the behaviors that are appropriate for each rating in each of the five categories.

Appraisal Interview & Discussion

Effective evaluations provide an opportunity for two-way communication. The Supervisor and Employee should discuss job performance, especially the items where a significant rating difference occurs between the self evaluation and the supervisor's evaluation.

Overall Rating

For the overall rating, add up the ratings for each of the five areas. The overall rating is based on the following table. Please contact Employee Relations before assigning an overall rating of "Below" or "Minimally Achieves."

5-9	Below
10-14	Minimally Achieves
15-19	Achieves
20-23	Above Average
24-25	Exceeds

Remarks/Signature Block

Employees are given space and should be given the opportunity to provide remarks on the appraisal. The employee, immediate supervisor, and higher level supervisor must all sign the form. The original form will be given to the employee. A copy will be sent to Employee Relations and the State FNP/EFNEP office.

Judging the Effectiveness of Program Assistants

Name of Program Assistant: _____ County: _____ Date: _____

This form may assist in completing Performance Appraisals, but is not a substitution for one. The County Faculty is to check the amount of help a Program Assistant (PA) needs on each of the knowledge, skills, and abilities below.

	Needs Much Help	Needs Some Help	Needs Very Little Help	Needs No Help
1. Ability to work with low-income clients of all races or ethnic background.				
2. Ability to teach				
a. Individuals				
b. Groups				
3. Ability to recognize what people know and begin teaching at that point.				
4. Ability to use appropriate teaching methods and flip-charts to teach clients.				
5. Ability to improvise when needed materials are not available.				
6. Ability to maintain enthusiasm and interest even when progress is slow.				
7. Receptive to new ideas and suggestions.				
8. Knowledge of subject matter.				
9. Ability to organize groups and/or enroll clients.				
10. Knowledgeable of agencies and organizations available to targeted audience.				
11. Ability to motivate others to change.				
12. Genuine interest in and compassion for people.				
13. Mature and flexible individual.				
14. Possesses acceptable personal standards.				
15. Manages home, family, and friends so that work attendance is within acceptable standards.				
16. Ability to keep appropriate records and reports.				
17. Ability to listen and/or observe clients and determine their interests.				
18. Ability to relate interests to real needs and problems.				
19. Ability to evaluate progress of program participants.				

Suggestions for Handling Personnel Whose Performance Could Be Improved

The performance of Program Assistants should be evaluated and monitored throughout the year—not just when the annual performance evaluations are conducted. If an employee is not functioning in a satisfactory manner, contact the State Office. Files and materials in the state office can be compiled to help agents document the employee's performance. After the facts and information are accumulated, IFAS personnel reviews the situation and documentation and helps the agent make a decision as to the proper way to handle the performance situations. Special appraisals may be requested at any time through IFAS Personnel.

Assessing the Situation and Documenting Performance

1. How many clients is the PA actively working with? How many contacts is she making per month? How many hours is the employee working per month? How many hours is she spending teaching classes? What is the optimum number of clients the PA should be working with?
2. Is the PA conducting effective educational learning experiences with clients? Are the majority of clients taught in groups? Are the lessons taught consistently to those identified in the curriculum as needed by the clients?
3. Does the PA "lose" clients too often? Does she keep clients beyond 12 months? Beyond 6 months?
4. What are the results of the Food Recalls of the PA's clients? Are the clients' knowledge and practices improving?
5. How much time on average is spent working with each client? How much time is spent making contact visits?
6. Does PA attend training sessions? How does she respond to the training? Does she improve in her work?
7. What type of reports does the PA submit to the agent? Are the reports turned in on time? Are they complete?
8. What type of teaching sessions does the PA conduct? What are the topics she is presenting? What is the quality of the presentations? How do they relate to the behavior of the clients and the information on the food recalls?
9. Is the PA trying to move more clients into group situations in order to reach more clients?
10. How does the PA manage her time? Her travel?

Presenting Facts and Finding a Solution

1. Schedule a conference with the employee and discuss job expectations and performance.
2. Discuss the future of her employment. Review job description and what is expected as a University and EFNEP employee. The employee may wish to resign.
3. If the PA does not resign, set realistic goals and dates for improvement in her performance. Document the PA's work record with facts. Keep attendance records for training and logs to document when records and reports are turned in. If work is not performed satisfactorily, document steps along the way to help her improve. If the agent is supervising the PA closely, she will be able to help the PA to correct her work habits, etc. before this creates a real "problem."
4. Request the PA's weekly itinerary of working and contact visits.
5. Inform the PA that you will observe her working and contact visits. Visit client and teaching sites with her.
6. Schedule a conference to check progress and set further goals. Evaluate performance since last conference. Write up the status of her performance for record.
7. If no change, request Special appraisal.