

SIGMA Assessment Systems

Talent Development

Handbook for New Supervisors



How to Use Leadership Assessments to Build an Effective Team

If you are reading this handbook, you've likely been promoted to the role of a supervisor for the first time. Congratulations! Moving from task-based to managerial work is one of the biggest leaps you will make in your career, and it requires a significant shift in how roles and responsibilities are approached. At SIGMA Assessment Systems Inc., our expert consultants have developed this handbook to guide you through this transition and provide you with the essential skills and knowledge you need to succeed in your new role.

What's Inside?

This handbook provides a comprehensive guide for first-time supervisors. It explains the importance of training new supervisors and outlines the general responsibilities of the role. Additionally, it touches on common misconceptions and pitfalls for new supervisors. The majority of this handbook is dedicated to teaching you how to use leadership assessments to build an effective, motivated, and loyal team. By utilizing leadership assessments, you can excel in your role as a first-time supervisor and ensure that your team is performing at its best.

Why Read this Handbook?

"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." — Abraham Lincoln

The Need for Training

Employees who are promoted to a supervisory role are usually selected due to their outstanding performance. However, supervisory work differs significantly from task-based work. For example, a machine operator at a manufacturing plant may have exceptional technical skills and attention to detail, but they may lack experience in facilitating teamwork or setting strategic goals. Therefore, training is essential for new supervisors to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their role and contribute to organizational success. By bridging the gap between technical and managerial work, organizations can set new supervisors and their direct reports up to achieve their full potential.

The Lack of Training

A recent study highlighted a profound gap in management education. Shockingly, no training was provided to 58% of managers before they embarked on their roles.¹ As a result, it's no surprise that 60% of new managers fail within the first 24 months in their new role.² At SIGMA, we believe that proper training and support can help new managers succeed and make a positive impact on their organizations. Our consultants have developed this handbook to guide you through your new role and prepare you for success. We will start by examining the role of a supervisor. This will help you better manage expectations and understand what it takes to perform well in your new position.

The Role of a Supervisor

Understanding your responsibilities is one of the most important factors in transitioning successfully to the role of supervisor. Many supervisors and managers fail in their new positions, not because they are incapable of success, but because they work toward the wrong goals. To ensure a smooth transition into your new role, it's important to understand what is expected of you within the context of your team and organization. Below is a simple list of the common responsibilities and limitations that supervisors often face. While your specific position may differ, this list can serve as a guide to facilitate conversations around expectations with your managers and direct reports.

Supervisors ARE NOT responsible for:

- ✗ Handling technical tasks that can be completed by their team.
- ✗ Deciding how direct reports spend every minute of their day.
- ✗ Managing co-worker relationships, except when serious conflict resolution is required.
- ✗ Controlling how individuals and teams accomplish tasks.
- ✗ Preventing mistakes from happening to such an extent that it stifles innovation.

Supervisors ARE responsible for:

- ✓ **Setting SMART goals.** It is the job of the supervisor to cast a vision for their team. This vision must be made tangible with specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound goals.
- ✓ **Creating short-term strategic plans.** In addition to creating SMART goals, supervisors are responsible for creating short-term strategic plans to help direct reports accomplish those goals. Of course, individuals are responsible for creating their own plan for accomplishing daily tasks, but supervisors can create a culture of strategic goal accomplishment that will cascade to the work of individual team members.
- ✓ **Motivating their team.** Supervisors are also responsible for motivating their team to accomplish goals. Individuals work far more efficiently and effectively when they feel personally invested in the purpose of their tasks.
- ✓ **Communicating priorities.** Supervisors are responsible for communicating priorities so that direct reports can decide how to budget their time accordingly.
- ✓ **Emphasizing excellence.** While each employee is responsible for the quality of their own work, supervisors are responsible for the performance of their team. That's why it is important for supervisors to encourage their team to strive for excellence as a means of quality assurance.

- ✓ **Providing feedback.** One of the ways in which supervisors can emphasize excellence is by regularly reviewing the work of their direct reports and providing feedback on what was done well and areas that have room for improvement. This will create a culture of talent development.
- ✓ **Facilitating teamwork.** Because supervisors are responsible for the performance of their team, they are also responsible for facilitating collaboration among team members. This does not mean that supervisors need to schedule and oversee every group meeting, but they do need to encourage group work where beneficial.
- ✓ **Managing up.** Just as most employees report to a supervisor, supervisors also report to someone within the organizational hierarchy. Supervisors may be overseen by managers, department heads, vice presidents, or any other senior role. It's essential for supervisors to be able to operate upward by communicating effectively with senior management and sharing necessary information in a useful and comprehensible manner.

