Hello, and welcome to another session of troubleshooting where we meet here in the Supervisors Circle to talk about some challenges that you are having as supervisors.

You are welcome to share your own trouble by either coming on here live or submitting your trouble to the group. You can come on here to listen to other people's troubles and share your encouragement, advice, suggestions, or simply listen. You can listen after the fact. You can go into the forum and share your thoughts there. So, lots of opportunities to participate.

And without further ado, let's check out today's trouble.

I've been a manager for a while, but for the first time, I am managing people who manage other people. What's the best way for me to support them? And what is my role to people they directly manage?

So, if we're picturing an organizational chart, the step down is the person or people you manage. And then the step further down is the people they manage. So, your sort of grandchildren, your grand supervisees, if you will, is what this question is asking.

In some cases, you may have several layers depending on your career path.

You may already be in this position; you may never get to this position. We know that everyone's situation is a little bit different, but for lots of you out there, you do get to a point where not only are you managing people, but you start managing people who manage other people.

For the person who submitted today, the question becomes, what is my role in managing people who manage other people? Then what is my role or responsibility to the people that they then manage?

This might get a little clunky as we're describing it, but we're going to do the best we can as we always do. Some questions to consider as we examine this issue.

The first place to start always is self-reflection. We always have to remember not to stop there.

Self-reflection is a part of any growth process. Where we need to be careful is that there are limitations to self-reflection always too. We always want to be careful to remind ourselves and not get stuck in the fact that our experiences can be really helpful in informing other people's experiences and helping other people and helping us understand other people.

And we also need to recognize that they're limited because our experiences are just that. Our experiences are our own experiences. Sometimes what worked for us is exactly what's going to work for other people. Sometimes what works for us will help other people and work for them in limited ways or partial ways.

Sometimes what worked for us is not going to work for other people at all. It's important to remember that it's a great place to start and it's a terrible place to stay.

Let's start there. Let's not stay there.

What worked for you when you were a manager? What worked for you when your supervisor was helping you? Hopefully, although in a lot of cases we know we had managers who didn't help us out very much, but what did work for you? It's a great place to start because sharing those suggestions, sharing those lessons learned with the people you supervise, to then pass on to the people that they supervise.

I'm going to try hard not to overuse this metaphor or analogy or parallel of, of the grandchildren, if you will, but it's a good one, right? Because there are a lot of parallels here, which is to say if there was a particular, course that you took, or a book that you read, or a group that you joined, or a conference you attended, or any of those many ways you've gone about improving yourself as a manager, a certain online community such as the Supervisors Circle that you joined, for example, that was helpful to your growth as a, as a supervisor or manager and you suggest that to others.

Let's say for example, they test it out and it's not so helpful to them. That's unfortunate. It's also not a complete waste.

I was just having this conversation with, I've been working with someone to help me out and the work that I'm doing on some of the marketing things I've been working on, and some of the things quote unquote work, and some of them don't work as well as others, although I, I never quite know exactly what we mean when we say they work and they don't. The conversation we were having was, I know it's a little cliche, but to say figuring out what doesn't work gets us closer to what we know does work. I know it.

That felt even a little like icky saying it, because it is so cliche, but it doesn't make it any less true.

So, when you're sharing these things that worked for you and you pass them along and the person says, ah, yeah, I read the book, it didn't do a ton for me. Or like, ah, it was okay. And for you it was like life changing. It really made you into this wonderful supervisor you are today, but for them it was just kind of like, eh, it, you know, take it, or leave it. That can feel disappointing, or it can feel like you failed them, or it was a waste of their time or that you wasted their time. But in reality, it's also like, okay, so now I know that wasn't helpful, so maybe I can shift gears a little bit and think that's not their kind of book, or that might not be the style of what resonates with them.

So, I'm going to suggest something that's a totally different type of thing or has a different language or voice and maybe this is what really resonates with them, right? I don't want you to think that it is a complete waste. Like, yeah, it would've been better if it was just as valuable to them as it was to you. If you really nailed it on that first suggestion, it doesn't always work so smoothly. So, it is a good place to start.

Go back and think about what really worked for you, what was really valuable to you. Share some of those things. See what works for them and encourage them to do the same, to think about what really worked for them.

What are some lessons learned and how they pass the those on to the people they're supervising. Also, we need to be cautious not just in terms of resources, but also in those personal experiences.

Sometimes we, not overshare, but sometimes we push our experiences on other people in a way that we're intending to be helpful but doesn't really give them the space to experience for themselves either. And this, this isn't a great analogy, but I'm going to share it anyway, which is when I was starting my career as a teacher, and I remember a lot of other teachers looking at my class roll and saying like, oh, you have such and such student. Well, let me tell you about such and such student. And that really can cloud your experience with the student because now you have this preconception of, oh, I have to act and prepare a certain way because now I have this idea of what this student is all about.

