

IMPROVING SUPERVISORY SKILLS
Professional Development Resource Package

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IMPROVING SUPERVISORY SKILLS

Supervisors spend a great deal of time interacting with employees to build trust and collaboration, to deal with conflicts, to develop healthy and effective working relationships. The most powerful skills that such people can bring to the workplace do not involve technical ability or knowledge but rather the interpersonal resources that allow them to enhance their relationships with people in various situations. The best managers and supervisors are those with the finest people skills.

And yet, most supervisors have no direct training in interpersonal skills, in mentoring, in strategies and techniques that can be used to improve their own working life and the experiences of those around them. This is a significant oversight, as most career professionals spend more time with their colleagues than with their own families. Collegial relationships are profoundly important.

This one day workshop offers supervisors the opportunity to further develop a range of interpersonal skills: mentoring, building trust, resolving conflicts, recovering from mistakes, promoting collaboration, containing and working through challenges, and understanding the primary role of self-awareness. This will be a practical workshop, with emphasis on approaches that can be applied quickly and effectively.

About Ross Laird

Ross Laird, Ph.D. teaches creative process, leadership, psychology and counselling at various educational institutions in the Pacific Northwest. His approach is experiential and collaborative, with particular emphasis on the creative as an instrument of change. He is a clinical supervisor to social service agencies, an award-winning poet and scholar, and best-selling author of *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft* (shortlisted for a Governor General's Award). His most recent book, *A Stone's Throw: The Enduring Nature of Myth* is currently in bookstores. A new book on addictions will be released in 2006. Visit www.rosslaird.info for more information.

AGENDA

Preliminaries

- Introductions, goals, intentions
- What this workshop offers, and what it does not
- Examples from the workplace of dilemmas and scenarios

Understanding Personal Development

- No one understands human psychology... however:
 1. Self-awareness and childhood development
 2. Psychology grad school in 30 minutes (the adult self)

Requirements for Psychological Health

- Candid reflection and self-awareness
- Daily debrief
- Support and Community (the workplace environment as a community)
- Health practices, imagination, innovation, challenge, hope: emotional imperatives

The Erosion of Psychological Health

- Trauma, stress, isolation, grief, lack of attention to self-awareness, the shadow, environmental factors, community factors, sleep, conflict, unresolved themes etc: understanding the five per cent of employees who take ninety-five per cent of your supervisory time.

How Psychological Illness Manifests: the Rule of Four (the simple version...)

- Nervous system responses (flight, freeze, orient, fight)
- Coping styles (dissociation, depression, anxiety, anger)
- Addictions (hallucinogens, opiates, stimulants, alcohol)
- Unresolved themes (belonging, need-fulfillment, autonomy, will)

Signals and Signs, and what to do about them

- The myth of the 'toxic employee' - the shadow carrier
- Why soft skills are more useful than business school
- Building trust, rapport, safety, and support (basic counselling skills)
- The daily debrief (balancing privacy with sharing)
- The subtle check-in
- Giving empathic feedback (steam!)
- Coaching and mentoring skills
- Team development
- Employee responsibility (the 50 per cent rule)
- Another rule of four: sleep, exercise, nutrition, support

THE MASK

The mask is the mediator between your true nature and the world. It is developed in early childhood and refined in adolescence. Everyone has a mask, and it is, in fact, an essential part of being a human being. But in most people the mask operates mostly as a protective shield, guarding your fears and vulnerabilities so that other people don't see them. The mask is the wall you put up, but the function of the wall is actually to hide yourself from yourself.

In most people, the mask takes one of several forms: politeness, confidence, competence, friendliness, superficiality. It can also take a shadow form: the tough person, the person who is untouched by life, the indifferent or cynical or careless person. This shadow form is very common in people who have experienced trauma.

