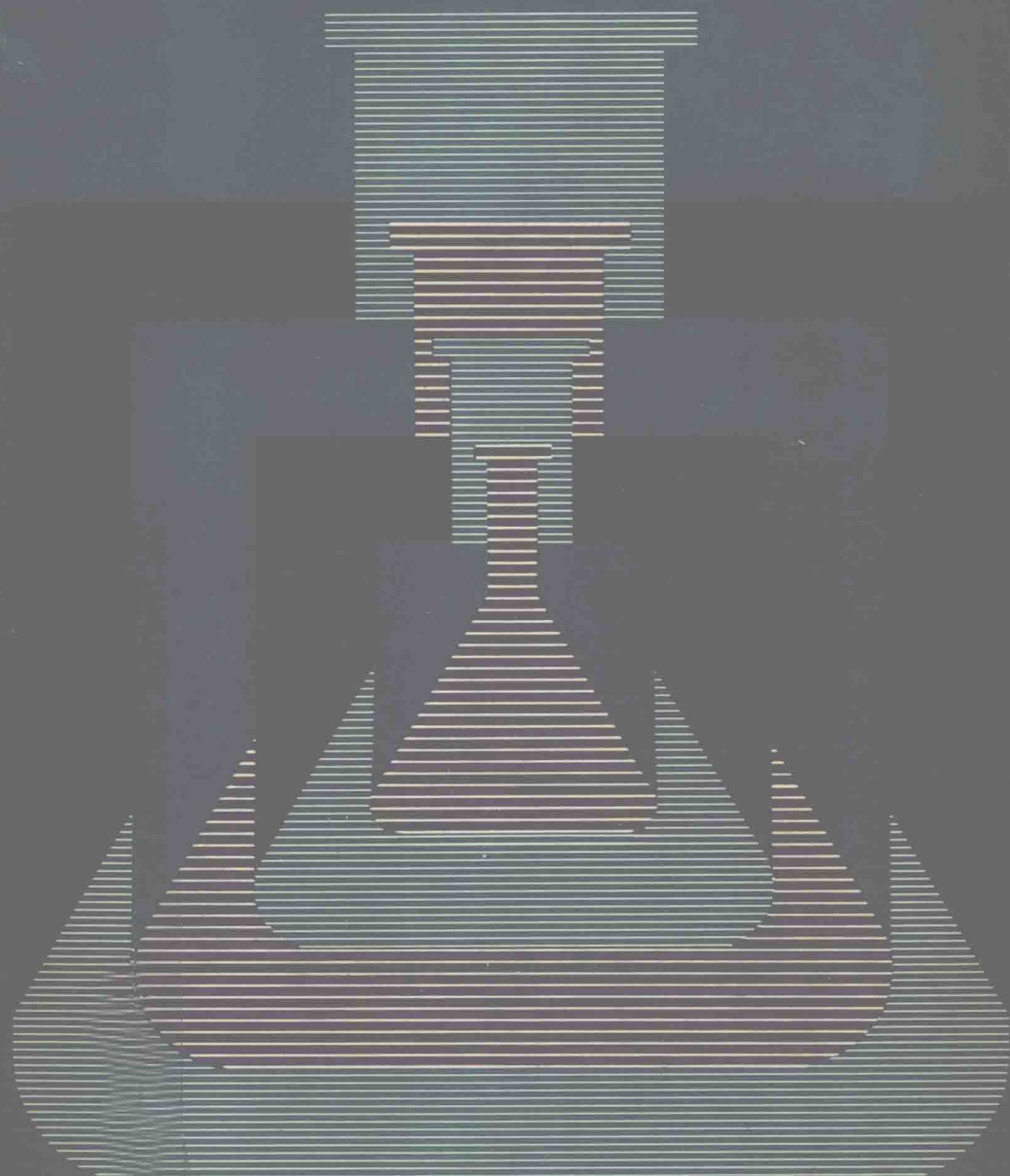


William O. Umiker, M.D.

