The Effective Health Care Supervisor

Eighth Edition

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# Table of Contents

Preface ................................................................. xv  
About the Author .................................................. xix  

## PART I—THE SETTING ............................................... 1  

**Chapter 1** The Evolving Supervisory Role ......................... 3  
  Chapter Objectives ............................................. 3  
  For Consideration: Reinventing the  
    Healthcare Organization .................................. 3  
  The (Whirl)Winds of Change ................................. 4  
  The Broadest Shifting Paradigms: The Only  
    Constant Is Change ....................................... 4  
  Organizational Priority Number One: The Bottom Line ... 5  
  Then Came Reengineering .................................... 6  
  Can We “Reinvent” the Hospital? ............................. 7  
  Healthcare Paradigms and Their Effects .................... 8  
  The Evolving Role of the Healthcare Manager .......... 9  
  Job Security in the New Environment ....................... 14  
  Health Care Versus “Industry” ............................... 15  
  Where Does Your Department Fit? ........................... 21  
  A Word about Quality ........................................ 22  
  To Embark on a Successful Supervisory Career .......... 22  
  Questions for Review and Discussion ....................... 23  
  Exercise: Where Does Your Department Fit? ............... 24  

**Chapter 2** The Volatile Healthcare Environment ................... 27  
  Chapter Objectives ............................................. 27  
  For Consideration: Predictions Are Strange Phenomena .. 27  
  The Managed Care “Solution” ............................... 28  
  The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 ........................... 31  
  Marketing Health Care ....................................... 32  
  Healthcare Settings ........................................... 33  
  For Consideration: Predictions ............................. 35  
  External Pressure: An Area of Continuing Concern ..... 35  
  The Changing Face of Healthcare Management .......... 36
# Healthcare Reform: The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010

- Questions for Review and Discussion: 48
- Exercise: Responding to External Pressure: 49

## Chapter 3 The Nature of Supervision: Health Care and Everywhere

- Chapter Objectives: 51
- For Consideration: Paid to Make Decisions?: 51
- Born to Work or Watch?: 52
- The Dual Nature of the Supervisor’s Role: 53
- The Peter Principle Revisited: 54
- The Working Trap: 55
- Nothing to Do?: 56
- The Responsibilities of Healthcare Management: 57
- The Nature of Supervision: 58
- Truly Paid to Make Decisions?: 59
- Questions for Review and Discussion: 62
- Exercise: Your Two Hats: 63

## Chapter 4 Management and Its Basic Functions

- Chapter Objectives: 65
- For Consideration: A Tough Day for the New Manager: 65
- Definitions, Titles, and Other Intangibles: 66
- Introducing the Basic Management Functions: 70
- Management Functions in Brief: 72
- Planning: 72
- Organizing: 74
- Directing: 75
- Coordinating: 76
- Controlling: 76
- The Management Functions in Action: 77
- Emphasis: 77
- Processes Versus People: 79
- Questions for Review and Discussion: 79
- Case: Balancing the Functions: 80

## PART II—THE SUPERVISOR AND SELF

## Chapter 5 Delegation and Empowerment: Forming Some Good Habits

- Chapter Objectives: 85
- For Consideration: Delegation for the Wrong Reasons, or “If You Want Something Done Right…”: 85
- Taken for Granted: 86
# Table of Contents

The Nature of Delegation .................................. 87
What about “Empowerment”? .......................... 88
Why Delegate? ......................................... 89
Failure to Delegate ................................... 91
Looking Upward as well as Downward: The
   Personal Approach to Delegation .................. 94
The Pattern: The Nuts and Bolts of Delegation ..... 97
“If You Want Something Done Right...” ............. 102
Authority and Responsibility .......................... 103
Freedom to Fail ....................................... 103
Building the Habit .................................... 104
Questions for Review and Discussion ................. 104
Exercise: To Whom Should You Delegate? ............ 105

## Chapter 6 Time Management: Expanding the Day
without Stretching the Clock ......................... 107

Chapter Objectives ..................................... 107
For Consideration: The Manager and the
   Sales Representative ............................ 107
Time and Time Again .................................. 108
The Time Wasters .................................... 110
The Time Savers ..................................... 112
Time Management and Stress Management:
   Inseparable Activities ............................. 118
Time-Wasting Pressures and the
   Supervisor’s Response ............................ 119
The Unrenewable Resource ........................... 120
Questions for Review and Discussion ................. 121
Case: Ten Minutes to Spare? .......................... 121

