Recommended Practices and Strategies for Supervisors

Starting Off on the Right Foot

A. Have a system for orientation to the workplace—things you wouldn't learn in the official orientation
- Orient new employees and transfers from within the organization
- Make sure new hires are assigned a buddy; buddies help new employees understand the organization's culture, including social activities, traditions around significant life events, and more.
- Orient new hires and transfers as to policies and expectations relevant to the SSHS project (e.g, work hours, working from home, flex time, etc.)
- Discuss your organization's performance review system

B. Be clear about each person's role
- Clearly define responsibilities when hired
- Be clear about reporting lines and collaborative relationships, including boundaries for work roles; but flexible enough to adapt these as needed
- If a supervisee has time committed to other projects, respect this and help supervisee manage their multiple priorities
- Take special note of the special situation of telecommuters, and how to connect them best when out of the office and during on site time
- Maintain responsibility for guiding and training new hires
- Clarify under what circumstances employees would be contacted outside of regular working hours, and how that contact would happen
- Resource: the Project Directors' Guide has job description templates: http://

C. Explain the overall project and how each staff member fits in
- Convey the big picture including essential elements of the project, its end goals, funder needs and priorities, in order to provide a context for required tasks, why we are doing particular tasks, why they are important, and what are others on the project doing
- Provide regular/predictable updates as project matures and tasks develop
- Autonomy vs. authority: as appropriate, allow for autonomy. To eliminate surprises and decrease misunderstandings, describe the parameters that you will use for decision-making

Maintaining Effective Working Relationships

A. Be available on a regular basis
- Have an agreed upon time that is appropriate for supervisor and supervisee to consult about work progress
- Have a system or protocol for access/availability of the supervisor on ad hoc or emergency basis
- If the supervisor has to cancel a meeting, onus is on them to reschedule

B. Promote honest and ongoing communication about performance: Seek input and feedback *from* staff and provide honest and timely feedback *to* staff
- Recognize that open communication requires trust, respect, and improves over time; and that honest feedback promotes employee growth
- Give immediate feedback on areas of improvement; don't just wait for performance reviews. Use a positive frame: "The next time, why don't you try this?"
- After a key task is completed, ask "Looking back, is there anything else I could have provided to you ahead of time?"
- Take the initiative to ask questions about how to support employees at their 3-month review, other performance reviews, or check in meetings
- Welcome differences in perspectives, don't avoid conflict when it occurs, and manage it for positive outcomes
- Make it clear what options supervisees have if they are not satisfied with the supervision they are receiving

C. Use Performance Review process effectively
- Talk about the performance review process from the start
- Feedback from colleagues should inform the review; colleague feedback should not be identifiable
- When reviewing someone who supervises, use this document to assess performance
- Know your organization's timelines and protocols for employee reviews

Nurturing Excellence

A. Provide support/focus on professional development
- Bring out the best in people by setting high standards and supporting staff with training and resources to do their jobs well
- Know your staff; be familiar with their resumes, their strengths, and their professional goals
- Help staff develop and pursue short and long term professional development goals within the context of appropriate work for project or within center/division, and within their careers; consider work schedule, and cost/benefit of training opportunities, when discussing professional development opportunities
- Be familiar with your organization's policies around reimbursement for professional growth opportunities

Skills and Characteristics of Effective Supervisors

Connects well interpersonally
- Creates and communicates a version of an 'open door' policy, so staff know how and when they can communicate
- Is aware and considerate of events in other people's lives which may affect their emotional state, cause distraction, stress, etc. and tries to strike a balance between support and focus on work
- Is able to listen to and communicate well with all supervisees
- Is equitably responsive to supervisees' needs and requests
- Make an effort to understand employee's cultural background and take it into consideration

Fosters continuous improvement
- Creates an environment of continuous improvement through ongoing feedback
- When reviewing challenges and mistakes, considers work factors first, rather than immediately blaming individuals
- Knows how to differentiate between issues related to person/project
- Uses excellent communication skills to provide honest feedback
- Addresses problems and conflict directly

Creates an environment of trust and respect
- Creates a safe environment where staff feels respected, listened to, and trusted
- Is consistent. If the staff knows what to expect, it will build their trust
- Values staff input while being clear about how decisions will get made
- Is not rigid; is open to changing his (her) mind
- Is respectful of supervisee's privacy

Pays attention to differences in style
- Is aware of his (her) own style and styles of all supervisees. Respects and values various personality styles and approaches
- Has a flexible management style that responds to differences in supervisees
- In particular, is aware of different comfort levels with personal disclosure