The mask is what you project, what you want people to believe about you. It is false. It hides both the darkest and the brightest parts of you, the shadow and the authentic self. A strong mask results when someone believes they are unlovable, that if others only knew who they really are, everyone would turn away, and the person would be alone. The mask will do almost anything to keep control of your life.

Even the claim of knowing about the mask and having worked on it is a mask! The mask is very tricky. You can't just take it away. It requires much patient, humbling work.

In our society of superficiality and spiritual bankruptcy, it's easy to find examples of the mask: fashion magazines, self-help gurus, movie stars, politicians. Given a choice, the mask will always take flash over substance.

THE SHADOW

The shadow is the source of much of your energy. It's the murky part, the part you don't like to look at. It's selfish, passionate, violent, belligerent, sexual, simple, and very powerful. The shadow is the dark side (to borrow a metaphor from Star Wars). It's like a vast pool in which all of your hidden fantasies, impulses, actions and fears swirl around.

The shadow is the home of fears and un-acted desires. This is the source of its energy: it is raw, uncontrolled and un-mediated passion. The mask tries to hide the shadow, but the more you try to hide the shadow, the more it comes at you sideways, in unexpected and self-sabotaging ways. You need the shadow; it's an essential part of you. But it's very difficult to acknowledge that the stuff in the pool really is a part of who we are: sexual fantasies, the desire to harm and kill, the drive for power or revenge or whatever – all the dark and scary impulses that we disown and try not to think about.

The tendency is for people to disown the shadow; to hide it in themselves and point out the shadow traits in others. This is called projection, and it is the central challenge of self-awareness work. We must learn to own the shadow, to acknowledge that we are in fact capable of the very acts we abhor in others. We are the whole world; everything we see is a reflection of our innermost natures. Coming to terms with this is the most difficult and most rewarding aspect of personal growth.

Try this: think about a person you strongly dislike. Consider the specific behavior this person does that bothers you. Try to accept that you yourself do this same behavior. You might hide it better, with the mask for example, but it's a cosmic rule of the psyche that we dislike in others what we possess, and hide, in ourselves. A parable of Tibetan Buddhism suggests that whenever you point the finger, remember that there are three fingers pointing back at you!

Some examples of the shadow might be Darth Vader, Hannibal Lechter, vampires and monsters, the Taliban, and the long list of scary characters in film and in real life. The list is long because we disown the shadow, and this is its way of coming at us sideways.

The Shadow Carrier

In every family, in every group, someone is generally disliked: they are cranky, or aggressive, or troublesome. People don't like dealing with such people, who in fact exert great unspoken psychological influence and control many situations without realizing it. They tend to be isolated, angry, misunderstood, disrespected. Such people are *shadow carriers*: they hold, by way of projection, the shadow material of a group. They are essential features of any human community, and are important people to befriend. They are straight talkers, they know what's going on behind the scenes, and they are strong. Dealing with them teaches you about yourself, shows you how to own your own shadow, and instructs you in humanity. Developing relationships with shadow carriers can be a profound spiritual path: it is generally much more effective than meditation...

THE AUTHENTIC SELF

The psychologist Carl Jung called the authentic self 'individuated,' in the sense that a person who is in touch with this part of themselves is truly an individual: awake and alive to their own feelings, impulses, and experiences. The authentic self is similar to what you might call the soul, or the spirit of a person. It exists without you having to work on it. It's something essential to your nature, but can be buried under many layers created by the mask and the shadow.

The authentic self is like an observer in your life. It watches what you do, without passing judgement, and is more or less indifferent about the way things turn out. The authentic self is not attached to worldly success, money, fame, or power. It understands that your life is a matter of choice, that your experience is what you make of it, and that your task is to learn what it means to be a human being.

The authentic self emerges when the mask and the shadow have come to terms and stopped fighting for control of your life. The mask is no longer hiding who you really are (and hiding the shadow), and the shadow has stopped finding troublesome ways to make itself known in your life. The authentic self appears when there is an alignment, a congruency, between the various parts of yourself.

