

The Supervisor's Lot: Dilemmas by the Dozen



TEACHERS' CONTRADICTORY
EXPECTATIONS CREATE A NO-WIN
SITUATION FOR SUPERVISORS.

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Teachers often have a less than complete understanding of a supervisor's role and responsibility. Supervisors seem to have left the difficult job of teaching for the leisurely life of administration. A better salary, secretarial assistance, more authority, and less work—from the teachers' perspective supervisors have the best of all possible worlds.

Few teachers realize the unrelenting demands that supervisors must respond to: endless paperwork, budgets and grants, pressures from parents and superiors, curriculum revision and inservice education—and meetings, meetings, meetings. Perhaps the greatest frustration for a supervisor, however, is the "can't win" dilemma that results from contradictory expectations of teachers themselves. In graduate courses I have taught for supervisors, this "caught-in-the-middle" problem is a frequent topic. From my collection of supervisor's dilemmas I offer samples. You will feel the dilemma coming on when teachers say:

1. "You're not out in the schools enough." / "Why are you never in the office when I call?"

Houdini needed extraordinary powers to accomplish the illusion of being in two places at the same time. Teachers, however, expect supervisors to be in their office and in the schools simultaneously. A sub-class of this conflict is "You're always in the school looking over my shoulder." / "Why can't you be here when I need you?" And if you're attending a conference, be assured that this will be seen as a "junket" or a "vacation." The supervisor is always in the wrong place at the right time—and vice versa.

2. "You never communicate with us." / "Please! No more meetings, memos, or questionnaires."

This is a classic case of damned if you do and damned if you don't. It is safe to say that the supervisor will always sit on important information and disseminate irrelevant information. We could probably solve the nation's fuel crisis by judicious win-

ter burning of unread supervisor memos. (Say! Could it be that teachers reached this conclusion before I did?)

3. "You never give me any useful ideas." / "You're always telling me what to do."

How much advice is the right amount? The supervisor always makes the wrong guess. If you respect the teacher's right to develop his or her own style and method, you are perceived as unhelpful; if you provide suggestions, you are bossy. I would like to hear from anyone who has solved this dilemma.

4. "All we want from you is a pat on the back." / "Why don't you do something about that teacher the kids had last year?"

In many cases, supervisors are expected to be supportive and complimentary of the noble efforts of Teacher A while keeping Teacher B in line—that is, if you're Teacher A. Teacher B wants warm fuzzies and some firm action taken against Teacher A. And let's be quick and efficient about it!

5. "Give me some constructive suggestions on my lesson." / "Why can't you ever say something nice?"

Teachers say they want suggestions but they really want you to say that the lesson was perfect—impossible to be improved upon. Then, of course, you're back to "You never give me any useful ideas." If you do offer heartfelt praise, the teacher wonders what you really thought of the lesson.

6. "I could certainly use some resources to develop this unit." / "How do you expect me to do all these activities you sent me?"

Even though every teacher is on the lookout for materials, this is a situation where a feast may be as bad as a famine. Teachers often want to have every possible resource but they don't want to be responsible for actually using them. So be sure to provide abundant materials, but don't ask how they worked.

7. "You need to get all of us teachers together to solve this problem." / "Why waste our time with this? You've got all that free time to do it for us."

In theory, teachers want to be involved in decisions and want to have their opinions considered and valued.

On the other hand, they don't want to spend any of their time voicing their opinions—except in the faculty lounge. Maybe supervisors should hold curriculum meetings in faculty lounges—during school hours, of course. In any event, you can't win.

8. "You ought to get us a grant to do this project." / "I don't care what strings were attached to the grant, this is too much to ask of any teacher."

Whenever a project can be secured to underwrite a curriculum revision or some such project, teachers are quick to urge you to apply for funding. This immediately shifts responsibility to you, and it tends to delay actual effort on their part. Once the money has been received, however, the project becomes merely another burden to be borne by the already overburdened teacher.

9. "Who chose this terrible textbook?" / "I'm sorry, you'll have to find someone else to help with the text adoption decision."

What would happen if someone published the perfect text? Apparently, we need not waste our time considering that possibility. If a text is conceptually oriented, it doesn't have enough information in it. If it is informationally-oriented, it is dry and tedious. If it aims at the average student, it isn't challenging enough for the better student. If it aims at the better student, it is unrealistic. Needless to say, it is easier to complain about a poor text than it is to choose a good one in the first place.

10. "How was I supposed to know the class had never mastered these skills before?" / "Why do you make me fill out these records? No one looks at them anyway."

Here, again, the supervisor is caught in the crossfire of conflicting requirements. How can we minimize record-keeping while maximizing teacher use of vital information about student progress? If teachers don't read and use such information, its collection is indeed a waste of time. And what do you do with a permanent record comment like "I can't recommend this student too highly"?

11. "Why don't you arrange a summer workshop for us?" / "Oh, I couldn't give up any vacation time for that!"

Summer always seems so far away in

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November. Somehow, a summer workshop—to sketch out new course guides, to develop a scope and sequence—seems the perfect solution to so many inservice needs. Until, that is, summer actually arrives. Then teacher commitment, interest, and availability evaporate like the morning mist over the beaches of the Gold Coast.

12. *"We'd like you to get us a dynamic speaker for inservice." / "Not another speaker! What we needed was a good make-it/take-it workshop."*

Another Hobson's choice. Moreover, if the speaker is dynamic, he/she may be perceived as "a mere performer" and probably "too flashy." But if the presentation is low-keyed and academic it's called "dull" and "uninspiring." Of course, if you set up a workshop, teachers will tell you that such mundane activities can't compare with the value of a first-rate speaker. So it goes for the beleaguered supervisor.

In the final analysis, all of us fall prey to conflicting expectations. We heard a superintendent lament once that if he affirmed his commitment to quality education his board declared that "he was not cost conscious"; but if he showed his frugality by cutting out a program, "he was not concerned with educational values." Perhaps the safest generalization to make is that we see our own dilemmas best. ■

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