THE EFFECTIVE LABORATORY SUPERVISOR



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To the brave young medical technologists
who have just been invited
to join the management team

FOREWORD

While there is no lack of books on personnel management, most of them have serious shortcomings for the laboratory supervisor: They're devoted to management theory. They're directed to upper-level managers. They're written in a frame of reference to the corporate business setting. Yes, the laboratory supervisor can learn from them. But not easily, and not practically.

This book is different. It's written by a laboratorian for laboratorians—specifically for laboratory supervisors. It's written in the context of the clinical laboratory—a business, to be sure, but one that bears little resemblance to the industrial corporation. And it's devoted to the *practical application* of management functions and skills by the laboratory supervisor.

The author, Dr. William Umiker, has written numerous management articles for *MLO/Medical Laboratory Observer*. This book is not a compilation of those articles, however. It was conceived and written as an original work, based on his 20 years' experience as laboratory director at St. Joseph Hospital and Health Care Center in Lancaster, Pa. The end result is a clear, cohesive, comprehensive personnel management handbook.

It has another quality about it, too: It reflects the humanity of the author. To Dr. Umiker, employees are not subordinates to be manipulated, but members of a team working to achieve mutual goals. As *MLO* readers have commented about him, he seems to run the kind of lab you'd like to work in.

This book is the ideal complement to such other laboratory reference works as *Financial Management of the Clinical Laboratory* and *Legal Guidelines for the Clinical Laboratory*. For day-to-day problems, the laboratory supervisor may find this one the most valuable of all.

Robert J. Fitzgibbon
Editor, *MLO*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In writing this book, William O. Umiker, a veteran contributor to and masthead consultant for *MLO/Medical Laboratory Observer*, a national magazine for laboratorians, has called on his 37 years of experience as a laboratory director in military, government, and community hospitals.

For 10 years, Dr. Umiker served as pathologist and blood bank and laboratory director in several U.S. Navy hospitals, including the U.S. Naval Medical Center on Guam. He held those same positions for six years at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor, Mich., while associate professor of pathology at the University of Michigan Medical School. Since 1960, he has been director of clinical laboratories, medical director of blood bank, and medical director of the School of Medical Technologists at St. Joseph Hospital and Health Care Center, Lancaster, Pa. He is also a member of the adjunct faculty at both Millersville (Pa.) State College and Elizabethtown (Pa.) College.

Dr. Umiker is a laboratory inspector for the College of American Pathologists, a fellow of the College, and a member of the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, the American Association of Blood Banks, and the Association of Clinical Scientists. He is the author of more than 100 articles, including 34 on laboratory management, that have appeared in *MLO/Medical Laboratory Observer* and other national medical journals.

