The Humanistic
Enhances Growth and

All persons engaged in the "supervisory alliance" will experience growth and fulfillment through the insight and the informed skills of the humanistic supervisor.

Despite some efforts by professional writers to free it from its watchdog origins, supervision remains a bugaboo for many teachers, an experience to be avoided at all costs. Besides the inherent risks of having one's professional behavior examined, the supervisee must generally mobilize himself against a dozen extrinsic dangers associated with the supervisor's presence. Because it generally counts for so much, supervision often counts for nothing.—Robert Goldhammer in *Clinical Supervision*, 1969

Today supervision itself is being challenged both from within and from outside the profession.—Robert R. Leeper in *Supervision: Emerging Profession*, 1969

Few well-informed educators deny that the above statements accurately reflect the current status of supervision as well as that of the supervisor. Likewise, many dedicated supervisors themselves are the first to admit that the field of professional education is woefully short on those persons who have the knowledge, attitude, and skills required for the type of supervision that at once enhances persons and improves instruction.1 Even so, responsible educators at all levels are in desperate need of dynamic supervisors who are adequate to help lift them above their own personal limitations and facilitate their quest for professional growth.

It is the author's purpose to offer some thoughts on an improved and facilitative kind of practitioner of supervision—the humanistic supervisor!

The concept of the humanistic supervisor finds its roots in twentieth-century humanism,2 third force psychology,3 and a philosophy based on reverence for the indi-


Supervisor Improves Instruction

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Role of the Humanistic Supervisor

The major role of the humanistic supervisor is to create an environment which encourages human growth and fulfillment among those with whom he/she cooperatively works. Indeed, an encouraging, helpful, facilitative, and all-persons-growth-oriented environment must exist if anything constructive in the supervisory relationship is to happen.

Attendant to this overall and larger role are such important functions as the:

1. Assessing-Diagnosing function. Helping co-workers assess and diagnose their needs for the specific situation in which they are working.

2. Planning function. Assisting colleagues in planning goals, objectives, and experiences that will produce maximum results.

3. Motivating function. Helping co-workers establish and maintain a climate that will precipitate the best in all parties.

4. Strategic function. Choosing and using those strategies which will produce intended outcomes.


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to accomplish objectives and carry out experiences.

6. Appraising or Progress Reporting function. Helping those with whom one works to appraise and evaluate the results of their efforts to achieve goals . . . to assess the outcomes of a given set of experiences.

If the major role of the humanistic supervisor—the growth and development of those with whom he/she cooperatively works—is to be carried out effectively, then the functions briefly described above must be attended to in a most careful and humanistic way. In short, role acquisition and role process become all important.

Characteristics Needed by the Humanistic Supervisor

Contrary to the past and all-too-often present model of supervisor as teller, conditioner, and expert, the humanistic supervisor is helper, facilitator, and learner. The humanistic supervisor is receptive to and tries to constructively utilize the aspirations, needs, and talents of the person(s) with whom he/she cooperatively works. The humanistic supervisor realizes that any significant and permanent change in behavior is based on nativistic or intrinsic conceptions of motivation which propose building on what a person is and does in order to achieve what he/she ought to be and should do.

The humanistic supervisor is characterized by the humanistic attitude; that is, a consistently overt attitude which reveals a definite preference for asking rather than telling, sharing rather than controlling, and trusting rather than mistrusting. The humanistic attitude assumes that "human-being-ism" is enough and that all human beings respond better when trusted, accepted, and encouraged. It assumes that all parties in the supervisory relationship are human beings first and other things afterwards. The humanistic attitude enables one to say to those with whom he/she is working, "I accept, trust, and need you as another human being. I need your knowledge, skills, and contributions in order to exist, function, and transcend mutual problems."

The humanistic attitude toward supervision necessitates that those engaged in the supervisory partnership move beyond the trivial concerns of rigid procedures and paper pollution to the genuine concerns of persons and their growth. The humanistic attitude recognizes that if problems are to be solved and performances improved, all persons involved must feel good about each other and understand that any plan for succeeding must be based on a win-win (all persons gain something and lose nothing) strategy.

If it is true that the supervisory process involves carrying out the aforementioned functions in order to achieve growth and development among all cooperating parties, then the effective humanistic supervisor will possess at least the following characteristics:

1. A belief that all "human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems".

2. A belief that all human beings "possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are, within certain objective limits, the masters of their own destiny".

3. A belief that all human beings achieve "the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self-development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare" of those with whom one relates.

6 Lamont, op. cit., p. 15.
7 Ibid., p. 13.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
4. A commitment to democratic procedures when working with others.
5. A willingness to question others' and one's own "basic assumptions and convictions."
6. A deep commitment and capacity to make others feel worthwhile, important, and uplifted.
7. A willingness and ability to establish warm and empathetic relationships with all persons, regardless of their racial, religious, ethnic, or educational backgrounds.
8. An ability to listen and a desire to utilize the experience of others as a resource for planning and achieving goals.
9. An enthusiasm for and belief in supervision as a viable process for contributing to human growth and progress.
10. A commitment to upgrade oneself as a whole human being and the desire to carry on a continuing inquiry in the field of supervision.