Awareness and expression of the authentic self are the result of personal evolution and self-awareness. The layers are peeled away, and there it is, shining and clear.

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is the result of a combination of factors having to do with the way in which your childhood and adult development put you in relationship, or out of relationship, with your authentic nature. Most children and adults are diverted from the authentic self by the things that happen to them: wounds, trauma, shame, etc. Our society, devoted to the mask and not to the authentic self, makes it possible for people to forget altogether that they have a core: innocent, unviolated, impossible to harm or destroy.

Negative self-esteem is the result of feelings of unexamined fear, insecurity, guilt, vulnerability, doubt, inadequacy, and so on. The person usually makes some effort to hide these feelings with the mask. But sometimes the mask can take the form of the expression of these feelings, what might be called the victim mentality. No one is truly a victim; in the face of difficult or overwhelming challenges, you can either collapse, in which case you abandon yourself, or you can fight back, in which case you become not a victim but a warrior. This fighting back from trauma and feelings of vulnerability, of weakness, is an appeal to the authentic self, which can handle anything life has to offer.

Essentially, low self-esteem is a situation where the person is aware of the shadow, and perhaps the mask, but not aware of the authentic self. They might feel as though the shadow is the largest part of them, or that it poisons everything else. The person feels they are bad, or unlovable, or stupid, or ineffectual – there's an inexhaustible list of things one can manufacture to feel bad about oneself.

Self-esteem that is too high – what we might call a person with a 'big ego' – is just the mask. The shadow, in this case, is hidden, as is the authentic self. One cosmic rule about the psyche is that whatever you see on the surface is the opposite of what's underneath; this is how the mask works. It hides the stuff underneath. So, someone who displays a flamboyant or elevated self-esteem, who wants everyone to know how great they are, is actually feeling vulnerable and unlovable inside.

Healthy self-esteem is the alignment of the mask, the shadow, and the authentic self. These aspects of the self are interlinked: the more in line they are, the more whole and integrated you are. The less aligned they are, the more fragmented you become. When they line up, when your actions agree with your nature, everything is coordinated and working together. The individuated self then becomes like a deep well that reaches right down into the soul.

THE RULE OF FOUR: UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL THEMES AND ADAPTATIONS

