

Leadership in the Transportation, Logistics, and Distribution Sectors

Note: This case is designed for the student to integrate the concepts covered in communications, leadership, and motivation. They will need to identify barriers to communications and present action steps to resolve them. They will need to determine how flexible a supervisor needs to be in her or his leadership style to impact cross-generational communications and outcomes. The gender issue presents a challenge with respect to managing diversity in the workplace.

Foundations of Organizational Behavior Case Study

You are supervising a group of 25 employees, most of whom are warehousemen. They range in age from 18 – 50. Their experience on the job varies from six months to 20 years. Two new employees, Frank and Jo, are joining the team. They are right out of high school and need to be trained by your lead employee, Sam, who is 45 and worked in the company for 15 years.

The training program has historically included the supervisor introducing new hires to the members of the team, an overview of the company's goals, and how the warehousemen fit into the big picture. The lead employee handles the job specific training. Occasionally, employees need to work overtime in order to accomplish the training as well as get the job done. This is Sam's first time training new hires.

Prior to conducting the training, you have a brief conversation with Sam to let him know how confident you feel in his ability to share his knowledge with new employees. After all, he's been around for a long time. As a new supervisor, there are a lot of demands on your time so you are not able to complete the introductions that are normally done. You tell Sam, I want you to take complete charge of the training and make sure Joe and Frank know what they need to do.

Initially, it appeared that the training was going smoothly. However, Sam has come to you, complaining that the young people don't have a "very good work ethic." It is his opinion that the new hires aren't giving the amount of effort that is required to learn their tasks as quickly as Sam thinks they should. He's told you that back in his day, a new person could pick up the job and a matter of a week by putting in hard work and extra effort.

You suggested to Sam that he step back and review how he has been communicating the job assignments to the new employees. Sam's response is that he's only doing what you told him to do -- make sure they know what the jobs are in the area as soon as possible. Sam has indicated that he doesn't feel he's getting clear support and direction from you on how to train the new hires.

When you approach the new members of your team and ask how things are going, their response generally has been single word answers, such as "OK". However, you have observed that their work is not quite up to standard for the level of experience and

training that they have received. Upon probing further, Frank and Jo have told you that Sam is so out of touch with how to talk to them. He expects them to learn too much too quickly. Additionally, they indicate that Sam yells at them whenever they make a mistake. As a result, they are hesitant to ask any questions or seek clarification for the way to do things right.

Frank and Jo also indicate they have lots of ideas about how they can get the work done quicker by using new methods. They don't believe that Sam is listening to them simply because of their age.

In a separate meeting, Jo has told you that she feels Sam is speaking to her the way he does because she's female. It is her perception that Sam doesn't think women belong working in the warehouse.

You are challenged to resolve the issues and ensure your employees are trained.

1. What are the top issues identified in this case?
2. What are steps you need to take to ensure Sam knows what's expected of him?
3. Would you draw upon a different leadership style to motivate Sam than you would to motivate Frank and Jo?
4. What are possible barriers to communications between Sam and the trainees?
5. How would you rectify those barriers?
6. How would you address Jo's concerns?