

## A More Wholesome Balance

Stephen M. Corey

IN common, I suspect, with a number of professors of education who write and talk about supervision I have had no personal, firsthand experience with it, as does a school teacher, for a long time. No "supervisor" has tried recently to get me to do my work more effectively, nor have I been thought of as a supervisor by those of my colleagues whose work I have tried to influence.

This being, in a sense, on the outside of the whole complex apparatus of supervision, with its status differences and its group identifications and its anxieties and resistances, can probably be only in part compensated for vicariously. One thing, though, has impressed me from my work with supervisors, my reading about what they do, and especially my experience with people trying to get me to do my work better and my attempts to get some of my colleagues to do better. This is that while modern supervisors may function in many different ways, and increasingly use a language of their own, and work with more sophistication in groups than they formerly did, the main purpose of supervision has not changed much, if at all, through the years. The primary job of the supervisor is still to do whatever he thinks will be successful to get *someone else* to work more effectively, more productively.

What has changed in connection with supervision, and this most members of ASCD are aware of, is that more and

more people recognize that the method of getting another person to do his work better that had seemed so straightforward and reasonable and has been in use for a long, long time is not very effective. This time honored method has defined a supervisor as one who knows what ought to be done, and how, by those people he is supervising, and is able to get them to do what he thinks they should. The assumption is made that after hearing about and seeing what ought to be done, or submitting to some training in the new and better ways of working, the worker will do what the supervisor thinks is best even though this may seem to require more effort. If he does not do what he should, in this sense, he is stubborn or recalcitrant or unprofessional or something else bad.

As I have suggested, many students and practitioners of supervision doubt that this way of bringing about improvement in the work of another person can be very successful no matter how tactfully or gracefully it is attempted. In my experience, and I am sure it is not unusual, one central reason for this skepticism is not far to seek. When someone in my organization has as one of his main responsibilities getting me to do better, whether or not he is called a supervisor, this does something to our relationship. I rarely consider him a member of the group of my peers whose norms have much to do with my productivity. I real-

ize that his success is judged differently from mine by the people who render these important judgments. His success comes, in large measure at least, from his ability to see what it is that I am not doing well, or getting me to see this, and his skill in bringing about change, presumably improvement, in my professional behavior. This is what his superiors expect of him no matter what euphemisms are used about our working together on the same tasks. The person who is trying to get me to do better will not like this perception of him because he knows it interposes a barrier between us. It makes his job harder because I almost *must* resist him in order to keep my self respect. He would rather I regarded him as a friend and co-worker and help giver. He could then be more influential with less effort.

One reason for what is often a resistant attitude toward many well intentioned supervisors who try to tell other people what to do is the built-in implication that they are constantly judging other people. We all make evaluative judgments about one another more or less continuously, of course, and this includes the way our associates do their work. Whenever we suspect we are judged to be professionally inept, however, this sets in motion many mechanisms we have learned can protect somewhat our threatened self respect.

This is especially marked in our relations with a supervisor because by trying to improve us we know he thinks we are not doing what we should. Our defense is to believe that he, or any one else judging us unfavorably, is himself even more inept, or he is prejudiced, or he overlooks the favorable evidence, or he resents us personally. If we look closely we can usually find some evidence to support each of these accusations.

I am almost always surprised when some experience tells me again how very sensitive I am to criticisms of my own work, explicit or implied. Often when I ask for criticism I actually want commendation and am disappointed if I do not get it. Like most others I try to cover up this sensitivity because it is generally considered to be a weakness. The fact remains, though, that if someone wants to help me do better, he had better not let me know it if he thinks I am doing poorly. If he does think so, I am almost certain to find out.

For another person to be very influential so far as my professional work is concerned, he must realize I am now doing as well as I can, all things considered, and these things may be legion. This assumption that workers, the teacher, you and I, actually want to do as well as we can, *in our own view*, and are constantly striving to live up to these higher expectations in those areas in which we seem not to be achieving as well as we believe we should, is not sentimental, of course. It is one of the important realities supervisors often overlook. Even when this is "known" to be true the conviction is often insufficiently internalized to make behavior consistent with it.

If I am in a mood to be helped by a supervisor or anyone else, and no one can do much with me along this line unless I am, it is not necessary that the person wanting to help me also judge me. I have already done that. What I need is a person who can help me think more penetratingly about what I am trying to do, the way I go about it, and the evidence I use to estimate my success. This requires quite a different kind of supervisor, it seems to me, from the one who believes his task is to know what I should

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#### Editorial—Corey

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do and then get me to do it. The help I need most is with a process and I regret that attention to processes has diminished in the recent emphasis on a product that is usually in the form of knowledge. I hope that ASCD can accelerate the return to a more wholesome balance.

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#### Semantics—Hayakawa

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ing. The most common one is, "I didn't know I could write!" It is also surprising how many students want the instructor to read their hastily-written, unedited stuff. It is as if they were saying (as they cannot say about their laboriously written assigned themes), "This is I—this is what I am like—please read it." In a matter of weeks, student writings, at first so labored and self-conscious, become fluid, expressive, and resonant with the rhythms of the spoken American language.

Students find subject matter in this way, too, because they write down things that they would not have written in pre-meditated themes, and discover that some of it is literary material. Frequently, having touched upon a subject in their impromptu papers and found it interesting, students will explore the same subject more deeply later, in carefully rewritten and revised papers.

Of course, these exercises in spontaneity are not the whole of freshman composition in my view, but they provide the release and establish the self-confidence in students that enable them to approach their more formal writing assignments with fewer inhibitions, fewer anxieties. Teachers who have not tried such an approach as this are earnestly entreated not to argue against this exercise on *a priori* grounds, but to try it, because I am sure they will be as amazed by the results as I was.

So that's my formula for Freshman English: semantics, to induce a heightened awareness of language and its many complexities; abundant reading; a vast amount of writing, more than most students have ever done. The aim is not simply better students in the academic sense. The aim is growth.

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