## Chapter 7 Self-Management and Personal
Supervisory Effectiveness ............................... 123

Chapter Objectives .................................... 123
For Consideration: The Case of the Vanishing Day .... 123
It Starts with You ...................................... 124
Initiative ............................................. 125
Barriers to Effectiveness .............................. 125
Organization ......................................... 126
Individual Planning and Goal Setting ................. 128
The Increasing Importance of Prioritizing .......... 129
Stress and the Supervisor ............................. 130
Effective Use of Time ................................ 133
How Well Suited Are You to the Supervisory Role? 134
Questions for Review and Discussion ................. 140
Exercise: The Effectiveness Checklist ................. 141
PART III—THE SUPERVISOR AND THE EMPLOYEE .......... 143

Chapter 8 Interviewing: Start Strong to Recruit Successfully . . . 145
Chapter Objectives .............................................. 145
For Consideration: Potential Interview Questions? .......... 145
The Manager and the Interview ............................. 146
Candidates: Outside and Inside ............................... 147
Preparing for the Interview ................................. 148
Guidelines for Questioning ................................. 150
The Actual Interview ........................................... 156
Follow-Up .......................................................... 159
Questions for Review and Discussion ........................ 160
Role-Play: Would You Hire This Person? .................... 161

Chapter 9 Leadership and the Supervisor ....................... 163
Chapter Objectives .............................................. 163
For Consideration: One Boss Too Many .................... 163
Introducing Leadership ........................................ 164
Patterns of Leadership ......................................... 164
Some Assumptions about People ............................ 166
Style and Circumstances ...................................... 167
Outmoded Views ............................................... 168
Leadership’s Primary Characteristic ........................ 168
Word Play: Leadership Versus Management ................ 169
Can You Lead “By the Book”? ............................... 169
An Employee’s View ............................................ 171
The Visible Supervisor ......................................... 172
Leading by Default ............................................. 172
True Leadership .................................................. 172
Return to “One Boss Too Many” ........................... 173
Communicating with Employees: Leadership in Action ... 173
Empathy as an Asset ............................................ 174
Developing Mutual Understanding .......................... 175
Barriers to Effective Communication ....................... 178
Listening ......................................................... 181
Diversity in the One-to-One Relationship ................... 183
For Effective Interpersonal Communication ............... 184
The Open-Door Attitude ...................................... 185
Questions for Review and Discussion ....................... 186
Exercise: A View of You as a Leader ......................... 187

Chapter 10 When the Employees Are Professionals ......... 189
Chapter Objectives .............................................. 189
For Consideration .............................................. 189
Defining the Professional ..................................... 191
Nonhealth Professionals in Health Care ...................... 192
The Essential Team Approach ............................................... 193
Professional Treatment and Professional Behavior ..................... 193
Judgment: Professional Versus Managerial ................................ 197
Motivation and the Professional ........................................... 198
Turnover ........................................................................... 199
Appraising the Professional’s Performance ............................... 200
Credibility of the Professional’s Superior ................................ 200
Delegation: The Same but Different ...................................... 201
The Professional and Change .............................................. 202
Employee Problems ......................................................... 203
The Professional as a Supervisor ........................................ 203
Unions and the Professional Employee ................................... 205
For Consideration: A Disagreement  
   Between Professionals .................................................. 208
Questions for Review and Discussion ..................................... 211
Case: The Bully ............................................................... 211

Chapter 11  Motivation: Intangible Forces and Slippery Rules ...213
Chapter Objectives ............................................................. 213
For Consideration: Always the Last to Know ......................... 213
Satisfaction in Work ......................................................... 214
Demands on the Organization ............................................. 215
Motivating Forces: The Basic Needs ..................................... 215
What Makes Them Perform? ............................................. 219
Money as a Motivator ....................................................... 221
Learn What Motivates Your Employees:
   Look to Yourself ......................................................... 221
   Why the Last to Know? ................................................ 223
   Motivation and the First-Line Supervisor ......................... 224
   Questions for Review and Discussion ............................. 224
   Case: The Promotion .................................................. 225