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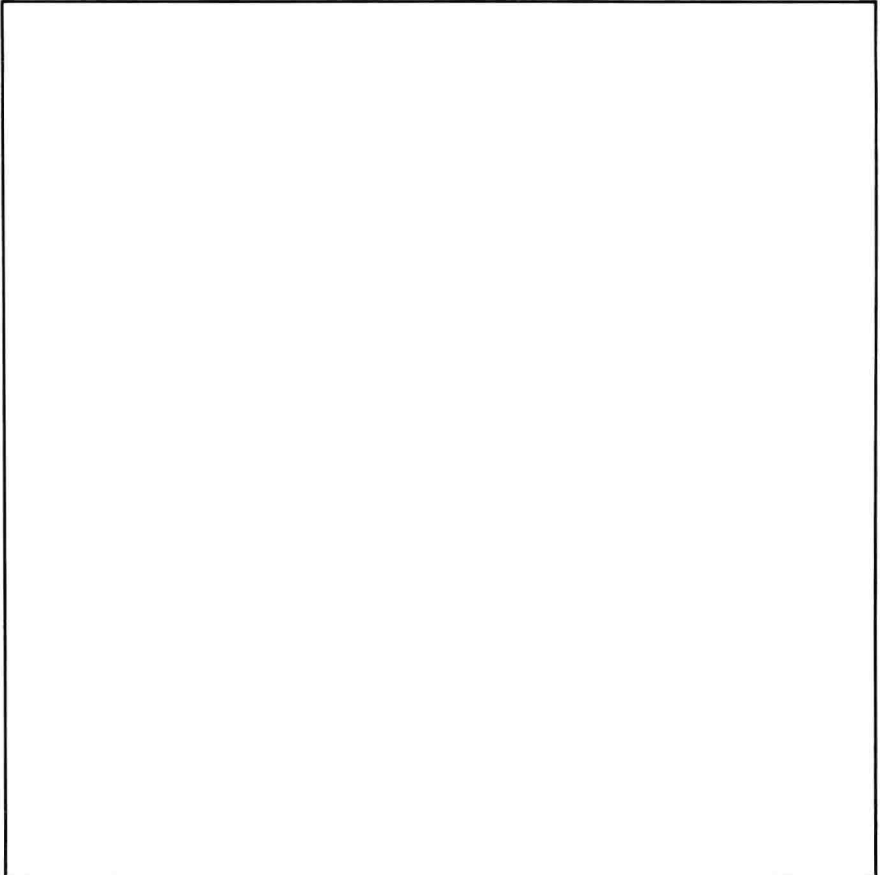
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1. INTRODUCTION



1

THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN LABORATORY MANAGEMENT

I like the simple definitions of management best. One is the “judicious use of means to accomplish an end.” Another, perhaps my favorite, is “getting things done through people.” Unfortunately, the term management is frequently used to refer to the senior officers in an organization or its board of trustees. But in the workaday world, anyone who directs the activities of another employee is involved in management whether he is a straw boss, foreman, supervisor, or what have you.

As for the word manager, I am going to restrict it to mean those who manage other managers, that is, are part of middle or upper management. This will distinguish managers from supervisors who manage nonmanagement people, the workers. This first-line supervisory level puts them closest to the action.

The supervisor serves as the keystone between upper management and the work force, and the role is an ambivalent one. At times, supervisors have difficulty identifying with management and feel more comfortable with their employees, especially since they usually came up from their ranks. In fact, the supervisor must maintain his or her technical skills to be an effective leader.

What is a supervisor?

According to the National Labor Relations Board, a supervisor is any member of the staff who has the responsibility of directing the work of others and the authority to affect the status of employees. A supervisor affects the status of others if he or she makes any of the following decisions or makes recommendations that will be considered in such decisions: “. . . hire, transfer, suspend, layoff, recall, pro-

mote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees . . . if the exercise of such authority . . . requires the use of independent judgment."

Medicare says that a supervisor is a qualified clinical laboratory technologist who "has had at least six years of pertinent full-time laboratory experience of which not less than two years have been spent working in the designated laboratory specialty in an approved clinical laboratory."

Importance of management training to laboratory personnel

Although many medical technologists ultimately assume supervisory roles, few medical technology programs provide any management training. Hospitals are no better. They seldom offer prospective or new supervisors training to prepare for management authority and responsibilities. The use of business administration graduates as laboratory administrative assistants attests to the deficiencies of the medical technologist in laboratory management.

Fortunately, those deficiencies are gradually being overcome. Many formal and informal management courses and seminars are now available; professional societies recognize the importance of managerial ability; and several periodicals deal with managerial techniques.

Budding supervisors can now draw on these sources to refine the skills that are essential for the job: technical competency, an ability to plan and organize, and an ability to manage employees. Putting these skills together will let them reach their primary goal of getting the job done efficiently, economically, and safely.

Members of top management spend most of their time planning and organizing. They deal with the organization's mission, philosophy, goals, long-range plans, and the various activities involved in organizing. They spend relatively little time directly supervising employees. Those in middle management, such as department heads, deal principally with objectives, short-range plans, coordination, and cooperation.

