

Self Improvement of Supervisors

Six promising areas of self improvement for the supervisor are here discussed.

A SUPERVISOR fairly recently appointed to her position wrote a statement concerning her situation. Among other comments was this:

My greatest problem arose at first from my philosophy. I didn't feel free to work. . . . Nothing in my training had prepared me for this (1).

In 1955 some of the supervisors in county schools in Ohio prepared a questionnaire for teachers in order to get their suggestions of ways in which the supervisors might be of greater help. A few of the teachers' suggestions are as follows:

The supervisor should say what she really wants. For instance, the statement, "I would like to hear your first group read" is not the same thing as, "Let me hear you teach reading to the first group."

I would like more straight talk from the supervisor rather than complimentary remarks to me and fault-finding remarks to my principal.

Remember that the supervisor is human too when her remarks seem short and snappy. Maybe she has aches somewhere, too!

When the supervisor remembers that teachers have good ideas, supervision is welcomed by teachers.

Supervision is a two-way street. The supervisor not only may give informa-

tion, guidance, feelings of security and deep satisfactions to those with whom he comes in contact, but he may receive these same kinds of gifts if the process is operating adequately. Inadequacy in giving and receiving help at times stems from inadequacies in the person. Since skill in this operation is the heart of instructional leadership, it is highly important that improvements be constantly sought which will keep it on the highest possible level.

A chief source of improvement in giving and receiving help lies in self improvement. Six areas in which self improvement of the supervisor may be very rewarding are discussed in this article. These areas are:

Understanding the concept one has of himself

Sharpening perceptions in human relationships

Clarifying perceptions of one's job and the situation in which one operates

Attaining professional breadth and depth

Allowing habits to contribute to personality

Setting reasonable levels of aspiration.

Away from It All

A solitary individual was seated on the beach with vast stretches of sand to the left, to the right, and behind. In front

of him was the vast expanse of water as far as eye could see. This lonely figure was "away from it all."

At times, and fairly frequently, all of us need such experiences. We need to get away from the hustle and bustle of office, work and even friends to ask ourselves, "Who am I?" "What kind of a person am I?" "How do I honestly evaluate myself in the roles in which I find myself, as a supervisor, for example?" "Do I find it easy to change my behavior in the light of new ideas?" "Do most people seem to have the same idea about me as a person as I have?" "Do I consciously try to be the same person to others that I am to myself?"

Jersild's (2) studies and those of many other psychologists have demonstrated that the understanding and acceptance of one's self is crucial in trying to help others to understand and accept themselves. Since the giving of this kind of help should be an important function of supervision, the questions in the previous paragraph are highly pertinent.

How should a person proceed in an attempt to understand and change the concept one has of himself? It will be necessary for him to look within himself to discover his anxieties, prejudices, values, concerns, even his ultimate concern, which Tillich (3) terms faith. The reactions of others toward a person may provide cues to his unconscious concerns because it is the behavior of others toward a person which, in the long run, determines his self concept.

Beware, however, of substituting other activities for self-searching. One does not want constantly to be intro-

spective, but from time to time this is the essential procedure for self understanding and improvement. One may discover help in books, workshops, group dynamics laboratories, friends, or even psychiatrists. However, none of these will be effective without considerable personal analysis.

Sometimes changes in one's self concept may come about as a result of a "rude awakening" through some human relationship highly tinged emotionally. Probably more frequently and less disturbingly they may take place gradually through an honest attempt to understand perceptions of one's self and others who operate in one's field of interpersonal relationships.

Binocular Vision

The improvement of skill in sensing the perceptions of others is another area closely related to the understanding of one's self which may contribute much to the efficiency of the supervisor. Binocular vision permits depth perception. This, in a psychological sense, is what is needed in sharpening perceptions in human relationships.

The importance of this ability or skill in maintaining good interpersonal relationships is probably self evident. Persons behave in any situation because of the way they perceive the situation in relation to their needs and values. For example, teachers will react to the same information and suggestions in different ways because they perceive differently. Since one acts upon his own perceptions and since individuals' perceptions frequently differ, a supervisor may find in some situations potential conflict until perceptions can be understood and, if need be, altered (4).

