

# Want to Be a “Super Supervisor”?

## Here are 11 Things You Can Do

By David Lee

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While updating the *How to Be a Super Supervisor* seminar, I found myself thinking “If seminar participants only did a handful of things that we covered in this seminar when they got back to work, what would I want those things to be?”

In other words, what are those “differences that make a difference” that separate mediocre bosses from great bosses? Reflecting on the feedback I’ve gotten over the years from employees and the research on what matters most, I pulled together 11 things that – if you’re serious about optimizing employee performance – you need to do.

Some of these you can do with almost no extra time investment, others will require that you invest some time and energy. If you do, though, you will dramatically increase your ability to bring out the best in your people. So... here they are... 11 things you can do that will help you be a “Super Supervisor”:

1. **Remember “Everything Matters” and Practice Mindfulness.** Pay attention to each interaction, each decision, and each communication. This practice is often called Mindfulness. Rather than running on autopilot while you interact with others, thinking about all the things you have to do, or just “winging it” when making a decision that affects your people, focus completely on that interaction, decision, or

communication. Consider the way you are doing it and its potential impact. Question to ask include:

- Is this how I would like to be treated?
- How will the way I’m thinking about doing this or saying this affect morale, engagement, and trust?
- Does this communicate respect?

2. **Get “Internal Customer” Feedback.** Ask your people what you can do to be a better supervisor.<sup>1</sup> Questions you can ask are:

- The best supervisor you ever had, what did he or she do – and not do – to be a great supervisor?
- What was the most meaningful recognition or praise you ever got? What made it so meaningful?
- Can you tell me a time that you felt like a supervisor “blew it” in the way they dealt with you?
- What do I do that gets in the way of you doing your job well?

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<sup>1</sup> If the whole idea of asking such questions makes you ill, look at what you’re afraid of. If you’re afraid it will make you look “weak” or unsure of yourself, you would be wise to get some coaching. Few things will elicit more respect and loyalty from employees than asking them how you can be the best supervisor for them. If you have very “rough and tough” employees and you’re concerned how they would respond to such a request, adjust how you would ask for this feedback so it fits your organization’s culture.

- What do I do that drives you crazy?

3. **Listen Better.** The more you truly listen to what your people say, the more they will feel like you value and respect them, the less negativity you'll have to deal with, the more they will care about what YOU have to say, and the more engaged they will be.
4. **Make It Safe to Speak Up.** Besides asking your people for feedback, develop the communication skills that make it comfortable for them to respond honestly. Learn how to make it safe for your employees to speak honestly and openly about what bothers them. Remember "Power may bring immunity from feedback... but not reality."

There is no such thing as Consequence Free Behavior. Just because employees don't say to their boss "It really makes me mad that you do such and such..." doesn't mean there are no consequences for their boss engaging in that behavior. Passive-aggressive behaviors, spreading negativity, diminished engagement, unscheduled accidents, theft, turnover, and workers comp fraud are all ways employees express their unhappiness with how they are treated.

It's less costly to get them to talk about it. So, invest in training and coaching that will enable you to be a master at making it comfortable for people to speak honestly and openly with you.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to seminars on listening and communication skills, some books and CDs: *Crucial Confrontations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler  
*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg  
*Turning Difficult Discussions Into Constructive Conversations* (CD) by David Lee

For information on David Lee's programs and services, go to: [www.HumanNatureAtWork.com](http://www.HumanNatureAtWork.com)

5. **Act Like a Real Person, Not a Boss.**

Some supervisors express concern that if they "let their guard down" (translated: if they act and talk like a real person), their employees will try to take advantage of them or will lose respect for them. So, rather than just be themselves, they project a persona, almost like a bad actor from a city theatre overacting the roll of "boss" in a play about the workplace. Interacting with employees in an overly formal, reserved, "always on" mode makes it difficult for people to relate to you and to bond to you.

Conversely, the more genuine and authentic you are, the more your people will bond to you – i.e. the more they will care what you think about them and the more they will care about doing a great job for you. This doesn't mean you need to be as unreserved as you would with your closest friends or spouse. It does mean the more you act like yourself and not some role – the boss -- the greater your ability to lead people.

6. **Confront Bad Behavior and Poor Performance Quickly and Decisively.** Few things damage morale and respect faster than a supervisor who isn't willing to deal with bad behavior and poor performance. Everyone notices and everyone is waiting for you to do something about it. So, do something.
7. **Practice Being a Good Finder.** The more you notice and acknowledge the good things your people do, the more good things they will do.
8. **Express Appreciation.** Few things kill engagement and discretionary effort faster than being taken for granted. Don't take your people for granted. Express appreciation.

9. **Show You Care About Your People As Individuals.** It's easy to act "all business" if you feel overwhelmed with all of your responsibilities and/or you have a personality style that focuses more on tasks than on relationships. Research from Gallup, Towers Perrin and other firms shows that feeling like their boss cares about them makes a huge difference in how employees act and how well they perform at their jobs.

Employees who feel cared about are less likely to miss work, less likely to have accidents, less likely to file workers compensation claims, less likely to steal, less likely to quit, and more likely to recommend their employer to friends and family.

