



Hello and welcome to another edition of troubleshooting here in the Supervisors Circle. Troubleshooting is an opportunity for folks like you and me to come together and share some of the many challenges that come along with being a supervisor.

If you're interested in submitting your own trouble, you can come on here live and do it that way or you can submit it like the person today and we can talk about it on your behalf. You are also invited to join the troubleshooting sessions live to share your own experiences, advice, and encouragement.

Finally, we post the trouble in the Forum after we are finished. So there is yet another opportunity to connect with your fellow supervisors and help them through these challenging moments.

Let's get started with today's trouble.

*"I've been a supervisor for about six months and it is way harder than I expected it to be. I have no idea what I'm doing and nobody is really helping me.*

*I've talked to my own supervisor about it, but he just tells me not to worry about it and that I'm doing just fine. I am pretty sure I'm not though.*

*How do I figure out how to do this thing?"*

Sound familiar to anyone else out there?

Certainly does to me.

Almost every one of these submissions is something that is so spot on for something I've experienced, something I'm still experiencing. I have to believe it's the case for you, too. That is the beauty of this community. That is the beauty of doing this together.

So often supervisors are left to do it on their own. There is even this term called lonely leadership. It's really damaging because a lot of us have experienced this but if you're on your own and you don't have anyone to talk about it with, if you don't have anyone to support you or to say yeah, that's normal or yeah that happens to everybody. It can feel really lonely. This is true in a lot of things and it's particularly true when it comes to being a supervisor because when we get to our points to consider, the main theme of what I want to share with you who submitted this is that, for almost all of us the transition from frontline, whatever field we're in.

For most of us we were recognized, praised, encouraged based on the work we were doing as individuals. All of a sudden when you become a supervisor that is almost the opposite. Like it all gets flipped on its head because all of a sudden if you continue to do what you have always done, which most of us do because that is what has made us successful, it's not going to benefit you and it's not going to benefit your team.



One of the biggest shifts, the hardest shifts we need to make when we go from being on the front line so to speak to becoming a supervisor is deprogramming and getting ourselves out of these habits that have served us for so long.

Now all of a sudden this does not serve us at all and perhaps more importantly it doesn't serve the people we are called to serve.

The center of my response is going to be around this concept. But before we even get there, I want to say to you, whoever submitted this to all of you who are listening..

You are not alone.

You are not alone.

You are not alone.

Most of us go through really similar situations when we first become a supervisor and then throughout our time as supervisors.

This frustration that you've shared, this feeling of being a failure, the feeling of hopelessness, like what do I do? How do I figure this out? Nobody is helping me. This is all too common. This was the driving force behind The Supervisors Circle.

A lot of your words echo mine and that's why I started this community- to say this is really hard and we will be far more successful if we work on it together rather than maintaining that individual approach that we've been doing so long.

So, you are not alone.

You are not a failure.

You are going through what is a really normal and challenging transition and like many of us, one that you are expected to figure out on your own. Almost none of us can do that. We need the support. We need the resources. We need the training. We need the coaching. That is what we are building here.

So, thanks for being honest. Thanks for saying out loud what so many of us feel and have felt and maybe aren't as comfortable to say out loud.

Let's look at some things to consider for this moment.

You have written in as a supervisor of six months. I've had people come to me with very similar thoughts and feelings that have been doing this for 10 years or even longer.

The goal is to be more transparent and open about this so that it's not such a shock to everybody that when they become a supervisor, it's not like this slap in the face of like wait, what is this thing? And I feel terrible. My confidence is shot because I was chosen



to do this job ostensibly because I'm really good at what I do and all of a sudden I don't feel good at what I do. I am not good at what I do. And I do not know how to get any better.

For many of you it might be the first time you have that feeling of being a failure. Or a feeling of simply not knowing how to make things better.

That is why we are here.

We're trying to let people know the good, the bad, the ugly of what this experience is like and helping people prepare mentally, prepare emotionally, prepare their skills.

So when they made that transition, even though it will still be hard for most of us, at least it's not so shocking. At least we're not so blindsided to say, Oh, I thought this would be easy. I was not prepared for this.

First and foremost as with anything that appears to be an assumption- and in this case, it does appear to be a bit of an assumption is challenging that assumption.

You may have heard this line. I still try to embrace it. It is not easy for me. That you don't have to believe everything you think.

A lot of times when thoughts pop into our heads, when feelings pop into our bodies, we accept them as true. I think this thing and now not only do I think it, I'm sure of it. And that gets attached to a feeling. So, if we think we're not doing a very good job for many of us that comes along with a feeling of disappointment, perhaps guilt maybe a loss of some self-confidence.

I have no doubt that you and all of us have lots of room for growth.

It's not to say and I'm not going to say I'm sure you're doing just fine like your supervisor did. I am sure everything's perfect. I am sure you have nothing to worry about.

No, we need to continue to acknowledge where we need to grow and if you've only been doing this for six months, I am almost positive that you're not that great at it yet.

That is part of managing expectations. (No pun intended.) Maybe pun sort of intended.