Psychological and Emotional Theme	Style of Coping and Adapting	Typical Choice for Addiction	Requirements for Mentoring and Support
<p>Belonging, trust, safety, community: Do I belong in the world? Can I trust the world? Tendency for dissociation or distance. Sometimes skittish. Typically very intelligent, but often out of touch with emotions.</p>	<p>Tendency for dissociation or distance. Sometimes skittish or flighty. Typically very intelligent, but often out of touch with emotions. Often socially awkward or isolating. Powerful imaginative life. Prefers imagination to actual relationship. Retreats during conflict.</p>	<p>Hallucinogens Entactogens LSD Ecstasy (MDMA)</p>	<p>Slow, careful, and non-intrusive development of trust and safety. Nurturing of a sense of belonging in a community of caring and support. Emphasis on integrating imagination into actual work.</p>
<p>Need fulfillment, emotional nurturing and support: Can I get my needs met? Must I do everything myself? Tendency for collapse and depression. Sometimes overly-independent. Typically very emotionally astute and sensitive, but easily overwhelmed by emotions. Enjoys calm and safe environments. Dislikes chaos.</p>	<p>Seeks emotional attachment and bonding. Responds well to nurturing, but also is highly demanding of relationships. Exquisitely aware of emotional situations and energies (and, when such situations are stressful, is strongly impacted). Turns inward during conflict.</p>	<p>Opiates Heroin, Methadone Valium GHB Rohypnol OxyContin Talwin</p>	<p>Personal connections, emotional commitment, loyalty and trust, community spirit. Attention to small details which make a large impact. Emphasis on healthy emotional atmosphere, with particular focus on kindness.</p>
<p>Dependence and independence: Can I be my own person? Who must I depend on? Tendency for over-commitment and anxiety. Possesses much energy, but burns out. Often is too independent (dislikes authority!). Assumes many tasks, has trouble completing them. Is very verbal and greatly enjoys conversation and chaos.</p>	<p>High energy, high motivation, but underlying depression. Keeps moving fast (the 'rolling stone' approach), and does not slow down enough to commit deeply. Has many balls in the air, is a good juggler, but crashes predictably. Changes activity in conflict (avoids).</p>	<p>Stimulants Cocaine Phencyclidine (pcp) Ritalin, Amphetamines Methamphetamines Coffee Extreme sports</p>	<p>Skill development with regard to slowing down, focusing on one thing at a time. Development of collaborative instincts (which are resisted) and the skills to play by the rules (never!). Support of uniqueness and energy. Emphasis on enthusiasm.</p>
<p>Will, power, dominance: Can I use my power? Will my power hurt others? Tendency for conflict, tension, and anger. Possesses a great deal of energy but struggles with using it appropriately. Often is isolated due to power dynamics; is often the shadow carrier. Sometimes is too controlling, but is excellent at controlling. Organized, motivated, energetic.</p>	<p>Enjoys dominating (or being of service). Is often perceived as intimidating, sometimes responds to this by retreating or bullying. Often less than sensitive in emotional situations. Feels uncomfortable when out of control. Works hard – sometimes too hard – as a way of managing anxiety and anger. Orients to blaming in conflicts.</p>	<p>Alcohol Gambling Workaholism</p>	<p>Relaxation, collaboration, delegation. Development of soft skills, appropriate conflict resolution, emotional sensitivity. Slowing down, taking it easy (but never say "take it easy"!), steaming off safely. Emphasis in empowerment and capacity. Acknowledgement of indispensability.</p>

Managing Emotionally Stressful Situations

Where To Start

What To Notice

What To Do

What To Say

Phase One: 90% of all situations

<p>Find a private space for you and the employee to meet. While doing this, pay attention to your own emotions and take a moment to settle down. Breathe, move your body, focus on your center (your “gut feelings”). Try to be grounded, or as “present” as you can be. Work toward feeling neutral and open. Be aware of your boundaries. Notice your thoughts and try to slow them down. Try to be aware of your tendency in this kind of situation (fight, flight, freeze) and try not to do it. <i>Do not get angry</i>, or avoid the situation. Stay neutral. Focus on containment, safety, and trust. Voluntarily suspend your judgments, beliefs, and biases.</p>	<p>The “vibe” (energy) between the employee (or within the employee) and others seems uncomfortable. Body language and eye contact patterns are obvious. You become aware of intensity, discomfort, isolation, etc. Conflict inevitably begins with a series of such small cues early on. Your own habits of conflict or evasion arise. You have an emotional response to the situation, which typically includes tightening up with anxiety. Notice the employee’s signals about safety and trust (body language, verbal cues, action). Notice the reactions of the rest of the group; everyone is involved (especially those who claim not to be). Consider your actions carefully.</p>	<p>Deal with the situation as soon as you receive the first cue. <i>Do not wait</i>. It will not go away, or resolve itself without your intervention. Make dedicated time to talk (about 20 minutes). Remind yourself to be open and neutral. Take a couple of deep breaths, then start with small talk (if possible). Gently ease closer to the issue as the employee begins to feel safe. Focus on the quality of your voice and presence. Do not allow your own feelings to take control. At this stage you are simply listening, being supportive, and letting the employee “steam off.” Your own views have no place yet. Let the employee lead the conversation. Stay loose.</p>	<p>Emphasize neutrality and good will: “How are things going?” “I want to check in with you to see how you’re doing with...” “It sounds like you’re feeling...” “Tell me more about...” “I’m curious about...” Use feeling words and empathy. Cultivate the charged “hm.” Use metaphors. Let the employee steam off (10 minutes, usually less). Ask if there’s more. When there’s no more, ask if the employee would be comfortable with your feedback. Be neutral, empathic, and supportive. Trust and good will are your best assets. Avoid advice. Be proactive.</p>
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Phase Two: When situations are more tricky (8% more)