So, it's difficult.

Here's like balancing act 1,070, which is you don't want them to unnecessarily experience negative, harmful things just to learn the lesson. And you also don't want to prevent them from doing things that might have a very different outcome for them.

Just because something was negative for you doesn't mean it will be for them too. See how this gets really sticky?

So if you're trying to prevent them from having a similar negative experience you did, so in this example, it might not be a student, we're not talking about a school, but you might say, oh, you know, you don't really want to be on the committee with this guy because, or you don't really want to, facilitate, uh, this meeting with this guy or be a project leader with this person because... in an attempt to prevent a similar negative thing that you experienced, but maybe they wouldn't have had that negative experience, and in fact, maybe you're even preventing them from quite a wonderful experience, maybe their outcome would've been totally different than yours.

So, you have to be careful and balance sharing really factual, important things. They need to know all the policies and procedures and things like that, and where you are using those coaching skills to help them make good decisions about what they're saying yes to and what they're saying no to and how they're going about who they're choosing to be on project teams with and whatnot.

Complicated, right?

This is what learning is. It is really figuring out what's best for you.

It was interesting when, you know, I've taught my whole life, I'm still teaching now and I

teach at the university level and the big joke that goes around a lot, you can see a lot of memes and things about group projects and how many people complain about group projects and how everyone seems to think they're the one who does all the work and everybody else is the, is the slacker, right?

So, I wonder how that can be logistically possible. But anyway, there was a big project that one of my classes was required to do through my department. And I said, you know, I don't want to be the one that requires it to be a group project because I know so many people talk about how much they hate group projects, and I am going to give my students that autonomy to say, if you want to do this as a group project, you can choose to do so and you can choose the members of your team. And if you prefer to do it on your own, you have that option as well. I was fully prepared to have a class full of students who chose to do it by themselves because it's such a common joke and ongoing comment of how much people hate group projects.

Sure enough, I'm telling you, I am the world's worst assumer. Like I get it wrong every time. Sure enough, just about half of my students chose to do it in groups, and about half my students chose to do it by themselves. I'm grateful I gave the option because people got to self-select how they wanted to do it. And if I had not given the option, then the folks who benefited from the option of doing it as a group weren't as well served as they were having the option to do it as a group.

So really think about balancing when you're advising and telling, which is what we tend to do quite a bit. We do it coming from a good place, but it often results in not a great result. So, we need to not always excuse it away that it's coming from a good place, and we need to take a step back and try to get ahead of that and dig a little deeper and say, what am I projecting or pushing on this person?

Where can I really refrain from advice or telling?

Where can I help them come up with a decision that will work best for them?

The next thing, this maybe should have been number one, but so it is, what is required in their growth and development and what is optional? At the organizational level, perhaps within your profession or your field, there are certain things that people have to do, have to have certain training, certifications, continuing education, those sorts of things that you need to stay on top of. One thing that is really nice is finding ways for your staff to stay on top of that rather than you having to stay on top of that.

The first time I was managing folks, it was two people, so things that we had to stay on top of in our field, it wasn't that big of a deal for me to do it because it was two people. I had a little self-made Excel spreadsheet, and it was easy for me to put things on my calendar, and it wasn't so much to keep track of. In my next position after that when it jumped to 10 people and then added a couple of interns and then added a couple of volunteers, it did become really unwieldy even though I consider myself to be really organized and I had spreadsheets and calendars and reminders. It was so much keeping track of certifications and fingerprints and background checks and all these things that

needed to be renewed and updated and turned in. Some things were once a year, some things were once every two years, some things were every six months. And there were so many people. As a director, I had to make sure that they were done. But I also had an opportunity to say, yes, I can be the final overseer of this, but I don't need to be the one who's micromanaging this either. I can pass this on to my staff to make sure they're responsible for staying on top of this and I can be the final overseer to make sure that it's been done.

Make sure you are on top of what needs to be required of your staff and that they have agency overstaying on top of that and that you also are staying on top of it to make sure that it gets done. Then what is optional and recommended and helpful and what does your staff care about in terms of growing and learning and that that is constant.

That there's an expectation and a culture that every year it is an ongoing check-in of new goals and that those goals set up your conversations throughout the year and they inform your one-on-ones and what you're tracking.