Common Pitfalls for New Supervisors

With a better grasp of the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, you should now have a clearer understanding of how to lead your team effectively. However, there are still a few common pitfalls that new supervisors often encounter. Be sure to keep an eye out for the following challenges and distractions so that you can maintain a composed mindset as you enter your new role.

1. **Being liked by your team.** When beginning a new supervisory role, many individuals strive to make a positive first impression and win over their team's approval. While this objective is not entirely misguided, it can lead to some degree of insincerity and manipulation. Ultimately, you cannot dictate whether or not your team members like you. Instead of focusing on gaining their admiration, prioritize putting forth genuine effort and providing supportive leadership. By demonstrating your dedication to their well-being, you are more likely earn their respect and trust, which are critical to effective management.
2. **Servant leadership.** New supervisors may fall into the trap of believing that their team exists to serve them. However, the opposite is true: a supervisor's purpose is to serve their team. While the team is responsible for the frontline work, supervisors operate in the background, supporting and enabling their team members' success. As you begin your new role, it is crucial to acknowledge that your team's accomplishments are not your own. Rather than seeking recognition, you should focus on crediting your team for their achievements and taking responsibility for missteps that occur under your supervision. By adopting a service-oriented mindset and demonstrating accountability, you will foster a positive and productive environment for your team to thrive in.

- 3. Rules and regulations.** Most supervisors are, to some degree, responsible for creating rules for their team. The challenge here is to use rules as a means of gaining control over performance. New supervisors may feel uneasy about being held responsible for their team's mistakes, and as a result, may rely excessively on rules and regulations to minimize the potential for failures. However, in doing so, they inadvertently strip away their team's autonomy, hindering their ability to exercise creativity and innovation. While rules can serve a valuable purpose in mitigating risk, an over-reliance on them can stifle growth and development within the team. As a supervisor, it is essential to strike a balance between managing risk and empowering your team to take ownership of their work. By fostering a culture of trust and accountability, you can create an environment in which your team members feel comfortable taking calculated risks and pushing boundaries, ultimately driving progress and success for your organization.

Excessive rules and regulations also prevent teams from operating at full capacity. Instead of using boundaries to control the output of your team, use boundaries to guide input. Create routines that establish a framework for your team's success. Establish realistic expectations and set healthy limits that enable your team members to thrive without feeling micromanaged. Demonstrate your trust in their capabilities by granting them autonomy over their work. While this approach may result in some mistakes, it will ultimately yield a more engaged and dedicated team, committed to growing their skills and abilities under your leadership. By prioritizing guidance over control, you can foster a positive and productive work environment that promotes innovation and achievement.

- 4. Remembering your responsibilities.** One of the greatest challenges new supervisors encounter is the desire to maintain the same level of productivity they had in their previous role. Individuals in management are no longer responsible for the technical tasks they are used to performing. Rather than executing those tasks themselves, they are now accountable for empowering others to accomplish those tasks while overseeing their productivity. For new supervisors, making this transition can be particularly challenging, especially if their performance evaluations were previously based on their individual productivity in these technical tasks over a period of months or years. Therefore, it is important for new supervisors to remember their responsibilities. Although you are still responsible for delivering results, your role as a supervisor involves delegating tasks to your team and ensuring they have the necessary resources to accomplish them efficiently. As the leader, you are held accountable for the team's overall performance, rather than solely for your individual output. By effectively deploying your team's skills and expertise, you can achieve the best optimal outcomes for your organization while fostering a positive and productive work environment.
- 5. Managing in both directions.** New supervisors can quickly become near-sighted in their management of their team and forget that they are also responsible for managing up. Supervisors must understand what information needs to be shared with senior management, and how to best communicate that information in a way that it can be easily understood and applied.
- 6. Maintaining friendships.** A difficult dilemma that new supervisors may face is how to navigate workplace friendships, particularly when one friend is promoted to a supervisor position over another. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to handling this issue, it is essential to acknowledge that relationships will inevitably evolve as a result of the change in roles. Ignoring

these changes can lead to confusion and discomfort among colleagues. To sidestep potential misunderstandings, it's important to openly acknowledge the change in workplace roles and engage in a dialogue about how to sustain the friendship, while acknowledging and respecting the new responsibilities and expectations associated with the supervisory role.