Chapter 12  Performance Appraisal: Cornerstone of 
Employee Development ...................................................... 227
Chapter Objectives ............................................................. 227
For Consideration: “It’s Review Time Again” ......................... 227
Appraisal and the Manager ................................................. 228
The Objectives of Appraisal .............................................. 229
Traditional Appraisal Methods .......................................... 230
Common Appraisal Problems ............................................ 235
Why Appraisal Programs Often Fail ................................... 236
What about Jack’s Evaluation? .......................................... 237
Why Appraise at All? ....................................................... 238
Requirements of an Effective Appraisal System ...................... 238
The Changing Language of Appraisal ................................... 240
Making Performance Appraisal Legally Defensible .................. 241
Table of Contents

Standard-Based Appraisal: A Long-Range Target ........ 242
Constructive Appraisal ......................................... 243
The Appraisal Interview ......................................... 245
Living with an Existing System .............................. 245
A Simple Objective ............................................... 247
Questions for Review and Discussion ......................... 247
Role-Play: Ms. Winston's Appraisal ......................... 248

Chapter 13 Criticism and Discipline: Guts, Tact, and Justice . . . . . 251
Chapter Objectives ............................................... 251
For Consideration: Did He Have It Coming? ................. 251
The Need for Rules ............................................... 252
Criticism .......................................................... 252
Perhaps He Had Something Coming ......................... 255
Discipline .......................................................... 256
Nonpunitive Discipline .......................................... 264
Behavioral Contracting ......................................... 265
Coaching: Stopping Trouble Before It Starts ............... 266
Guts, Tact, and Justice .......................................... 267
Questions for Review and Discussion ......................... 268
Case: A Good Employee, but .................................. 268

Chapter 14 The Problem Employee and Employee Problems . . . . . 271
Chapter Objectives ............................................... 271
For Consideration: What Do We Do about a First-Class Grouch? .................. 271
Is There Such a Person as a “Problem Employee”? ........ 272
Dealing with the Problem Employee .......................... 274
Seven Guidelines .................................................. 275
A Special Case: The Dead-End Employee ................. 276
Absenteeism ....................................................... 278
Abuse of Sick Time ............................................... 280
The Troubled Employee ......................................... 281
One and the Same? .............................................. 283
Special Cases: Some Signs of the Times ................... 284
The Real “Problem” ............................................. 285
Questions for Review and Discussion ......................... 286
Case: The Great Stone Face .................................. 286