It is a new role. It is not a new skill. It is a combination of these really complex skills that most of us aren't trained on, aren't coached on. We're thrown into it and all of a sudden we're expected to do these really difficult things that we've never had to do before.

I am positive that you're not that great at it yet. None of us is.

Having said that your perception of how you're performing sounds like based on what we know a perception.



Find out what's true.

Yes, you will undoubtedly have lots of things you need to work on but you might not. Your assumption might not be in line with what's actually true with what your team is experiencing, with what your team is seeing and knowing that you need to improve on.

Do not believe everything you think.

Listen to your intuition. Listen to what you are experiencing.

And also challenge it.

To that end, how can you get a sense of how you're doing?

In almost every workshop and training that I do, I have this same slide- I recycle a lot of my slides actually not out of laziness. Believe me these workshops take so long to prepare.

And may I interject for a moment?

I've been at this for a while and before I started my business while I'm doing my business and continuing until today, I also have been a teacher for many, many years. Being in front of people and trying to help them grow is something I've done literally for decades.

Doesn't mean I am perfect by any means, doesn't mean that I don't have a long way to go.

Some things are certainly easier now than when I started 20 plus years ago.

Still I get the comment of when people ask me to come in and do a training and they quote me something that is not a rate I would do said training for and inevitably they say, well it's only an hour.

It used to make me a little hot. Now I kind of laugh about it because of course, it is not just an hour.

Any skill that we hone that we've been doing for 20 years doesn't take an hour. It takes 20 years to get there. That is an aside.

So I'm not putting these slides into multiple presentations to cut corners. I am doing so because there are a lot of central themes to growing as a supervisor and to being successful at it.

One of them is this question I ask almost more than any other question when I'm working with folks, which is, how do you know?



That first question, what are you basing your conclusions on? How do you know? How do you know that is true?

The question I inevitably ask after that is how can you know?

Where are you getting your information from at this moment and where can you get more information or perhaps more accurate information?

So my question to you and to all of us when it comes to a role as a supervisor is, how can you know how you're doing?

The slide I'm referring to is- how do I describe it? I don't know. It's a visual but...a great way to describe it, right? But basically what it says is there's these five main ways that we enrich our knowledge and understanding. Let's see if I can remember them all.

The first is our own self-reflection and really being honest with ourselves and trying to understand what's going on.

The next one is using some type of measurement. What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know when we accomplish it?

The third is these ongoing conversations that we have with folks when it comes to supervisory stuff. The vast majority of this should come from the people that you're supervising because they know best, and they know exclusively what it's like to be supervised by you. Certainly, you can also have conversations with colleagues and your own supervisor. But the majority of that valuable information is going to come from the people who are experiencing it.

The next one is experience. Just like I was a little bit on my soapbox about I have been doing this all these years. There's something to be said for experience. There's something to be said for having gone through something and learned and grown and gotten those bruises so to speak and picking ourselves up and coming back at it.

The last one is what does the data and research world out there tell us about how to become better at this thing?

Those are the five: self-reflection, assessing, conversations, experience, and the data and research

Within those really really big five areas, there's a lot of different ways to do it. There are a lot of ways to self-reflect. Some people have journals. Some people go for walks. Some people have a sheet they fill out at the end of the day. Some people I do not know. There are lots of different ways to do it.

The assessments you use to determine your baseline determine your growth. These can be surveys. They can be measurements of something like staff retention, something like staff reaching goals.





How are you going to measure the growth that you're experiencing?

The conversations that you have, how frequently, what topics, what are you doing with the information that people share with you?

Your own experiences which is the balance. We come back to that theme of balance all the time between taking what you have already experienced to inform how you lead going forward and also not assuming that just because you have experienced it before that it's going to be the same thing when you experience it again.

Lastly with research and data. This is also a little bit trickier than it might seem at first. It would be great if there was one simple place to go that says here's what the data say. Here's how you do this thing. There's a lot of research out there that can guide us. There's often research that contradicts itself or there's a lot of research that says it depends.

So, of those five ways each of them has their pros, each of them has their challenges. Really the best conglomerate of information that you can get is doing a little bit of all five, looking at the issue from all five of those areas that can give you much more insight than just the self-reflection alone.

Self-reflection is a piece of that. It is one of the five, but it cannot be the only one. No matter how self-aware you are, you cannot experience you outside of yourself. You need to tap into those other areas as well.

How are you going to do that? That is a really important question for you. It is a really important question for the rest of you. No matter what it is you're working on as a supervisor, how are you ensuring that you're getting the clearest best picture of what's really happening?

Million-dollar question. What does it mean to be doing well as a supervisor?

How do you know when you're doing it well?

What does it feel like to do it well?

Does it mean that every day there has to be some success? Could you still be considered doing it well, if one day is a complete disaster?

What are you basing well on?

What are your own expectations of how you are performing as a supervisor? What is your own supervisor's expectation of what you should be doing as a supervisor?

What is your team's expectation of what you should be doing as a supervisor?



That is complicated in its own right. It has made further complicated by the fact that every person you ever supervised is going to want a different version of you as a supervisor.