If you have some sort of version of a performance evaluation, that all of those things are tied into supporting your team's growth and development. You are the model for this, that you're also investing in your own growth and development that your staff see you getting trained and coached and going to conferences and being part of mastermind groups and all the ways you're growing and developing yourself, that you're celebrating your successes and, all these things that you are giving and offering to your staff that you're also participating in them as well.

This is the big one, and this one pertains to that second layer, your grand supervisee if you will. What is your role with the person being supervised by the person you are supervising?

Yet another balance.

What this is 1070, what, what did I say before? 72, 73, wherever we are.

Because you do need to make yourself accessible. The dream, the ideal situation is you have a staff filled with direct reports who are wonderful supervisors and that you never have to implement your role and your position as the not intermediary. I guess the person that that grand supervisee goes to. I know now I'm fumbling, let me start again. So, in a perfect world, all your direct reports are great supervisors and the people they supervise never have to go to you to report about something their supervisors are doing that is unethical or illegal. That's the hope and dream.

In reality, things like that happen all the time. And there needs to be an explicit opportunity for people to know who they can go to when their supervisor is the one that they need to report.

In most cases, it needs to be clear the chain of command, if you will, ugh, as a phrase, right?

In most cases we want people to go to their direct supervisor. We don't want people going five levels up because the printer's out of paper, right?

Like there's a reason that there are levels so that things can flow, and things can get accomplished without going too high up that organizational chart for things that people that high up do not need to be the ones to respond to.

At the same time, there are situations that people higher up that chart need to be made aware of. So yes, the first person people should be going to for most things is their direct supervisor and people need to know if it is the direct supervisor who's the problem. They need to know that there's somewhere else for them to go. That needs to be you and HR. Perhaps it's someone even above you, however you're structured. But they do need to know, yes, not just that they CAN, but they SHOULD report it elsewhere. Who do they go to for that?

That's when they are not, overstepping and they need to know that you're accessible. That is really vital so that you are not blindsided and that these egregious things are not being kept secret, that they're not persisting, that people are not continuing to be harmed because you don't know what's going on with your own team. That's really, really important.

Even though it's hard to articulate, these are things that need to be said out loud from the absolute jump like during orientation.

You need to say this to the people that you directly supervise to your direct reports when you are orienting them and welcoming them and telling them who they need to go to for what, you need to make it explicit that if they have an issue with you, if they think that you are doing something that is illegal or unethical that they don't feel comfortable talking to you about, they go to HR and / or your direct supervisor.

It might not feel comfortable to say out loud, but one, it establishes trust. And two, you are also protecting yourself and them so that people know that you are upholding the values you are undoubtedly saying are important to you and your team and the organization. So, people understand that there are ways to address when something isn't going right.

A lot of organizations do what they call skip meetings, which means, at some regular interval, once a month, once a quarter, once a year, however they set it up, you meet with the person above your direct supervisor, meaning you sort of skip that level on the chart and you meet with the person directly above them.

You might decide that that's something you want to implement. It might make sense for your organization the way that you're structured logistically set up. It might not, depending on the number of layers and the departments and how that all shakes out.

Where you want to balance this is you want to, have a relationship with everybody on your team, and you don't want it to seem like you are overstepping the supervisory

relationship of the supervisor and the person they are supervising.

You want to be cautious that your team knows one another and that there is a positive working relationship, that people feel comfortable talking to one another, that if something's going on that can't be addressed directly with their supervisor, that there is a path for them to take.

Also, that they're not constantly skipping their supervisor just to go to someone above them because it's more expedient or because they feel like you're buddy buddy and you're going to get it done. Preserving the sanctity, if you will, of the supervisor's role.

You want to be really careful not to overstep and make sure that the supervisor is the person that the supervisee is going to for most of what they need.

So, what do you think, if you're someone who supervises people, who supervise other people, what has your experience been like? What has worked for you?

What hasn't worked for you?

What are some lessons you've learned along the way that might be helpful to this person to share or might not work for this person, but they can give it a try, or they can learn something that doesn't work for them, which can be helpful as well? Share your thoughts.

We'll post this in the forum after, you can share your thoughts there as well.

I hope this was valuable to you. This can be really tricky at times.

It's also really important because depending on how big your organization is, sometimes the bigger it gets, the more complicated it gets. Sometimes when your organization is really small, it gets complicated because the relationships get really close and intimate, and you get to know everybody really well. That can complicate things. These are the reasons we talk about this.

The more that we have opportunity to work through these issues, the stronger we get as supervisors, which is why we're here.

If you would like to shoot your trouble with us here in our troubleshooting sessions, please feel free to reach out. You can come on here live or email your situation and we'll talk about it here.

Thanks so much for being here today and we'll see you next time.