<p>The situation seems more troubled or tense. Your previous conversation seems not to have helped. You (or others) seem to say the wrong thing. The employee’s activation or resistance rises. Re-focus on yourself, your own process and reactions. Think of the principle of non-resistance, of flow.</p>	<p>Your own activation begins. You easily lose your own center, and your relationship with the employee is therefore compromised. Your voice tightens slightly. You’re getting annoyed, anxious, uncertain, frustrated. Notice your tendency, at this stage, to either avoid or punish. Resist both. Think about how hard it is to change.</p>	<p><i>Slow down</i>. Return to your own center, your own feelings. Pay attention to your heart (a good general principle). Take some time for yourself to re-establish a sense of neutrality and support. Avoid judgmental or critical language. Ask yourself if this is just about the employee, or also about you. Use the “Columbo” approach.</p>	<p>Stay collaborative. Use “we...” “I want to check-in...” “I’m curious, I wonder about...” “I’m not sure about...” “It seems like we’re struggling...” “I wonder if we should...” Take ownership of part of the issue, and ask the same. Use gentle advice (careful!).</p>
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Phase Three: Difficult situations (the remaining 2%)

<p>You are stymied, frustrated, and angry. You have the impulse to distance and to punish. The relationship seems to go wrong at every turn. You begin to dislike the employee, as do others. The group displays many kinds of adaptive behaviours to avoid the employee.</p>	<p>The relationship feels fraught by resistance and heaviness. You question your own ability and skill. You start to shut down emotionally, and you think of punitive measures for the employee. Resentment creeps in. You wonder what others are thinking about the situation.</p>	<p>Speak the unspoken. Share your frustration honestly, privately, and with diplomacy. Do not triangulate. Be honest, clear, and direct. Do your own personal homework. Make a firm verbal contract that meets your needs. Seek appropriate assistance.</p>	<p>“It seems like things are difficult.” “I’m not sure what else to do.” “My impulse is to distance, but I don’t want to do that.” “Let’s talk about what’s happening.” “This is what I need: ...” “I need you to help me with this...”</p>
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GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING TEAM INTEGRATION AND HEALTH

1. *Meet Every Day*

Many working teams in the corporate world spend time and money on so-called bonding activities (such as whitewater rafting) designed to help people become more familiar with each other. Almost universally, such practices do not work: they are superficial, brief, and contrived. Conversely, effective team integration derives from the same kinds of experiences as those that contribute to good family and community relationships: time spent together every day. Ideally, the team should meet at the beginning of every day for a meeting of about fifteen minutes. This is a time to hear about personal or professional items that may impact upon the day, to hear how people are doing generally, and simply to chat. It is extraordinarily difficult for a team to work well if a daily meeting is not held.

2. *Meet Once Every Season, and Once Per Year*

Longer meetings, such as planning sessions (one day) and retreats (two or three days) are also essential. We all spend too much time putting out fires in daily work to think about the big picture, but it's in the big picture that our vision of our work will eventually manifest. Without a sense of that vision and how it is unfolding, the work becomes drudgery.

3. *Place Boundaries around the Work*

In any environment of deep professional dedication, one occupational hazard is that the work begins to find its way into all the personal areas it does not belong. This is why a typical career professional faces a burnout crisis every three to five years (see next item). The best way to avoid this is to create clear and strong boundaries in the work. Create firm time structures for the different aspects of your work (because multi-tasking does not work!). Fight for your space and time. Otherwise, it will be taken from you.