Chapter 15 The Supervisor and the Human Resource Department . . . . . 289
Chapter Objectives ............................................... 289
For Consideration: A Favor or a Trap? ...................... 289
“Personnel” Equals People ..................................... 290
A Vital Staff Function .......................................... 290
A Service of Increasing Value .................................. 291
Learning about Your HR Department ....................... 293
Putting the HR Department to Work ......................... 297
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanted: Well-Considered Input</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Why as well as What</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Friends Like This</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis On Service</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise: Where Can Human Resources Help?</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART IV—THE SUPERVISOR AND THE TASK</strong></td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 16  Ethics and Ethical Standards</strong></td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Is the Boss Always the Boss?</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and the Healthcare Manager</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Ethics: Some of the Issues</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Ethics and the Healthcare Organization</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Codes Clash: Mason Versus Green</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Ethical Issues</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management’s Responsibilities: A Top-Down Obligation</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But It Remains Everyone’s Job</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 17 Decisions, Decisions</strong></td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Deciding Under Pressure</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Fact of Life</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Basic Decision-Making Process</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk, Uncertainty, and Judgment</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The No-Decision Option</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Range of Decisions</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility and Leadership</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Awareness: Often an Essential Pre-Step</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Magic Formula</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case: The New Copy Machine</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 18 Management of Change: Resistance</strong></td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Delayed Change of Command</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Change</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflexibility or Resistance?</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing with an Evolving Role</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Resistance?</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadly Delays: Revisiting Mr. Smith</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Supervisor’s Approach</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 19</td>
<td>Communication: Not by Spoken Words Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For Consideration: The Wilson Letter, or,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the Agents of Wordiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Written Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources of Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidelines for Better Letters and Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing Old Habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attacking the Agents of Wordiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology Strikes: When the Message Is an Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Matter of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise: The Copy Machine Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 20</td>
<td>How to Arrange and Conduct Effective Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Let’s Schedule a Meeting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management by Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Types of Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leading a Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaning Up “The Conference”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Videoconferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use or Abuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case: Your Word Against His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 21</td>
<td>Budgeting and Cost Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“What's a Budget Besides Lots of Work I Don't Have Time for?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing the Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Total Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illustration: The Diagnostic Imaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department Expense Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing and Scheduling Considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Budgeting Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Finished” Is Just Begun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of Work? Certainly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control: Awareness Plus Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 22</td>
<td>Quality and Productivity: Sides of the Same Coin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Caught in the Elevator</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Total Quality Movement: Just “Excellence” Again?</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity “Recycled”</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sides of the Same Coin</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Versus Cost and Output</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An “Elevator Speech”</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise: In Search of—?</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 23</th>
<th>Teams, Team Building, and Teamwork</th>
<th>423</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>423</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Can You Build an Effective Team from the “Enemy Camps?”</td>
<td>423</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Teams</td>
<td>424</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project or Employee Team</td>
<td>425</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Departmental Team</td>
<td>432</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Building and Its Purposes</td>
<td>432</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing Employee Potential</td>
<td>433</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stages of Team Building</td>
<td>434</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power of the Team: The Individual</td>
<td>437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Building and Leadership Style</td>
<td>437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance for the Team Builder</td>
<td>438</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude and Commitment: Everyone’s</td>
<td>439</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Has Her Work Cut Out for Her</td>
<td>439</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>441</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case: The Silent Majority</td>
<td>441</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 24</th>
<th>Methods Improvement: Making Work—and Life—easier</th>
<th>443</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Objectives</td>
<td>443</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Consideration: Is There a Better Way to Accomplish This Task?</td>
<td>443</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edison-Plus</td>
<td>444</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for Improvement</td>
<td>444</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the Center of Quality Management</td>
<td>445</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Methods Improvement Approach</td>
<td>446</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tools and Techniques of Methods Improvement</td>
<td>450</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The Information Request</td>
<td>454</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Organized Approach to Methods Improvement</td>
<td>457</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Methods-Minded Attitude</td>
<td>460</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Review and Discussion</td>
<td>460</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise: “The Pencil”</td>
<td>461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 25  Reengineering and Reduction-in-Force  ........................................ 463
- Chapter Objectives ............................................................................. 463
- For Consideration: Expanding Responsibilities .................................. 463
- Reengineering: Perception, Intent, and Reality .................................. 464
- Reduction-in-Force and Beyond ......................................................... 466
- Coping with Your Expanding Responsibilities .................................... 472
- Resistance to Change: Coping with Dramatic Paradigm Shifts .......... 473
- Questions for Review and Discussion ................................................. 474
- Case: Identifying for Layoff ................................................................. 475

## Chapter 26  Continuing Education: Your Employees and You .................. 477
- Chapter Objectives ............................................................................. 477
- For Consideration: Cross-Training and the Supervisor ...................... 477
- Why Continuing Education? ............................................................... 478
- Commitment ....................................................................................... 479
- Many Options ..................................................................................... 480
- Your Employees .................................................................................. 481
- An Urgent and Expanding Need ......................................................... 486
- Continuing Education and You ......................................................... 489
- When There Is No Money .................................................................... 490
- Your Key Role ..................................................................................... 491
- Questions for Review and Discussion ................................................. 491
- Exercise: The Skills Inventory ............................................................ 492

## Chapter 27  The Supervisor and the Law ..................................................... 493
- Chapter Objectives ............................................................................. 493
- For Consideration: What Kind of Employee? .................................... 493
- Legal Guides for Supervisory Behavior .............................................. 493
- The National Labor Relations Act ...................................................... 494
- Wage and Hour Laws ......................................................................... 497
- Equal Employment Opportunity ....................................................... 502
- Other Pertinent Legislation ............................................................... 507
- Special Concern: Sexual Harassment ............................................... 509
- Who Needs More Rules? .................................................................... 510
- Questions for Review and Discussion ................................................. 511
- Exercise: Rates, Hours, and Overtime ................................................. 512