- 7. Prioritizing people.** Although supervisors are ultimately accountable for their team's productivity, they also bear responsibility for their team members' personal and professional growth. Projects should never be prioritized over people. As a supervisor, it is crucial to prioritize the development of each individual on your team by connecting with them regularly and providing them with the support they need to advance in their career. Not only does this demonstrate your commitment to their well-being, but it also drives better performance and decreases turnover rates. By investing in your team members' success, you can cultivate a work environment that values people as much as it does results, resulting in greater job satisfaction and employee retention.

Getting Started as a New Supervisor

"The scariest moment is always just before you start." — Stephen King

While the basic definition of supervision is observation, the role of a supervisor extends beyond mere monitoring to include direction and execution. As a new supervisor, getting started on these responsibilities can be challenging. To support your development in this critical role, our team of consultants has designed a suite of leadership resources aimed at providing you with a head start in managing your team effectively. These materials draw on SIGMA's flagship leadership assessment, the [Leadership Skills Profile – Revised™ \(LSP-R\)](#). In the pages ahead, we will introduce you to the LSP-R™ and demonstrate how new supervisors can leverage this assessment to enhance their team's performance.

What is the LSP-R?

The LSP-R is a scientifically-valid assessment that evaluates employee potential on [50 leadership competencies](#). These competencies are sorted into four broad categories: cognitive leadership skills, interpersonal leadership skills, senior leadership skills, and personal leadership qualities.

The LSP-R can be completed online in only 25 minutes, and test-takers receive a Focus Report that summarizes their scores immediately upon completion (see sample report [here](#)). The LSP-R's Focus Report guides test-takers through their results, including strengths and developmental opportunities. These development opportunities do not necessarily indicate a lack of ability; they are competencies that may not come as easily to the individual test-taker. In addition, the report offers templates and activities that assist readers in recognizing areas for development and offers helpful guidance to assist test-takers in designing a customized plan for their personal development.

Benefits for New Supervisors

Why would a leadership assessment help new supervisors transition into their role? It may not be the most apparent tool, given that assessments are commonly used to select individuals for promotion rather than aiding them once they are in their new position. However, leadership assessments can be invaluable tools for leaders once they have stepped into their new role. There are two significant benefits to using assessments at this stage. Leadership assessments can be used to:

1. Aid new supervisors in comprehending their personal strengths and development areas, supporting personal development.
2. Assist new supervisors in comprehending their team's strengths and areas for improvement, promoting team development.

Accomplish Your Mission

Helping new supervisors understand their own strengths and development opportunities allows them to set practical goals for themselves in their new position. This ensures that new supervisors maintain a [growth mindset](#), rather than becoming overwhelmed by the responsibilities of their new role. A practical tool that can be used in conjunction with the LSP-R is SIGMA's [30 60 90 Day Plan](#). This form-fillable template allows leaders to create a strategic plan for their first three months in a new role. The template guides leaders in using their Focus Report to select a leadership competency for development, then outline specific goals, tasks, and metrics for success. By utilizing both the LSP-R and this template, new supervisors can ensure that their initial three months are not wasted but rather become a springboard for ongoing development, establishing a strong foundation for their future as a leader.

Team Development

In addition to helping new supervisors focus on personal development, the LSP-R can be used to help leaders focus on the development of their team. This is a critical part of every leadership position. Global studies have shown that 79% of people who quit their jobs cite “lack of appreciation” as their reason for leaving.³ Leaders must prioritize investing in their team, as it can have a significant impact on employee retention. For this reason, supervisors should engage with their direct reports immediately upon assuming their new role. The LSP-R can be used as a vehicle for structuring this engagement. Follow the steps below to demonstrate to your direct reports that you are invested in their professional development, and witness their transformation as they become an effective, motivated, and loyal team:

1. **Meet with your team** to introduce yourself as their new supervisor. Regardless of whether you're familiar with everyone on the team or not, it's important to meet with your team as their new supervisor. During this meeting, introduce yourself in the context of your new role and express your investment in the individual development of each member of the team. Introduce them to the LSP-R and explain that they will receive a link to take the assessment, and that results will be used to create personal development plans. Be sure to emphasize that this assessment is for development, not selection purposes, and that results will not be used to make hiring or promotion decisions, now or in the future. If you require guidance on how to proceed with your team, you may find it helpful to read SIGMA's [Sample Email: Invite Your Team to Take a Leadership Assessment](#).