4. *Avoid Burnout*

Expect some type of burnout every three to five years. It's simply part of the territory of deep commitment to a career (and, by extension, of working with emotionally charged situations). Pay attention to the warning signs - fatigue, cynicism, emotional shutdown, erosion of boundaries, health problems, depression, addiction - and try to catch them early, when there is still time to take a break. Know when you need a rest. If you miss the signs, you will damage yourself and others (obviously). Consider burnout as an occupational stage, not as a disability. Simply catch it early (transforming it from a potentially crippling experience into a relaxing break).

5. *Debrief Daily*

In any human community (including the workplace, of course), emotional intensity is the norm. There is no end to the messiness of human nature. Get used to conflicts, politics, and emotional crises. In dealing with these, daily debriefing is a minimum requirement for all staff (including you, if you are the supervisor). You need to be able to go into the office of a colleague, shut the door, and talk for a few minutes about what has just happened. You also need to be able to call dependable mentors and peers (paid or otherwise) who will give you supportive and ethical feedback and advice. Without such support, you simply cannot preserve both your professionalism and your character.

6. *Participate in Health Practices*

Among the commonalities shared by successful teams in the workplace is commitment, as a group and individually, to some type of health and wellness practice (yoga, Tai Chi, running, gardening, whatever). The activity itself matters little; what's important is the intent to share and deepen team relationships by way of mutual activity.

7. *Train Together*

In any professional environment, things change quickly (and with many disagreements). As such, ongoing professional development is an absolutely essential requirement for professionalism. Team members who train together assist the team in two ways: personally, by way of enhanced skills and contributions; and synergistically, by way of deepened relationships.

8. *Fight the "Corrosion of Character" with Soft Skills*

The modern corporate workplace is increasingly challenged with regard to traditional values such as loyalty, commitment, and team cohesion. Large organizations have great difficulty resisting this corrosion of character (a phrase from Richard Sennett), but individual teams commonly do well: at the local level, where a high degree of daily autonomy exists. The skills for management at the local level are soft skills – effective communication and conflict resolution mostly – and should be taught to every team member.

A MISCELLANY OF STRATEGIES FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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Leadership (in its various forms) is one of the most influential roles in society. After parenting, it is perhaps the most crucial. And yet, few professionals have any substantial leadership training. Most good managers pick up skills in the field, thinking on their feet, trying to put out fires and keep employees motivated. Here are a few strategies that the good ones have in common:

1. Approach Leadership as a Devotion

The quality of a manager's presence – their character, you could say – has more impact on the workplace environment than any other single factor. Love what you do, acknowledge the potentially profound role you play in an employee's life. Get past the politics and the drudgery and the unpaid hours. Develop and bring into the workplace your sense of the social and professional obligations of what you do.

2. Lead From Desire

The French philosopher Simone Weil once said that “the intelligence must be led by desire.” At heart, professionalism is an emotional endeavor. In turn, good leadership engages our feelings and sympathies and dreams. The most effective managers and facilitators are those who openly express and evoke such feelings. Their passion – for the subject, for the interactions – is infectious.

3. Lead From Behind

Borrowing a phrase from Gandhi, a good leader leads from behind. Diminish your own authority, create collaborative projects, allow employees to teach each other. A good manager displays precisely the same interpersonal skills as a good teacher.

4. Do What You Love

The content of any workplace project should reflect your own interests. Try to customize projects to your own style and approach. Part of this customization involves bringing to the workplace environment activities and practices that, on the surface, have nothing to do with the subject but which interest you greatly. If you like gardening or badminton or wood-turning, find a way to bring these into your management. They will imprint the workplace environment with your own energy and passion.

5. Build Containmentment

Your capacity to hold the energy of professionalism, to respect and nurture fragile interpersonal connections in the workplace, is a function of your containmentment capacity; how grounded you can be, with clear boundaries, with sensitivity and gentleness. A good manager is comfortable with emotions, is adept at encouraging and managing debates, is consistently neutral and clear in dealing with everyone. A good manager makes the environment feel safe, and this is one of the most difficult leadership skills to master.