First-line managers, the supervisors, spend the bulk of their time implementing, directing, and controlling. This does not mean that planning and organizing are less important, merely that they devote less time to them. In smaller sections, the supervisor is also expected to spend a certain amount of time performing nonsupervisory work. I've shown these management functions in Figure 1-1 and, in Figure 1-2, the skills that laboratory supervisors need. These are the subjects we'll be covering in this book. I hope it serves you well.

Figure 1-1**MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS OF LABORATORY SUPERVISORS**

Planning: Defining and selecting a course of action

- Develop goals and objectives
- Prepare budgets
- Serve on planning committees
- Help to develop request and report forms
- Estimate space requirements
- Recommend new methods and equipment
- Help to determine procedure costs and recommend charges

Organization: Establishing objectives and bringing the resources to bear on the accomplishment of the plan

- Prepare position descriptions
- Determine location of equipment, work stations, and storage of supplies
- Establish lines of communication
- Prepare written policies and procedures
- Establish preventive maintenance program

Direction: Leading subordinate personnel in the accomplishment of the work

- Select, indoctrinate, and train personnel
- Delegate responsibilities
- Supervise daily work
- Monitor quality control
- Insure safety
- Conduct personnel meetings

Control: Determining whether or not plans are being adhered to

- Establish standards of performance
 - Appraise performance
 - Make commendations
 - Take corrective and disciplinary action
 - Recommend promotion and salary increases
 - Counsel personnel
 - Prepare productivity reports
 - Analyze financial and other statistical reports and act on them
 - Prepare deficiency or incident reports
-

Figure 1-2**MANAGEMENT SKILLS REQUIRED OF LABORATORY SUPERVISORS**

Motivation: Creating a desire to achieve results

- Apply an appropriate leadership style
- Eliminate dissatisfiers
- Set an example
- Coach and counsel

Communication: Everyone knowing what he needs to know

- Encode messages
- Select the right channels (memo, telephone, or intercom)
- Eliminate barriers to communication
- Conduct meetings
- Get feedback

Time management: Making the best use of time

- Organize his own work
- Delegate effectively
- Establish priorities
- Eliminate time wasters

Decision Making

- Establish rules, regulations, policies, and procedures
- Seek expert advice
- Make effective use of committees and meetings
- Use planning and problem-solving techniques

Coordination

- Coordinate machines and people
- Coordinate laboratory activities with those of the medical staff, nursing service, emergency room, outpatient, and other departments.
- Coordinate laboratory shifts, departments, and sections

Training

- Prepare new employees for their jobs
 - Teach technologists new procedures and new instruments
 - Support continuing education for laboratory employees
 - Participate in training programs for students, nurses, and others
-

2

THE NEW SUPERVISOR

In the good old days, supervisors could run things with little interference. Employees were not likely to challenge their orders. The only orders from above came from the laboratory director who was too busy to spend much time with the supervisors. Regulatory and accrediting agencies were just starting to complicate the practice of laboratory medicine.

Today's supervisor is beset with constraints from all sides. First, there are the pressures from above. The supervisor may have to cope with several pathologists or other clinical scientists, all with some authority to issue orders to the supervisor, and with administrative assistants, chief technologists, or business managers.

There are pressures from the employees. While today's lab techs are better educated and can perform more difficult tasks, they demand more information and more attention than their predecessors did. They tend to be critical of their supervisors and upper management. This pressure increases if the laboratory workers are unionized.

