

Purpose: To obtain knowledge and learn skills through guidance provided by the agency supervisor.

Discussion: In order for a social worker to learn job-related tasks and procedures and develop as a skilled professional, he or she must make appropriate and effective use of supervision. The term *supervision* is rooted in a Latin word that means “to look over.” Modern supervisory practice places less emphasis on a supervisor as an overseer or inspector and more emphasis on a supervisor as a skilled master of work to be done, a leader, and a teacher. Van Dersal (1968) described *supervision as*

the art of working with a group of people over whom authority is exercised in such a way as to achieve their greatest combined effectiveness in getting work done. It is best performed in an atmosphere of good will and zestful cooperation on the part of all the people involved-including, of course, the supervisor. It is possibly one of the most difficult of all the arts, since it demands an ability to use successfully and almost intuitively those principles of human relations that have proven true with most people most of the time. (p. 25)

In a social agency, the supervisors serves clients through the work of others (i.e., line workers or supervisees). Above all else, a supervisor must be accountable to the clients. The quality of service provided to a client is the ultimate test of a supervisor’s performance. Kadushin (1976) explains that “the ultimate objective of supervision is to offer the agency’s service to the client in the most efficient and effective manner possible. It is toward that aim that the supervisor administratively integrates and coordinates the supervisee’s work with others in the agency, educates the workers to a more skillful performance in their tasks, and supports and sustains the workers in motivated performance of these tasks” (pp. 20-21). An agency, its workers and supervisors, exists for the purpose of providing quality service to its clients. All other functions and activities must be viewed as the means of accomplishing that end.

There are three major functions or components of supervisory practice within a social or human service agency: (1) the administrative function, (2) the supportive function, and (3) the educational function. In describing the essence of the *administrative component*, Kadushin (1976) states that “the supervisor is a link in the chain of administration-the administrator who is in direct contact with the worker. As an administrator, the supervisor has responsibility for agency management, and specific, clearly defined, administrative managerial functions are assigned to her” (p. 41). A supervisor must attend to the management and administrative functions of directing, coordinating, and evaluating the performance of workers.

Austin (1981) explains that *supportive supervision* involves activities such as “sustaining worker morale, facilitating personal growth and increasing sense of worth, promoting a sense of belonging related to the mission of the agency and developing a sense of security in job performance” (p. 11). Supportive supervision is extremely important in the human services, where high stress and worker burnout are serious personnel problems.

Kadushin (1976) states that the *educational component* of supervision “is concerned with teaching the worker what he needs to know in order to do his job and helping him to learn it. Every job description of the supervisor’s position includes a listing of this function: instruct workers in acceptable social work techniques; develop competence through individual and group conferences; ‘train and instruct staff in job performance’” (p. 125). In essence, the educational component relates to the transmission of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed by the workers.

Several guidelines can help the social worker make appropriate and effective use of supervision.

1. Realize that a good supervisor will have expectations that you are to meet. Austin, Skelding, and Smith (1977) provide a list of general expectations.

COOPERATION. You will be expected to be cooperative with all your co-workers and to demonstrate a willingness to work and learn alongside them.

INITIATIVE. Your supervisor will expect you to complete whatever duties you are given and then if you haven’t been told what to do next. To look around, see what needs to be done, and do it if you can.

WILLINGNESS TO LEARN. Your supervisor expects you to learn about your job and your agency and the way things are done in your agency. You should not be ashamed to say “I don’t know” and to seek your supervisor’s help when you need it.

WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS. Your supervisor will expect you to be able to follow directions and, after you have been working a while, to be able to work on well-established routines without direction.

BEING KNOWLEDGEABLE AND LIKING YOUR WORK. Your supervisor expects you to know your job, to like your work, and to show that you like your work. You are also expected to be familiar with your agency’s procedures and to be able to apply them in your daily activities.

