

# Tactical Management: Getting the Most from Managers

By Richard A. Reda and Jean B. Lenderking

Taking an in-depth look at the next step in making decisions that address immediate needs while keeping a longer term goal in focus.

One of the most difficult transitions in an organization is moving from the rank and file into supervision. The skills and competencies that get people to that stage are not the same ones that will sustain them or further their growth in the organization.

The role of supervisors and managers relies less on technical expertise and more the ability to listen, motivate, mentor and manage—manage work loads and schedules—and, more importantly, people, problems and relationships.

## Relationships Are Investments in People to Get the Job Done

Building and maintaining relationships is critical to a supervisor's success in managing work processes and outcomes. How can this be true? Most of us don't have time to hold the hands of our employees. We just need to get the job done!

Why is it, then, that the first thing every leader in the military learns is that they are responsible for the accomplishment of the mission *and* to maintain the welfare of the troops? This is not an "and/or" proposition. These two concepts are equally balanced. Without doing the second part, the first cannot be achieved.

Just how important are relationships versus task accomplishment? First, let's define what we're talking about. Tasks are simple enough: job outputs such as

producing widgets, designing better mousetraps, landing a man on the moon, managing air traffic: the steps a business takes to produce goods or services. Relationships complement technical skills and include a wide variety of related issues. Characteristics of successful relationships include:

- Open Communication
- Information Sharing
- Trustworthiness
- Reliability
- Listening Skills
- Compassion
- Understanding.

Most of these qualities are hard to define, but we know them when we see them. Now, take a minute to think about the best supervisor you ever had, and some of the characteristics that describe that person. You'll probably come up with descriptions such as: honest, reliable, a good listener, a problem solver, a motivator.

Think about the worst supervisor you ever had. What words or concepts describe that person: untrustworthy, self-serving, deceitful, secretive, problem avoider? In both examples, most often the descriptions address relationship issues. In some instances, task oriented phrases may come up, such as clock watcher or taskmaster; but they will seldom, if ever, describe the best supervisor.

## Tactical Management

This is the fourth in a series of articles that describe the concept of **Tactical Management**, and the six milestones that enable managers to focus on long term goals while addressing short term demands. This article looks at getting the most from managers.

Previous articles can be downloaded from PDFs of the three previous 2004 issues of *Managing the Skies* located at [www.faama.org](http://www.faama.org).

## Balance Technical Skills with Managerial and Leadership Skills

Why is it, then, that there is seldom an investment made in developing and nurturing the characteristics that make a good supervisor? It's as if there is an expectation that they will appear magically by donning the title of manager.

Many professions have requirements for certification and/or for continuing professional education. This doesn't seem to exist for management positions, independent of any technical requirements associated with the organization's function.

A tactical approach to effective management begins with an understanding of the need to begin a supervisor's new journey with clear instructions as to role and responsibilities as well as exposure to the fundamentals of



“A tactical approach to effective management begins with an understanding of the need to begin a supervisor’s new journey with clear instructions as to role and responsibilities as well as exposure to the fundamentals of communication, problem solving and conflict resolution — balancing the technical skills with managerial and leadership skills.”

communication, problem solving and conflict resolution—balancing the technical skills with managerial and leadership skills.

At one time, in the Federal government, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) required that new supervisors receive 40 hours of supervisory training within their first year after promotion, and another 40 hours before the end of their second year.

When OPM dropped that requirement, most Federal agencies eliminated any training whatsoever for new supervisors. The result has been disastrous. Investing in training for managers is one of the most important resource expenditures that can be made, but often is the one most overlooked.

### Tactical Management Encourages Applying New Approaches to Old Problems

Training need not be limited to formal classroom training. Tactical management requires examining new approaches to old problems. There are a number of options that can respond to the need for training without the additional expenditure of limited funds. Some of these tactics include:

- Sending one person to formal training and having that person train others within the organization.
- Contract training to meet specially designed needs.
- On-line training.

- Developmental assignment elsewhere in the organization.
- Exchange programs with other organizational elements or with other organizations/agencies.
- Discussion groups: peers who meet to address specific topics and invite a veteran manager to talk about approaches or options.
- Mid- to long-term mentoring programs.

### Success Depends Upon Supplying the Right Tools and the Right Training plus Continuous Follow-up

In order to get the most from managers, they need the right tools to do the job. But it’s not enough to just hand them those tools—or to just send them to training. Not every program is going to work. Nor does every formal training class provide the solutions that are sought. There needs to be continual follow-up and discussion:

- What is working and what is not?
- How effective was the training, the discussion, the developmental assignment?
- What could have made it better?
- What could have made it more germane?
- Is there additional support we can provide managers?

Even in an organization that is not limited by financial resources, it’s important that those resources are used effectively. To make the most of developmental opportunities, maintain a library that’s easily accessible, which describes the program attended or the developmental opportunity.

In the library, supplying a short summary of the program and the benefits and/or limitations can help those who follow you. More importantly than the short analysis of the course, the name and telephone number of the attendee will allow for a discussion and a better insight into the needs and the deliverables. It also will provide another opportunity to build a relationship. ✈

---

**Richard Reda** is the former Director of Employee and Labor Relations for the Department of Energy, and a graduate of the National Training Laboratories Organization Development Program.

**Jean Lenderking** is the former Labor Relations Program Manager, Department of Transportation, and first Interagency Labor Relations Forum chair.

Both are currently consultants with Lenderking, Reda and Associates (LRA). They can be reached via email at [RReda@LRA1.com](mailto:RReda@LRA1.com) and [JeanL@LRA1.com](mailto:JeanL@LRA1.com), respectively, or at [www.LRA1.com](http://www.LRA1.com)