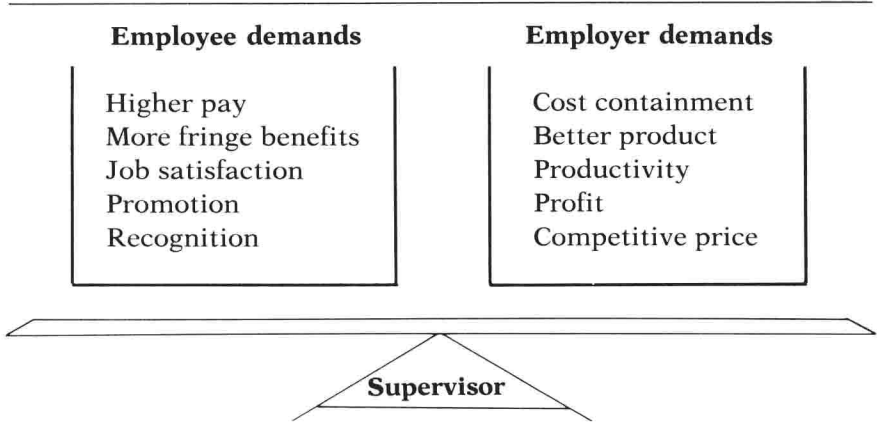
Pressures come from various sources outside the lab, too. Personnel directors, systems analysts, controllers, and a host of hospital officials affect the work of today's lab supervisor.

Then there are those free-floating constraints coming in from federal and state regulatory agencies and from accrediting organizations. These constraints deal with safety, quality control, labor laws, and the like.

Finally, there is the customer, the physician, who demands a wider range of tests, better quality, and faster turnaround time.

The supervisor has been depicted as the man in the middle, caught between upper management and the workers.¹ Management expects

Figure 2-1
DEMANDS PLACED ON SUPERVISORS



you to maintain discipline, prevent waste, control costs, keep production rolling, and be loyal to the organization. The workers expect you to be the good guy—to represent their needs and to be loyal to them. In many cases, they knew you when you were one of them and expect to maintain the same relationships they once enjoyed.

Relationship with former fellow employees

Some authorities have described a honeymoon that you, the new supervisor, and your former peers enjoy. Both make a special effort to be on their best behavior. The employees tell you how happy they are to have you in charge and that you certainly deserved the promotion—whether or not they really believe it. You respond with promises of support saying that nothing has really changed between them and you. It's going to be the same old gang.

The honeymoon may end abruptly when problems arise, or it peters out as everyone realizes that things *have* changed. During this evaluation phase you'll find the employees testing you. You'll have to earn their respect by demonstrating an ability to lead. Likewise, you will finally find out how well your former buddies are going to respond to your directions.

You'll soon realize that you are no longer one of "us," the workers, but part of "them," the management. If you try to stay one of "us," you probably won't succeed in the long run.

You must remember that your employees will always have mixed feelings toward you. They have positive feelings toward you since you

offer security and social acceptance. On the other hand, they resent your power over them. You can be a threat to their future or their daily routine.

Perhaps the hardest things to do in relation to former peers are: 1) to change your social relationship with them; 2) to discipline them; and 3) to control your tongue. Let's explore these areas a bit more.

Most management authorities frown on frequent outside social activities with the old gang. So no matter how friendly you once were with your co-workers and how much you enjoyed your card parties or dinners, you must now spend less time socializing with them and more time with your new peers. You must obviously be diplomatic about this changed relationship—and hope that your former colleagues will understand.

The discomfort of discipline needs no embellishment. You must start by learning to say no and meaning it.

Figure 2-2

TIPS FOR THE FIRST FEW MONTHS

- Make sure you know your authority and responsibilities. Carefully study your position description and standards of performance.
 - Spend more time with fellow supervisors, less with your former fellow workers—but don't desert them.
 - Set a good example.
 - Keep your employees and your boss informed.
 - Get input from your employees. Be a good listener.
 - Don't try to change everything right away.
 - Let each employee know where he or she stands.
 - Maintain balance between staff and management needs.
 - Show confidence in your employees and defend them against outside criticism.
 - Delegate effectively.
 - Don't criticize your superiors or the organization. Say "we," not "they," for management.
 - Don't blame your boss or your staff for your goofs.
 - Be consistent and firm.
 - Have the courage to make decisions without undue delay.
 - Use your time effectively.
 - Get help with your weaknesses.
 - Keep up with your professional knowledge.
 - Remember that only results count.
-