

Who's in Charge?

by Karl D. Spence

Managers take great pride in the fact that they can plan programs, draft directives, and develop all sorts of innovative things with little or no supervision. In fact, as they move up in the bureaucratic hierarchy, they are expected to receive less and less day-to-day supervision. Phrases such as "receives general supervision" or "supervisor reviews work for overall compliance to departmental policy..." abound in position descriptions. The equation "higher grade = less supervision" generally holds true in both the civil service and in the private sector.

Unfortunately, some people in a supervisory position who take pride in the fact that they can "do it alone" expect the same from those beneath them—all the way down to the apprentice or trainee level. A major result of *laissez faire* management, especially in an industrial environment, is an increase in accidents without the organization.

In many industrial activities, low level employees, trainees, and apprentices experience an accident rate out of proportion to their population within the organization. If this situation shows up in your accident data, take a closer look at exactly who is supervising your work force at the first line level and where they are when their troops are gainfully employed. In too

many instances, you will discover a foreman who "is busy catching up on paperwork" or a leadworker who is trying so hard to be "one of the guys" that he's hesitant to exercise any meaningful supervisory guidance or give constructive criticism.

The bottom line is this: when any group of employees is working on an industrial task, someone should actively be supervising them. This does not mean a chain gang scenario, but someone must inspect the work site. Someone must check to make sure that all employees are wearing or using personal protective equipment, and someone must be observing the work evolutions. The degree of supervision should be high if the experience level of the workers is low.

"So what else is new?" I grant you that my philosophies certainly aren't earthshaking, but the next time you see a group of people doing their thing out in the "yard," ask them who is in charge and where he or she is. Ask them who inspected the work area and who briefed them on hazard awareness. If nobody appears to be in charge, you have a new topic to discuss at the next safety council meeting and I'll bet your accident rate improves.

from Navy Lifeline

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