ACCEPTANCE OF CRITICISM. Criticism is necessary since it is the way your supervisor lets you know how he or she expects the job to be done. You should accept it with a smile and try to improve when it is justified and constructive. (p.412)

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2. In return, you should have certain expectations of your supervisor. Again, Austin, Skelding, and Smith (1977) provide a helpful listing of what your agency supervisor should provide.

TRAINING. Your supervisor should see to it that you receive whatever on-the-job training is necessary for you to do your job. If you are not sure how to do something and you tell your supervisor, you can expect him or her to teach you or make sure someone else shows you how to do it.

EXPLANATIONS. You can expect your supervisor to explain what he or she expects from you and also to explain any important policies, rules, and regulations of your agency that you should know.

CHANGES. You can expect your supervisor to tell you about any changes in your duties and responsibilities, and about anything else which affects you and your work.

EVALUATIONS. Your supervisor will be evaluating your performance on the job by assessing your work and making suggestions on how you can improve.

DISCIPLINE. If you don't follow rules and regulations, or if you don't live up to what is expected of you, you may be disciplined by your supervisor.

SUPPORT. You can expect your supervisor to give you the opportunity to demonstrate your ability, to understand your viewpoints, to encourage you to improve your performance, and to try to help you when you request assistance with a problem. (pp. 413-414)

3. The social work student has a special set of responsibilities to himself or herself, the School, the practicum agency, and agency clients. Judah (1982) provides a list of these basic responsibilities.

Responsibilities to self:

1. to identify learning needs and objectives;
2. to be ethical in all activities;
3. to fulfill as fully as possible all legitimate expectations of the learner in the field and to go beyond them as feasible;
4. to apply self fully to learning and services-including realistic allotment of time to outside demands;
5. willingness to recognize the needs of the others in the field instruction partnership system and commitment to be helpful. If possible.

Responsibilities to school:

1. to maintain open, honest and sharing communication for achievement of system goals and maintenance goals, which includes problem solving in the field instruction partnership system;
2. to complete all expected reports fully and on time;
3. to provide feedback from agency in the form of case illustrations for classes and sharing of knowledge gained in the field; to questions and comment on the usefulness of concepts and methods taught in class in relation to field work;

4. to fulfill all educational requirements including spending the full time expected in the field as usefully as possible;
5. to work diligently to solve problems arising out of inadequacies or misunderstanding in the field instruction system, including evaluation of the system and its functioning in relation to its goals;
6. to work to improve ways in which the school functions with respect to field instruction through channels provided, such as committees. Suggestions for improvements, and sharing in general;
7. to responsibly budget time to allow for adequate attention to both class and field and other student responsibilities.

Responsibilities to field settings:

1. to fully cooperate with field instructor and other partners in obligations of learning and reporting responsibilities including dictation, agendas for conference, identification of goals, problems, needs and so on;
2. to carry out service and other field activities in compliance with agency policy and practices;
3. to help field instructor keep an *educational* focus, if this help is needed;
4. to question and evaluate agency policies and practices and work responsibly for their improvement;
5. to furnish all reports and other work required on time and fully, to devote the full amount of time expected in the field, and to be flexible when asked to change the specific hours worked for good reasons;
6. to discover how one's own learning experiences may simultaneously promote one's growth as a professional and augment the agency's capacity to function;
7. to enhance agency efforts, when possible, through extra service to clients, development of new resources, public relations contacts, feedback, sharing new learning, and so on.

Responsibilities to clients:

1. to practice social work in a disciplined manner and at the highest level of competence possible in view of time and skill limitations;
 2. to work to maintain and improve social work service, of one's own and others;
 3. to offer service promptly, courteously, and without prejudice, and in other ways to put the client's interests first, before one's own convenience;
 4. to respect the privacy of clients but also their right to opportunity to make use of service (outreach);
 5. to never exploit clients in one's own interest and to share with appropriate persons the instances in which the agency and school policies or requirements collide with a client's needs. (pp. 156-57)
4. What you get out a job or learning experience reflects what you put into it. Sometimes, good things happen completely by accident, but most often, a satisfying work situation or a good learning experience happens because you have tried to make it happen by recognizing and building on existing strengths.

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