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Supportive Leadership: What It Is and How To Develop It

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Whether you're in charge of a small team for a single project, or you're a department head managing many people, you can benefit from establishing a thoughtful leadership style. Some people prefer to make the decisions for their teams while others prefer to provide more autonomy to their people. Supportive leadership combines these strategies in an employee-first approach. In this article, we explain what supportive leadership is, describe how to become a supportive leader, highlight the importance of supportive leadership in business, offer the qualities of a successful supportive leader and give tips for providing effective supportive leadership.

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What is supportive leadership?

Supportive leadership is a leadership style in which the leader supports their subordinates with tools and resources until they have the skills to work autonomously. Supportive leaders do their best to ensure everyone on their team has the necessary skills, tools and resources to complete the task they've been assigned or find success in a long-term project.

Often, the level of support varies from team member to team member depending on each individual employee's knowledge and needs. The objective of supportive leadership

is team members who are capable of working autonomously, but who feel comfortable

seeking support when they need it.

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How to become a supportive leader

Supportive leaders often have positive relationships with their team members. If you're interested in becoming a supportive leader, follow these steps:

1. Establish relationships

Relationship building is an essential tenet of supportive leadership. Establishing and growing positive relationships with your employees shows that you care about them both as professionals and people. A trust-centered relationship will make it easier for you to offer them feedback and support and for them to accept it.

2. Pinpoint needs

Know what each member of your team needs for success. This may require you to conduct skills assessments or closely review your team members' work when first getting to know them, their strengths and their areas for growth. With some proactive knowledge, you can better prepare to assist them with new projects and tasks as they come up.

3. Build a cohesive team

Facilitate relationship building between your team members. More than likely, they'll need to work together on certain tasks or projects. Ensuring the entire team has a foundation of trust and support will help the employees work together cohesively in the future.

4. Research solutions

When embarking on a new project, have a roster of tools and resources ready to share with your team. Research potential supports in advance, based on what you know about your team's individual strengths and weaknesses, so that if they need help, you can provide it quickly.

5. Check in regularly

Make sure you regularly meet with your team, particularly those who are new. These check-ins will show the employee that you care about how they're doing and want them

to come to you for support when they need it. Check-ins will also help you gauge how the project is going and what level of support you need to provide to ensure success.

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Importance of supportive leadership in business

Supportive leadership is an important and valuable leadership style for businesses. Not only does it foster positive relationships between employees, but it also ultimately empowers team members to develop their professional skills and work well autonomously or with little active management and guidance. The supportive leadership style values upfront employee development and training with the expectation that those investments in employees will pay off with high productivity and excellent performance.

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What are the qualities of a supportive leader?

While supportive leaders can and do have varied personalities and approaches for helping their team, many share a similar set of characteristics:

- **Accepting:** Supportive leaders are often very accepting of their employees, and they work to meet them where they are in terms of skills and abilities.
- **Positive:** Maintaining a positive attitude is an important ability for a supportive leader.
- **Considerate:** Most supportive leaders consider their employee's perspectives and opinions before making a decision or delegating an assignment.
- **Empathetic:** Showing empathy for employees who need support and assistance is a vital quality for supportive leaders.
- **Confident:** The best supportive leaders are confident not just in their abilities to effectively lead, but also in their employees' abilities to learn, improve and produce excellent work.
- **Resourceful:** Many supportive leaders are resourceful—they can find the necessary tools to help their employees meet their goals.

- **Knowledgeable:** Supportive leaders should have a good base of knowledge in their field or industry to best support their team.
- **Patient:** Excellent supportive leaders are patient with their employees as they learn new skills.

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Tips for effective supportive leadership

To maximize the impact of your supportive leadership, use these tips:

- **Build your relationships:** One of the best ways to help you become and remain a supportive leader is by establishing relationships with your peers that help you develop your leadership skills and improve your abilities.
- **Support yourself:** Make sure you're taking time to work toward your own goals. When you're productive and successful in your professional life, you'll be better prepared to help your teamwork towards individual and group success.
- **Be available:** Make sure you're available for your team. You don't have to make yourself available every hour of every day, but ensure you set aside ample time at regular intervals for your team to ask you questions or for guidance.
- **Normalize failure:** Failure helps you learn and improve. If you normalize the act of getting something wrong, learning from the mistake and using that information to improve, you'll see your team take greater risks and improve their abilities quickly.
- **Stay aware of the big picture:** Make sure you regularly check to make sure you and your team's endeavors align with the company's overall goals and strategies.

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