6. Make Progress Contingent Upon Opposition

William Blake, the 19th century poet who invented the modern mind, wrote that “without contraries is no progression.” In the workplace environment, progress means debate, disagreement, dialog, negotiation, and spirited engagement with the process. Encourage these in your workplace. If you make it safe to do so – if you protect, in other words, the value of diverse views – employees will discover how to think; and, more importantly, how to believe.

7. Talk Less, Facilitate More

At any given time in the typical workplace, only about a fifth of the employees are actually listening to the manager. Besides, those who *are* listening will forget most of what they’ve heard within a few days or weeks. But if you engage them in an unusual process that requires attention and dedication (i.e. by having employees teach each other), they will remember almost everything, and for a long time. If you have specific content that you must impart, break it down into small blocks each of which takes no more than half an hour. Then do something else. If the content cannot be broken down, make it participatory and collaborative.

8. Let Employees Teach Each Other (and You)

Employees who have the opportunity to teach each other consistently demonstrate higher levels of skill and knowledge in a given area. In the workplace, about half the time can be devoted to this collaborative leadership. It’s more fun, more useful, and more lasting. Besides, the manager gets to learn some new things also.

9. Encourage Employee Responsibility (the fifty per cent rule)

The workplace environment is developed by two main forces: the employees, and the manager (or supervisor, or whatever the term of the day). Each is responsible for half the energy. Typically, managers take too much. They control too tightly. But employees also make the experience for themselves, and if they do not take responsibility – for their own participation, for greater involvement in discussions, for ownership of the space – then everything falls flat. As a manager, you agree to take half; ask your employees to do the same.

10. Prefer Instincts Over Facts

In all fields, the best scholars or practitioners are those with the most highly developed instincts for their subject – not those who know the most factual details. Paradoxically, the evaluation system in most educational institutions and corporations tests solely for facts while completely ignoring instincts. As a manager, pay attention to this imbalance and attempt to remedy it.

11. Learn and Teach Health Practices

Whether it's Tai Chi, Chi Kung, Yoga, Aikido, Pilates, or some integrated hybrid, health practices greatly facilitate professionalism. This is one of the most significant findings of educational and workplace research. Employees who move, who practice proper breathing and ergonomics, who take breaks to stretch and unwind – consistently do better. As a manager, one of the ways you can enhance the workplace environment is by bringing health practices into the workplace. Such practices should be adaptable to any employee, relatively easy to do, and above all should be fun.

12. Use Humor, but Don't Try to be Funny

Humor is one of the most powerful leadership tools (as is fear; but fear teaches only the dynamics of fear, whereas humor can teach anything). And yet, humor is vastly underutilized in the professional environment. But it's a skill that can be learned. A complex skill, yes, possibly the most complex of the human social skills; nonetheless, it can be developed. The basic key to humor is playfulness, nothing more. Don't try too hard; just have fun.

13. Don't Try to Make Everyone Happy

In any given professional activity, the ideal spectrum of experience is one in which most employees are enjoying themselves but at least two are at opposite ends of a spectrum: one is ecstatic (because the task or job feeds them in some profound way) and one is dejected (because temperamentally they are unsuited to the current task or job). An ideal professional environment is one in which every group member generally occupies the center but visits both extremes at least once. A workplace without a shadow is false and dangerous.

14. Nurture the Shadow Carrier

Shadow carriers hold, by way of projection, the shadow material of a group. They are essential features of any human community, and they are the most important people to befriend. They are straight talkers, they know what's going on behind the scenes, and they are strong. Dealing with them teaches you about yourself, shows you how to take ownership of your own shadow, and instructs you in humanity.

