

# Be a SUPERvisor!

By Bethany Wright

Superman, Wonderwoman, Captain America – there are many imaginary superheroes. But have you bosses out there ever considered that you could be a super hero in real life? Whether you oversee a whole department or just train one employee at a time, your employees depend on you for direction and feedback. They probably spend more time with you than with their own families, so the way you work with them makes a big impact, be it negative or positive. By using the best methods for employee management, you can become a real-life SUPERvisor.

I recently read about a strategy called the SMART Evaluation Plan. It was an acronym, one of those clever little diagrams where each letter of the word is also the first letter of another word. Besides being clever, there is a lot of common sense in this strategy, so I would like to share it with you now.

## The SMART Evaluation Plan

**S is for “specific”.** Being specific with your employees will help you

**Specific**  
**Measurable**  
**Accountable**  
**Realistic**  
**Timely**

be a good supervisor. Tell them exactly what you want them to do. Show them picture or operations manuals if needed. Let them know what your expectations for them are. They might still fall short of the goal, of course, but if you don't lay out a goal for them, they are definitely not going to meet it.

When you review their work, point out exactly what they did right and what they did wrong. Being specific is especially important when your employees need to improve. My husband jokes that the absolute worst supervisor is the one who rejects your work by saying “Do it better”. Now, the problem with that is that in most cases people are already doing what they think is good work. If they knew how to do it better, they would. So just telling them to do it different is probably not going to help.

There are a hundred ways for them to do it different but still wrong, but only one way for them to do it right. By being very specific you get them to continue the good things they are doing but still improve the things they need to change.

**M is for “measurable”.** As you evaluate, try to give your employees measurable goals. This will give both you and your employee benchmarks for success. It will help you determine if your employee is stagnating or growing. It also provides a way for your employee to document his success. And since a little success develops motivation for more success, a small but measurable improvement can have a big impact.

On the job, measurable goals might be like this: “Try to do it five minutes faster next time”. “Our goal is for you to suggest solutions to three operational problems next month”. “I am asking you to complete one more task tomorrow than you did today”. Or, “Our goal is for you to earn the next level of certification in the next year”. With these measurable goals, it is easy to see if your employee made the goal. Plus, even partial improvement can be noted. “You were three minutes faster this time” or “You found two good solutions this month. Keep up the good work.”

**A is for “accountable”.** Building accountability into your employees' jobs keeps you from having to micro-manage their work, but also gives you time to resolve problems before they become disasters. How often they report back to you on their progress depends on their skill level, your comfort with their work, and the importance of the task, but the essentials are the same. You want them to update you enough so that you know what is being accomplished, you can plan together for the next phase of the work (if needed), and problems which might arise are taken care of before they become critical.

Plans for accountability vary widely. Some people need to be monitored almost constantly, while others can work practically independently, with only occasional contact with their supervisor. It also depends whether the work is the same for long periods of time, or can change at a moment's notice. One city I have visited has weekly staff meetings on Monday. The Public Work Director lays out the work for the week and divides it up between the

staff. They have a big white board, and all the jobs are written on it. Each employee checks off his jobs as he completes them. This allows the PW Director to see their progress at a glance. Other cities have a short meeting each morning. Still other people have walkie-talkies, and they check in with their supervisor many times a day. It does not matter what form your accountability plan takes. The important thing is that your plan allows your crew to function in the most productive way.

**R is for “realistic”.** This can be a hard one to follow, but you need to set realistic, achievable goals. It is always tempting to push each employee to be as good as the best worker you ever met, but this can backfire. Trying to make your new guy as good as your twenty-year veteran is just going to wear you both down. It took your twenty-year guy twenty years to get that good, so give the new guy a break. It will be more productive if you just ask the new guy to be better tomorrow than he was today. This will put him on an upward path, and who can tell but in a few years he may even know a few things that the veteran employee could stand to learn!

**T is for “timely”.** As anyone who has ever trained a puppy knows, timing is everything. You have to be there *immediately* to scold him when he has been bad, or reward him when he has been good. The same principle holds true for employees. The sooner you evaluate them, the more useful your evaluation will be. I encourage you to discuss problems with your employees quickly. Don't wait until their yearly evaluation rolls around. They will just continue to repeat their mistakes, making it harder for them to change and driving you crazy in the meantime. Also, note the good things they do immediately. They will continue to repeat their good actions, causing positive effects in your department.

That concludes the ideas from the SMART Evaluation Plan. There are many benefits in using these strategies. Hopefully, some of them will help you get the most out of your staff and become a SUPERvisor.