Showing you care about your employees as people includes:

- Knowing something about who they are outside of work.
- Asking them how things are going.
- If they share something from their personal life (e.g. their daughter is going to college this fall or they are going to a Patriot's game this weekend) , check in with them about it.
- If they request something (information, resources, a decision whether they can take their vacation during a specific week) give their request the same priority you would if your boss asked you for something.
- Do what you can to remove red tape and other obstacles that make it hard for them to do their work well.
- Ask them for input on the best way to supervise them

10. **Model courtesy and civility.** Because they are swamped with emails, voice mails, and a crushing

workload, many people in the workplace don't bother with the simple courtesies that make relationships work. When we ignore these, we signal to others that they don't matter; we signal that we don't care how we impact them.

The more people are treated without courtesy and civility, the more they think it doesn't matter ("Why should I care... nobody else does?")

Examples include:

- Not returning phone calls and emails. Requiring people to hunt you down, especially when the person needs something that is time sensitive.
- Not bothering to indicate you received an email that is either something you requested, something that is time sensitive, or something the other person needs from you. Doing this leaves them not knowing if you received it or not, and then putting them in the awkward position of either following up and appearing to be badgering you, or wondering if you didn't receive it. A 5 second "got it, thanks" reply not only respects their time and effort, it also shows you care how you affect them.
- Saying "Please" and "Thank you"
- Show up to meetings and coaching sessions on time.
- Apologizing when you make a mistake or act in anyway you know is not respectful.

11. **Spread Goodwill.** Whenever you act in a thoughtful, considerate, generous way, you inspire others to do the same. By consciously looking for opportunities to spread goodwill, you not only increase the odds your team

will have high morale and want to do their best, you will – by influencing how they treat others – have an impact on your whole organization.

Examples of Spreading Goodwill include:

- “Catching people doing things right”; being a Good Finder.
- Expressing Appreciation
- Getting back to your employees promptly when they make a request (e.g. for time off, for a piece of equipment, for some information), rather than making them have to ask repeatedly.
- Showing an interest in them as individuals; bothering to know who they are.
- Asking for feedback on how best to supervise them.
- Showing them the same respect you would show a superior
- Showing an interest in helping them succeed at their job

- Showing an interest in their professional development
- If you find some information or resource you think they would find helpful, pass it along.

**Note:** To reprint this in an association or corporate newsletter, please contact the author first at: [David@HumanNatureAtWork.com](mailto:David@HumanNatureAtWork.com)

**About the Author:** David Lee is the founder of HumanNature@Work. He is an internationally recognized authority on organizational and managerial practices that optimize employee performance, morale, and engagement. Mr. Lee is the author of *Managing Employee Stress and Safety*, as well as several dozen articles on organizational and individual performance that have been published in a number of trade journals in North America, Europe, India, Australia, and Asia. For information on bringing his services to your organization, email [David@HumanNatureAtWork.com](mailto:David@HumanNatureAtWork.com)

## Comments About David Lee's Work:

"David Lee helped us to build the necessary people skills on our management team...He empowered us to move our organization from a bureaucratic governmental agency to a progressive, customer-focused, financial institution."

*Eric Henry, Executive Director, New Hampshire Retirement System, NH*

"I found your presentation on personality styles very enlightening. My team has referred to the content enthusiastically several times since we met. We're using it to understand and communicate with each other more effectively. Nicely done!"

*Daniel J. Flaherty, President, Olympia Hotel Management. ME*

"Having seen a lot of speakers, I can't tell you just how impressed I was by David. I even waited in line to talk with him... I learned a great deal and laughed my butt off in the process... When we have someone who is so genuine and so well prepared, we owe it to each other to spread the word... I take it very seriously when I recommend someone else's work and... he's great!"

*Naomi Judd*

"I just wanted to thank you again for a magnificent presentation. I have been to many seminars, and this far exceeded any past experience. I walked away feeling energized, enthusiastic and empowered. I can hardly wait to apply the principles that we discussed today at work and beyond."

*Sybil L. Morin, Director of Administration, LifeShare, Inc., NH*

"Thank you for doing such an outstanding job keynoting our conference. As you could tell by the response, participants loved both the content and the delivery of your presentation."

*Dr. Ian Gawler, Director, The Gawler Foundation, Victoria, Australia*

"Listening to David Lee was a wake up call! The younger generation of workers who are entering our workforce today are unlike any other that we have seen before. Employers and supervisors everywhere should be prepared for this distinctively different group of employees. What looks different from a supervisor's perspective?: Just about every aspect of providing feedback and support. I loved this class...very interesting and informative!"

*Sheryl Jacobs, LL Bean, ME*

David, I wanted to thank you for being part our show in Las Vegas. The feedback I have received about your sessions was fantastic!!!!!! Three cheers to you.

*Julie McNeney, COO, International Council on Active Aging, Vancouver, BC*

"I learned more in this seminar than in four others I took from (a well known national seminar company)."

*Jennifer Sgroi, Stonyfield Farm Yogurt, NH*

I want to say a big thank you for the wonderful job you did in your presentations during our Quality Leadership Conference. You are a talented individual; thank you for sharing your gifts with Fairview. You have touched our soul.

*Tom Hanson, Fairview Healthcare System, MN*

"David's presentation style is unparalleled! The substantive and timely content of his subject materials is immediately adaptable to the workplace making his seminars an invaluable aid to an employer seeking to be an "Employer of Choice."

*Lynn M. Lombard, VP, MMG Insurance Company, ME*