Supervisors need to have the ability to get to know everyone. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, a good supervisor knows them.

- A supervisor that says it like they see it. You don’t need to shout and scream, or pretend you’re a big boss and above everyone. Give respect and you get respect back.

- The guys have to be comfortable with you, there needs to be honesty and no fear. When there is no fear there is never a stupid question. That keeps guys safe.

- Lead by example. They watch, they see what their supervisor does, they notice if you do something unsafe, your minimum standard is seen as acceptable.

Supervisors’ leadership practices that create strong and positive safety climates and encourage safe behaviour in workgroups

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rmit.edu.au/research/health-safety-research

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Centre for Construction Work Health and Safety Research
Purpose of this guide

Supervisors play a critical role in driving healthy and safety (H&S) performance in the workplace. They act as a critical link between senior managers and the rest of the workforce, ensuring the consistent implementation of corporate H&S policies and procedures in the workplace. It is through supervisors that workers form an understanding of what ‘management really wants’ in relation to H&S. This provides insights into supervisors’ leadership styles and how leadership shape workplace culture and influence workers’ H&S-related behaviors. It is based on research conducted on seven major infrastructure projects.

How to use the guide

The guide:
1. provides key findings from the research,
2. makes suggestions for developing supervisors’ leadership styles so that they lead to positive safety climates, and safe working practices within workgroups, and
3. identifies skills and practices that can guide the development of supervisors’ leadership capability.

The guide can be used by supervisors to develop an awareness of the impact of different leadership styles and practices on workplace leadership development programs for supervisors. The guide also helps workers to recognize leadership styles they could encounter in the construction field, and identify behaviors which influence H&S and other aspects of project performance.

Key findings

1. H&S compliance and participation are important, and are influenced by supervisors’ leadership behaviors.

Construction work is undertaken to a tight schedule. High quality relationships between supervisors and workers have a positive impact on many aspects of group performance. The development of a trusting and collaborative workplace environment encourages workers to look out for the H&S of their co-workers and others. When workers feel that H&S is valued and their ideas for improvement are taken seriously, they are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors that go beyond their usual job duties and are focused on creating a safe and healthy environment for all. Effective supervisors are role models and leaders. They are approachable and visible, and set a positive example for H&S compliance.

2. Supervisors adopt relationship-based and technical leadership styles in different activities or situations.

Effective supervisors adopt a leadership style that positively influences the behavior of their employees. They are able to recognize different activities or situations, and choose the most appropriate leadership style to adopt. Effective supervisors are able to adapt their leadership style to different activities or situations, and are able to recognize the importance of different leadership styles. They are able to motivate and lead workers, and foster a positive H&S climate in the workplace.

3. Both relationship-based and technical leadership have a positive H&S impact.

High quality relationships between supervisors and workers have a positive impact on many aspects of group performance. The development of a trusting and collaborative workplace environment encourages workers to look out for the H&S of their co-workers and others. When workers feel that H&S is valued and their ideas for improvement are taken seriously, they are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors that go beyond their usual job duties and are focused on creating a safe and healthy environment for all. Effective supervisors are role models and leaders. They are approachable and visible, and set a positive example for H&S compliance. 

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