Above all else, the humanistic supervisor works from a frame of reference that is characterized by his/her "compassionate concern" for fellow workers. It should be stressed that the humanistic supervisor possesses that kind of concern for his/her fellow associates which involves both achievement in performance and reward in interpersonal relations.

Carrying Out the Supervisory Process

Given the fact that the supervisor understands the above role and functions and the characteristics needed for their execution, he/she must yet actually develop a process which ensures (a) performance that leads to instructional improvement and (b) behavior that leads to human growth and fulfillment.

The process or series of steps which the humanistic supervisor must take to achieve instructional improvement and fulfillment on the part of those with whom he/she cooperates is as follows:

1. Establishing an open, trusting, and collegial relationship. Such a relationship is basic to all meaningful and productive human interaction. Before anything else can occur, the supervisory team must create a climate that reduces tension, fear, anxiety, and withdrawal. Indeed, the climate must encourage an honest exchange of ideas, feelings, preferences, and perceptions so that credibility and trust are continually at work.

2. Identifying needs, aspirations, talents, and goals of both persons and institutions in which the supervisory trusteeship is to take place. Before sound planning can be engaged in, the wishes and talents of those with whom the supervisor is working must be seriously taken into account and utilized. We know that many who are professional educators or aspire to be, value autonomy over dependence, prefer knowledge over ignorance, want activity more than idleness, like much responsibility as opposed to little or no responsibility, and prefer to work in behalf of others rather than against them. If this knowledge is anywhere near correct, then it is important that the existing talents and aspirations of one's co-workers be identified and harnessed to honor such values. Likewise, each institution has its own unique needs and it is the task of the supervisor (with help of his/her working partners) to identify those needs, honoring both personal

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 16.
and institutional needs if achievement and growth are to be realized.

3. Planning what is to be done, how it is to take place, and when it is to occur. Every person is inclined to feel more committed to experiences if he/she has participated in the planning of them. A fundamental component of humanistic supervision is the active involvement of all those participating in the supervisory coalition. The purpose of planning is to turn needs into performance goals, communicate clearly performance expectations, identify barriers to performance, and design strategies for observing, analyzing, and appraising performance progress.

4. Observing the performance by “taking the role” of the performer, the learner, and the supervisor. By “taking the role” of the performer, learner, and supervisor, we mean that one identifies and empathizes with others in the supervisory relationship and the role expectations of their respective positions. A specific example can be related through the utilization of the college/university supervisor who works with student teachers. When and while the supervisor is observing the performance of a student teacher, he/she can make a much more comprehensive assessment by “taking the role” of the student teacher (how would I feel, think, and act if I were in his/her shoes in this particular situation?), the learners (if I were a student, would I understand and “dig” this instructor?), the cooperating teacher (as a former classroom teacher, how do I see the student teacher’s performance?), the college/university supervisor (as one who has much training and expertise, is the student teacher demonstrating those competencies expected of a future classroom teacher?).

If one is successful at role-taking as crudely set forth here, a more comprehensive insight and understanding of performance will indeed take place. This approach to observation must be explained to and accepted by all persons making up the supervisory team. Observation must be frequent, take into account the situation, and be non-threatening.

5. Analyzing the performance, holding conferences, and sharing appraisal feedback. Because the humanistic supervisor believes that people possess the capacity for self-direction, he/she makes a concentrated effort to help co-workers engage in self-evaluation. Appraising performance is a cooperative and mutual endeavor, with both supervisor and supervisee sharing in comparative analysis and assessment. As participants in the supervisory relationship share feedback, they will have the opportunity to modify wrong impressions, change task strategies, and agree on future expectations and responsibilities.

The role of the supervisor during conferences in which performance is analyzed and shared, is to achieve positive interpersonal relations, share realistic information, and mutually plan solutions to problems. The climate must be supportive, participants must be honest, and the emphasis should be on re-assessment and re-planning as opposed to any sort of grading. Certainly, all future planning should again focus on strengths, skills, and talents of the performer who is seeking help and guidance. Throughout the conference, the supervisor plays the role of questioner, facilitator, and resource person.

In his/her efforts to humanize supervision, the humanistic supervisor will have succeeded if all persons in the supervisory alliance emerge from their tasks:

1. Knowing that their skills, talents, resources, and creativity have been utilized significantly in the supervisory partnership
2. Realizing that they have been given wide latitude in self-responsibility, self-management, and decision-making
3. Feeling emotionally enhanced and intellectually richer
4. Emerging more fully as self-actualizing human beings, “as fully human as can possibly be.”


14 Maslow, op. cit., p. 53.