## Chapter 28  Living with HIPAA ................................................................. 513
- Chapter Objectives ............................................................................. 513
- For Consideration: A Look at Privacy .............................................. 513
- Introducing HIPAA ............................................................................. 514
- The Intent and the Reality ................................................................. 516
- Title II and Beyond ............................................................................. 517
- The Privacy Controversy ..................................................................... 518
- Respecting Privacy in a Public Setting .............................................. 523
Table of Contents  xiii

HIPAA and the Supervisor .......................... 523
Here to Stay ...................................... 524
Questions for Review and Discussion ............... 525
Case: Privacy Versus the “Need to Know” .............. 526
Appendix A: Typical Privacy Notice ........................ 528

Chapter 29 Organizational Communication: Looking
Up, Down, and Laterally .......................... 535
Chapter Objectives ................................. 535
For Consideration: The Unrequested Information .... 535
What Goes Down May Not Come Up .................. 535
Your Role in Organizational Communication ........ 538
The Grapevine .................................... 543
Dealing with “The Unrequested Information” ........ 544
Which Way Do You Face? ........................... 545
Questions for Review and Discussion ................. 545
Case: The Crunch ................................... 546

Chapter 30 Unions: Avoiding Them When Possible
and Living with Them When Necessary ............... 547
Chapter Objectives ................................ 547
For Consideration: The Confrontation ............... 547
Can Unionization Be Avoided? ........................ 548
Health Care: More and More a Special Case ....... 549
The Supervisor’s Position ........................... 551
The Organizing Approach ........................... 551
Unequal Positions .................................. 552
Your Active Role ................................... 553
Handling “The Confrontation” ........................ 556
The Bargaining Election ............................. 556
If the Union Wins .................................. 557
Decertification ..................................... 557
Questions for Review and Discussion ................. 559
Case: The Organizer ................................ 559

Annotated Bibliography ............................. 561

List of Quotations .................................. 573

Index .................................................. 579
In preparing each previous edition of this book it has been the practice to seriously consider a number of user comments and suggestions and to solicit editorial direction from the publisher. This eighth edition was approached in like manner; every effort was made to make it more useful to students who employ it as a text and to working individuals who might use it for continuing education purposes or as a reference for information about supervisory practice.

Some of the topics presented in this book represent tried and true management fundamentals that have not changed in many years and are not likely to change significantly in the future, although important refinements are offered from time to time. One particular topic addressed in previous editions, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), remains in a state of flux as HIPAA implementation continues to be stretched out over a number of years. Topics that have not previously found much space in these pages, such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), must now be addressed to some extent because of their likely impact on the payment for and delivery of health care.

Some choices concerning topic presentation were made based on user feedback. In this book's use as a text, for example, it is likely that no single course uses all the chapters, although each individual chapter is used in some courses. The most difficult choice faced with every chapter has always been the depth of topic coverage. Most chapter topics addressed in this volume could be, and in most instances are, the topics of entire books. But if every topic addressed herein were given in-depth treatment, the book would be impractically long and, more to the point, the book's intent—that of a comprehensive introduction and overview—would be defeated.

To a considerable extent, the book deals with the fundamentals of management as applied by those who supervise in healthcare organizations. Although management fundamentals remain essentially unchanged, matters of how, why, and when they are applied are affected by the changing circumstances of the modern healthcare environment. Changes affecting the delivery of health care make it necessary for managers at all levels to continually adapt to shifting circumstances as they apply the basic concepts of management.

In a manner similar to the previous edition, each chapter begins with a case study offered “For Consideration” while reading the chapter, to be addressed at a later point in the chapter after the information relevant to its assessment has been provided. As in the previous edition, “Questions for Review and Discussion” precede the single case or exercise that ends each chapter.

xv
A number of changes have been made to clarify and, in some instances, expand on or update information presented in the previous edition. Every effort has been made to make the book more useful by making parts of its message clearer and easier to absorb and apply. Also, an effort has been made to maintain simplicity of language wherever possible, in the firm belief that information presented in a conversational tone is more readily absorbed.

A word about terminology is in order, specifically about the two terms used most frequently throughout this book. The terms in question are *supervisor* and *manager*. These terms have long generated widely varying perceptions among people who use them regularly, and even among people who simply encounter them in written material. The problems arise from the conflict of the essential generic meanings of these terms with their frequent uses as organizational titles.