2. **Give your team a week** to complete the assessment, then schedule one-on-one meetings with each member of the team to review their results and create a development plan.
3. **Initiate a conversation** about the LSP-R in one-on-one meetings with your team members and ask them to share their thoughts on their LSP-R results. Was there anything that was surprising? How do they feel regarding the strengths and development opportunities outlined in the report? Next, work with your direct reports to fill out SIGMA's [Development Actions Form](#). This template can be used to create tangible development plans and track progress over the short, medium, and long term.
4. **Follow-up with each individual monthly** to review progress and adjust development plans as needed. Use these meetings as an opportunity to give praise and encouragement, in addition to constructive feedback. Make an effort to build trust and establish a strong relationship with each of your direct reports.

The LSP-R Advantage

In their work with clients, SIGMA's consultants meet leaders who find it difficult to design development activities to address specific competencies. If you find it challenging to think of ways to develop a specific competency for yourself or your direct report, consult SIGMA's [Leadership Skill Development Series](#). These PDF guides provide an overview of each leadership competency, as well as three broad tips and three specific actions for development. For group development opportunities, register for SIGMA's [Lunch and Learn](#) seminars, and for coaching support, explore SIGMA's [individual and group coaching services](#).

Recommendations for New Supervisors

In addition to using the LSP-R to create development plans with your direct reports, there are a few recommendations that SIGMA's consultants have prepared to set you up for success:

1. **Establish a weekly check-in with your team.** The duration of these meetings can vary depending on their specific needs, but what's critical is that your team has a collective point of contact with one another and with you. This will provide a consistent time and space to ask questions, share progress, and create a foundation for group connection and communication.
2. **Encourage your team to contact you as needed.** It is important that team members know you are available via Zoom, Teams, email, or any other platform of communication your organization uses. Make it clear to your direct reports that you want to hear from them.
3. **Initiate conversations with your team members individually.** Take time to check in with your team members or send an email just to ask someone how things are going. Establishing regular communication with your direct reports will foster an open dialogue and increase the likelihood of them also reaching out to you unprompted.

4. **Get to know your direct reports as people, not just as employees.** Ask your team what they are doing on the evening or weekend and get to know their family or living situation. Be sensitive, of course, but show that you care. Take an interest in your team and be open about your own life as well. This will make you more personable and approachable as a leader.
5. **Use incentives for motivation.** Learn what motivates your team and offer recognition and reward in a way that builds camaraderie and productivity.
6. **Have fun.** Although you are in a leadership position, it is still important to have fun with your team. Add appropriate humor to your messages and meetings and take time to go out for lunch together.
7. **Ask your superiors what they need from you.** To better understand how to manage up, consider directly asking your superiors what information they need and how they prefer to receive it. Rather than making assumptions, taking the time to ask can help you clarify their expectations.
8. **Ask for feedback from your team.** Whether it's monthly, quarterly, or annually, make sure you schedule regular check-ins with your team to ask for feedback. Inquire about your team's opinions regarding your leadership style, including areas they appreciate and areas where they see room for improvement. Additionally, seek feedback on what they would like to see in the future. This can be done in one-on-one or in group meetings, but an anonymous form is likely going to yield the most candid feedback.

Ready to Get Started?

Congratulations! You have worked your way through SIGMA's Handbook for New Supervisors. We're confident that you now have a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities inherent in a supervisory role. Coupled with SIGMA's strategic guidance and practical tools, you will be well-prepared to transition into your new role.



If you would like to learn more about SIGMA's talent development services, contact Glen Harrison. Glen is an organizational transformation consultant and leadership assessment expert. Over the course of his career, Glen has worked with one-third of the Fortune 500 list and with every level of government in Canada and the United States. Glen has extensive experience in the application of SIGMA's products and services to help organizations realize their people potential.

Glen Harrison

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¹ Sturt, D. & Nordstrom, T. (March 8, 2018). 10 Shocking Workplace Stats You Need To Know. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidsturt/2018/03/08/10-shocking-workplace-stats-you-need-to-know/?sh=7a0b2badf3af>.

² CEB Global. 2019. In Arruda, W.(February 15, 2023). Why Most New Managers Fail and How to Prevent It. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2023/02/15/why-most-new-managers-fail-and-how-to-prevent-it/?sh=551dfca53385>.

³ O.C. Tanner Learning Group. NA. Performance: Accelerated. White Paper. Retrieved from https://www.octanner.com/content/dam/oc-tanner/documents/global-research/White_Paper_Performance_Accelerated.pdf.