Of course perceptions may be inaccurate, distorted by one's wishes,

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attitudes, values, and state of knowledge or ignorance. Supervisors as well as teachers and their colleagues are subject to these same influences. For these reasons it may be desirable for a supervisor to be skillful in stimulating changes in perceptions as well as skillful in sensing them. How can these skills be improved?

Skill in sensing or ascertaining the perceptions of others is most likely to be improved first by understanding one's self. This has already been discussed at some length. Secondly, one must understand the relation of needs to behavior. How do people behave who need recognition, need achievement, need security, and so on? Professional reading, human relations workshops, and courses in psychology designed for this purpose are good secondary sources. The primary source is the careful study of people.

Once this skill is acquired it may be of frequent use, for it has been shown by Gage that:

You do not have to be closely acquainted with the perceiver, you do not have to interact with the perceiver over a long time in many situations for your accuracy of social perception to be meaningful for effective interpersonal relationships (5).

Skill in changing the perceptions of others requires a different approach. This may be a teaching-learning situation in its best sense, akin to therapy in dealing with an individual. Rogers (6) has recently explained one set of conditions under which such changes might be brought about. These are the accepted conditions of therapy but, within limits, can be adapted to education by well adjusted, integrated, understanding supervisors to bring about changes in individuals who have sensed this as their problem. One condition which would probably be necessary for securing a common set of perceptions of a

problem, task or situation would be to provide enough participation for all parties concerned to influence the perceptions and behavior of each other. Unless this is done the perceptions of some will be forced upon other persons and this will pose a threat to such persons' self organization.

Beyond the Horizon

Just as the supervisor at times should "get away from it all" to look at himself, he should occasionally look from afar at his job-work-professional situation, his little sphere of influence, in order to see it in perspective and reevaluate its functions, organization and priorities. Just as our recent satellite Vanguard II can give wider perspective to the study of weather conditions, so can a somewhat detached view give perspective to the work situation.

When we are moved to improve the situation which such a perspective reveals, we might look at the points of irritation. Moving backward from these points, perhaps causal factors can be found. In any case, a process of diagnosis is called for. Assuming that one has a mature self concept and skill in social perception, are there factors in organization, lines of responsibility, multiplicity of irrelevant activities, or conflicting philosophies of education which interfere with effectiveness? Self improvement in one's supervisory role may be brought about by attacking these problems, usually in cooperation with other persons concerned.

Many useful aids are available in giving perspective to the situational factors. The ASCD Platform of Beliefs (7), the Ohio ASCD survey and statement of beliefs (1), the Ohio administrators' case studies of supervisors (8), the Southern States Work Conference Re-

port (9), the report of and guide lines for the work of the curriculum coordinators in New Jersey (10), and Franseth's pamphlet on supervision in rural schools (11) are merely examples of such resources.

An interesting suggestive study is being carried on by Pace and Stern (12) at Syracuse University. They have devised and are using experimentally an instrument designed to appraise the pressure characteristics of a college environment. They seem to be finding that colleges differ considerably in press profiles and that these pressure emphases are related to the academic atmosphere of the college environment. The point here is that the many details of a working environment influence the quality and production of the workers. It appears that it would be valuable for supervisors to look at these situational factors, including pressures, as one avenue of self improvement.

Two-Way Stretch

Those engaged in education need both breadth and depth in their personal experiences. The world of knowledge on which professional preparation is based is changing rapidly. Self improvement, under these conditions, is a constant challenge.

New fields of professional understanding lie open to those who would enter. The whole area of perception has come out of the psychological laboratory and is influencing tremendously the study of human relationships. Concepts from biology, clinical psychology, and psychiatry, such as permissiveness, level of aspiration, empathy, needs, self-actualizing tendency, group dynamics, and a host of others have implications for instruction that need to be understood and applied.

Many supervisors and instructional leaders need to stretch themselves to become more familiar with research and appraisal procedures. Action research is especially important because it centers around local problems and is cooperative in nature. It is not only a useful tool by which answers to some classroom and instructional problems may be obtained; it is also a procedure out of which important values will come to those involved in the process. One of these values ought to be a "research mindedness" which would cause one to be cautious about generalizing without adequate facts and to be sensitive to research findings in educational literature.