Taken simply as words in the English language, *manager* and *supervisor* have essentially the same meaning. This can be verified in any dictionary, and every available thesaurus lists each as a synonym for the other. Both refer to overseeing the activities of others. Management may be simply but accurately described as “getting things done through people.” Likewise, supervision may be described as “overseeing the activities of people in the performance of work.” In both instances the process is the same: providing the people who are doing the work at the next lowest organizational level with the guidance, instruction, support, and assistance they need to get the job done. And in both instances, the higher-up—whether called manager or supervisor—bears responsibility for the output of the subordinates.

The greatest conflict in the varying perceptions of manager and supervisor is the tendency of many people, perhaps the majority, to believe that manager is a “higher” and thus better title than supervisor. This perception is most likely due to the manner in which the terms are used as titles within work organizations, creating the basic conflict with their generic meanings. Much of the time this perception is accurate; manager, as an organizational title, is superior to supervisor in some hierarchies. On occasion, however, the situation is reversed. In some places, supervisor is used as superior to manager and various other position titles.

Because manager and supervisor have different meanings for different people and are subject to varying uses in different organizations, this volume attempts to establish consistency through the use of generic meanings. Therefore, throughout this book the terms supervisor and manager are used interchangeably, as are supervision and management. At times some qualifying terms may be used in denoting “top management” or perhaps “first-line management,” “first-line supervision,” or “middle management,” but whether one says manager or supervisor, in all instances the reference is to the person who is responsible for the output of those at the next lowest organizational level.

A great deal of what appears in this book is applicable to all kinds of business organizations, but much of the material reflects the unique character of the healthcare organization. The book is intended to be read and used by first- and second-line supervisors and middle managers, those with or without formal training in management, and potential supervisors. It can also serve as a refresher text for managers at all levels of the healthcare organization. It is
also pertinent to many upper-level managers—the people who supervise the supervisors of the supervisors—in terms of lending perspective to the top-down view of what happens at lower levels.

There is no absolute topic order for the material in this book. Although it is divided into a significant number of chapters by topic, it is really not possible to deal with any single topic separate from all others. Each is implicitly or explicitly part of perhaps several other topics. Communication is a case in point; it is the primary topic of several chapters, yet the principles of effective communication make their presence felt in a dozen or more additional chapters.

Chapters can be read selectively, but it may be most helpful to begin with the first four chapters for the sake of obtaining an overall perspective. Then read those chapters on the topics that interest you, appeal to you, or touch on a problem you are experiencing. For instance, if the last meeting you attended was a disaster and you would like to learn about effective meetings, go straight to Chapter 20. Do not worry about skipping chapters that simply do not apply to your situation—just as long as you are certain they do not apply. For example, if you do not have budget responsibility at present, save Chapter 21 until later. Use your valuable reading time for the topics that will do you the most good on the job.

Supervision is often a tough task, and one of the conditions that make it so is the appalling lack of definite solutions to problems. If we were presenting technical task instructions, we could simply say, “Here’s how to do it, period.” However, the problems of supervision more often than not are problems of people, most of whom are unpredictably, but quite naturally, different from each other. When presented with a specific problem, your “correct” answer may be this, that, the other, or none of the above, depending on the people involved. The technical task worker may spend much time in a world of black and white, but the supervisor spends every day among varying shades of gray. Parts of this book are concerned with what are necessarily gray areas. The book can guide you in making many decisions; it cannot, however, prescribe solutions to “standard” problems, since few such problems exist in supervision.

Use this book for general enlightenment about healthcare supervision. Use it as a reference—seeking out specific topics through either the index or the Table of Contents. Use it as a textbook for management development classes.

Whatever value this book possesses lies largely in its potential as a working guide. Use it as your particular questions and needs suggest. If it helps you on the job in any substantial way, even only now and then, it will have served its intended purpose.

Charles R. McConnell
About the Author

Charles R. McConnell is an independent healthcare management and human resources consultant and freelance writer specializing in business, management, and human resource topics. For 11 years, he was active as a management engineering consultant with the Management and Planning Services (MAPS) division of the Hospital Association of New York State (HANYS) and later spent 18 years as a hospital human resources manager. As an author, coauthor, and anthology editor, he has published about 30 books and has contributed numerous articles to various publications. He is in his 33rd year as editor of the quarterly professional journal, The Health Care Manager.

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