Sometimes that version is only slightly different. Sometimes that version is really really different. How can you meet the needs of every one of the people on your team so that each of them says yes, they are doing a great job as a supervisor.

How are you going to know for yourself? How are you going to know to satisfy what your own supervisor needs from you? How are you going to know from your staff?

There are lots of ways to do this. Again nothing we ever talk about has the, this is the one thing, right?

Those ongoing conversations may be some version of an assessment for you to use. But really think about this and continue to think about it. What does it mean to be an effective supervisor and how will you know when you are and when you're not?

I'm going to put these two questions together because they are so linked.

Everything we talk about is linked and if we stretch it far enough, right?

But this confidence and skills really go hand in hand. As we build our skills it tends to at the same time increase our confidence. As we increase our confidence, that tends to give us what we need to admit where we need support, to admit where we need to grow, to admit and invest in what we need to become that successful supervisor we want to be. Is it a chicken and an egg sort of situation? Which one do I work on first? Is it my confidence and then I can start building skills or is it skills and then I start building my confidence?

Before either of those I want to go back to what I said when we first started today.

Which is understanding you are not alone. Understanding you are not a failure. Understanding if you're not doing a great job, having the confidence to admit that to yourself, to your own supervisor in a way that doesn't undermine you to your staff as well.

The confidence that you need to work on is that you know you can get there. Not that you'll ever be a hundred percent perfect at it. Not that you'll ever reach some finish line. Not that you won't still have days that are really really hard and days that you probably will mess up. Probably multiple days.

The confidence needs to come from not in this elusive imaginary perfection. But instead of saying I am going to keep at it. I know that I can get better. I know that I can do this.

As you are building that confidence as you're reminding yourself how normal it is for this to be a challenge and how you do have every capability to continue getting better at



it.

At the same time building up those skills, building up the that experience. I guess we can't consider experience a skill. I don't know- we tend to put it in its own category.

But the learning, the logistics of a skill- learning how to give feedback, learning how to solicit feedback, learning how to facilitate a team meeting, learning how to delegate. These are certainly skills that you can, should, have to develop as a supervisor.

The experience is such a part of it, too. The experience is so closely connected to that confidence.

I share this story a lot. I am going to share it again.

When I was first a supervisor and I had such a hard time, I avoided difficult conversations until it was too late. Eventually, I had my first really difficult conversation as a supervisor. And when I tell you I was so uncomfortable, I was so anxious. I was so avoidant. I would stand in front of my mirror at night literally practicing the conversation and practicing how this staff might respond. And how would I respond if they responded this way- like this horrible Choose Your Own Adventure.

I talked to friends and family and just built it up to be such a horrible thing. I got through it. It was pretty horrible. I got through it and throughout my career until now I continue to have really challenging conversations. I've never gotten to the point where I look forward to them. I've never gotten to the point where they don't feel at the very least unpleasant. But compared to where I was 20 years ago, it's like night and day.

I don't wait months and months to have these conversations. I don't shiver in front of my mirror. I don't call 14 people and ask the same question over and over and over again. It gets easier over time. You might never consider it easy, but it gets easier over time.

These skills that you are working on developing- having these difficult conversations, maybe letting someone go, telling someone they didn't get a promotion, addressing somebody's poor performance.

All of these things that are really hard- these are skills. And over time you develop that experience so you are better at it and that it isn't as horrible as it is in the beginning. That it gets a little bit more comfortable, a little bit more routine, a little bit less horrible for you.

Maybe you will get to the point where they don't bother you at all. I am not there yet, but maybe someday.

Don't wait until you have these skills to a level that you feel is where they need to be before you feel confident.





Be confident in yourself. Trust yourself. Be honest.

Another balance here- be honest with what you are not doing well. Be comfortable to admit that. And do not get stuck there.

Yes, I am six months in. I am not doing a very good job. I know I can do a very good job. I'm just not sure how to go about that.

We're so glad you found us here in the Supervisors Circle.

That is exactly why we are here.

There is not a step one check step two check step three check. Everybody's a little bit different. But you are doing the right things. You are reaching out for support. You are being honest about where you're struggling. You are seeking advice to get better.

This is what's going to make you an effective supervisor.

This is what's going to build your confidence and your skills and your experience.

You might not be a great supervisor right now. But you have shown that you have everything you need to get there. We will continue to support you, to encourage you, to challenge you as we work on getting there, too.

I hope that was helpful.

It was helpful to me. Sometimes the things I say are good reminders that I need to hear too. Sometimes every once in a while something pops into my brain and out of my mouth that I have not heard or thought before.

Is that how it works? Well?

I hope this was valuable for you, too.

If you'd like your own troubleshoot, you're welcome to come on here live, you are welcome to submit and you can do that through email or through the Forum. We'll be happy to talk about your trouble as well. And of course after this, I'm going to post in the Forum this very same question that we just read here. Come Selena, I said last time I was going to time her because she always comes like 90 seconds after we start and of course she likes to prove me wrong. That is how cats do right.

So please I encourage you to jump in the forum as well. If you have some additional thoughts or advice encouragement to share. This is an ongoing learning process for all of us, and I am so grateful to be doing it together.