Research can be an experience in depth. Mooney suggests what it may mean to one's own personal development.

Research has an inner and outer drama. . . . [It] is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its contribution to one's own self-realization. It can be taken as a way of meeting life with the maximum of stops open to get out of experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song. I would wish for beginners the personal joys I know can come to them. . . .

If an educational researcher has found a way by which he can use his involvement with curriculum problems to confront himself with problems central to the emergence of his own life-with-meaning, he has found a dynamic for his system and a way by which he can work with soundness and profit to himself and others (13).

Any Bad Habits?

Desirable self improvement can sometimes take place at routine levels. For example, such routines as those involved in opening and handling mail, filing and finding materials, making appointments,

and meeting book salesmen can consume time and energy out of all proportion to their importance in a supervisor's program. An occasional study of these routines may make it possible to find more time for creative activities which yield larger dividends. This same principle applies to personal routines and their possible interference with time for creative experiences.

Aspiration versus Aspirin

Goals give direction to a program and to one's activities. One needs to think not only about direction but about attainable levels. A supervisor's level of aspiration (14) in respect to his work embodies his goals and values. Here is another area where self improvement may be a possibility.

A supervisor's goals may be vague to teachers or administrators, or they may point toward ends which these persons think will be less profitable to attain than other alternatives. Since the supervisor's values are tied up with his goals it may require considerable flexibility of one's self to make desirable shifts.

If his level of aspiration is much beyond the expectation of the group with which he works his persistence to attain the goals may place pressures on him and on members of the group. These pressures may become a threat to their personalities and to interpersonal relationships. He may feel at times he needs more aspirins and less aspiration. His real need, of course, is to learn how to appraise himself and his colleagues in ways to set more realistic goals and levels of attainment.

In this article I have pointed up several avenues for the self improvement of the supervisor: understanding one's self concept, improving one's perceptions, attaining breadth and depth of experi-

ence, improving habits, and setting realistic levels of aspiration. The supervisor's self concept and accuracy of perceptions largely govern the supervisor's success. Integrity of personality is the keystone to these characteristics—"to thine own self be true."

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agreement that the "effectiveness" of these means is greater than present "extent" of use would indicate.

7. Grade level and department meetings should be continued as extensively as at present, if not to an even greater extent. All groups of educational leaders ranked these meetings high in effectiveness, and both elementary and secondary school principals ranked them in first place.

8. Both child study activities and action research are insufficiently used as means of instructional improvement. Although relatively little used, these means were already considered more "effective" than traditional institute programs. With greater use, they may become recognized as among the most effective of all means of instructional improvement.

An Indiana Survey

A third study comes from Indiana. Here, the research committee of the state ASCD, with Daisy M. Jones as chairman, has been collecting information about the problems of supervision on which help is needed.

From an evaluation of the types of activities included in a supervisory program, the following findings seemed to emerge from this study of present conditions in Indiana:

1. Some time is spent in an in-service education program. The tendency is to recommend more time for this purpose.

2. The task of providing coordination between departments, between buildings, and between levels is considered important. The most common reply was that some time is spent in this manner and more is recommended.

3. Most replies indicated that supervisors spend some time in curriculum building and could profitably spend more doing research, working with local committees, and evaluating recent publications.

4. All those responding indicated the need for more time spent in the evaluation

of materials, activities, and results of instruction. Most indicated they spend half or less of their time in this capacity.

5. More than half of those responding indicated they spend some time in research and could profitably spend more. This includes both the analysis of statistical data and a study of local records.

6. In the area of administrative detail most of those answering indicated they spend some time this way. When it comes to budget making and the ordering of materials and supplies, they preferred to spend less time. When it comes to the selection and placement of staff members, they preferred to spend more time.

7. Clerical details consume little or none of the time for the majority of those responding. In most cases, this is considered satisfactory.

From these and other findings, recommendations for study have been drawn up, with the suggestion that the survey be repeated at two- or three-year intervals in order to provide continued guidance on needs for self-improvement.

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