

Developing Best Practices for Supervisors at the Curry School

A summary of our community values in supervisor/supervisee relationships from our Appreciative Inquiry workshop

Introduction

The faculty and staff councils at Curry have made a commitment to support and provide resources that enhance supervision practices across the school. In an effort to inform this work, Curry staff have engaged in an appreciative inquiry workshop, documenting positive supervision behaviors. The purpose of this document is to promote these ideals, encourage positive supervisory practices, and increase staff engagement in the great success of the Curry school, its students and faculty.

The Workshop

The appreciative inquiry workshop was led by Julie Haizlip, MD, Director of the UVa Center for Appreciative Practice. This document summarizes the collective discussion based on the questions below:

In our daily work, we have the opportunity to interact with a variety of people. The quality of these exchanges greatly influence our days and our satisfaction with our work. Perhaps one of the most influential interactions is that which occurs between an individual and his or her supervisor. Take a moment to think about a time when you had a great experience with your supervisor. It could be an individual instance or a longitudinal relationship. Please tell me the story of that experience and what made it so good and memorable.

- What was the nature of your working relationship?
- How did you communicate with one another?
- What did your supervisor do during this particular instance or on a regular basis that led to you feeling positively about him/her?
- What did you bring to the interaction that contributed to its success?
- What can we take away from your experience to inform how supervisors and supervisees can best work together?

Workshop Results

In the workshop, communication and trust between supervisors and employees were emphasized as essential for a positive work environment. Staff also detailed the points below when telling their stories of positive experiences:

Communication	Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The employee is provided space and autonomy. ▪ Values and work ethic are modeled. ▪ Communication is frequent, open, honest, transparent, and positive. ▪ Communicate group goals so that everyone is aware of the specifics of all jobs within a department. ▪ Supervisor takes action on feedback when appropriate. ▪ Supervisor is willing to give and receive feedback. ▪ Provides information on organizational/departmental vision, goals, and objectives. ▪ Employee knows when to ask for help. ▪ Employee is given space to fail and learn from mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The supervisor values employee as a person. ▪ They enjoy working together. ▪ The supervisor cares about the employee's goals and success. ▪ The supervisor and employee connect around shared interests. They may get together outside of work. ▪ There is empathy on both sides. ▪ The employee feels protected by the supervisor. ▪ The employee is allowed to be creative. ▪ The supervisor provides steady presence. ▪ The supervisor cares about the team – leverages individual skills and identifies needs. ▪ The supervisor and employee have mutual respect for one another.
Development	Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities for growth in education, responsibilities, and challenging goals are provided. ▪ Supervisor provides support for professional goals and is aware of personal goals that may extend outside of the job. ▪ There is public acknowledgement of accomplishments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The supervisor understands the employee's job and provides support when needed. ▪ Opportunities for group goals are provided within a department.

Resources

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most (By Stone, Patton, and Heen) is a well-known book that inspires effective communication. The Office of Human Resources at Ohio State University has developed an [easy-to-read summary](#) of this title.

All Things Bob Sutton, Stanford professor, organizational psychologist and New York Times bestselling author on leadership and supervision.

Stronger Ties with Coworkers Boost Creativity and Resilience: Jane Dutton, University of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

Memo to the CEO: Are you the source of workplace dysfunction? By Robert I. Sutton

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