15. Lead in at least Four Different Styles

Most managers know that different learning and relationship styles are a reality, but few actually adapt their leadership to accommodate those styles. Personally, I like to use four different styles, each of which matches one of the four states of the human nervous system (fight, flight, freeze, orient). I introduce debates and spirited dialog for those who need to fight; I employ the imagination for those whose tendency is for flight; I cover material slowly, and with precision, for those who freeze; and I connect everything together so as to provide a framework for those who orient.

16. Know Your Own Style

Especially in stressful or conflictual situations, everyone generally reverts to one of the four coping styles of the nervous system (fight, flight, freeze, orient). It's what we learned in childhood, what has helped us to get out of similar situations in the past. But usually, we are so good at one approach that we neglect the others: fighters become rigid when they should back off, those with flight responses become avoidant under stress, freezers fail to act when they are startled, and those with orienting fail to follow through. In any given stressful situation, only one of the four responses is called for; as such, what we do by default is only correct one quarter of the time. Know what you do, what your default is, and learn to balance your approaches so that you can respond appropriately to any situation. In other words, learn to be able to choose and follow through on any of the responses. This is the essence of neutrality.

17. Assist Employees with Overall Health

Many employees are sleep-deprived, sit too long in chairs, and have too much going on in their lives. This is a social as well as a professional problem. As my contribution to its resolution, I frequently try to educate employees about achieving better sleep (which makes them better employees), stopping smoking (my ongoing worldwide campaign), or developing various other health improvement strategies. Everything, after all, is connected.

18. Avoid Terminal Burnout

Expect some type of burnout experience every three to five years. This is simply part of the territory of being deeply committed to what you do. Pay attention to the warning signs - fatigue, cynicism, emotional shutdown, erosion of boundaries, health problems, depression - and try to catch them early, when there is still time to take a break. Know when you need a rest. If you miss the signs, you will damage yourself and others (obviously). Consider burnout as an occupational stage, not as a disability. Simply catch it early (transforming it from a potentially crippling experience into a relaxing break).

19. Debrief

In any context of emotional intensity or dedicated engagement to a shared task, daily debriefing is a minimum requirement. You need to be able to go into the office of a colleague, shut the door, and talk for a few minutes about whatever's on your mind. You also need to be able to call dependable mentors and peers (paid or otherwise) who will give you supportive and ethical feedback and advice. Without such support, you simply cannot preserve your empathy or your dedication.

20. Learn Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills

Most managers have no formal interpersonal skills training. This is bizarre, given that management is one of the most interpersonal professions anyone can undertake. At a minimum, good managers should have basic counseling and conflict resolution skills. They must be able to respond empathically, to establish and preserve safe containment for conflicts, to be decent in situations where otherwise they might hide in their authority. Above all, a good manager is neutral in emotional situations, and this is simply a skill that most people do not naturally possess. It must be learned.

21. Be a Beginner

Perhaps the best managers are those who are open to their own new learning. Too often, we use the same approaches and strategies. We stagnate. Resolve to change one important aspect of your management style every year; over time, you will be freshened by new insights and strategies. Moreover, employees appreciate manager experimentation; it encourages them to try new things themselves.

22. Practice the Subtle Check-in

In any workplace environment, emotional situations arise that require immediate and private intervention. Overwhelm, depression, anxiety, and fatigue are perhaps the most common scenarios (though in conflictual situations, anger is most common). To respond to such circumstances, find a reasonably private space (an adjoining empty workplace, for example) in which you and the employee can meet. Deal with emotional situations immediately; they will not go away, and usually will not resolve without your intervention. Make dedicated time to talk (about 10 minutes). Remind yourself to be open and neutral. Focus on the quality of your voice and presence. Let the employee lead the conversation. Emphasize neutrality and good will. Use diplomatic language: "How are things going?", "I want to check in with you...", "I notice that...", "It sounds like you're feeling...", "I'm curious about..." Be aware of your tendency in this kind of situation (fight, flight, freeze) and evaluate whether it's an appropriate response to this situation. Do not get angry, or avoid the situation. Stay neutral. Focus on containment, safety, and trust.