

7 basic rules for boss-subordinate relations

By Rey Elbo | In the Workplace | May 11, 2018

I'm a newly promoted supervisor tasked to manage 11 workers who used to be my co-workers in our department for the past five years. My appointment started two weeks ago, and during that brief period of time, I've already experienced certain issues which if not corrected could make work life miserable. Can you give me some basic guidelines that I can use in starting my journey to a successful relationship with people? — New Road.



You're not alone. Many new people managers who are situated just like must be feeling like blood-thirsty mosquitoes at a nudist camp. You're excited and when you look around, you know it's wonderful to be in the company of totally nude people all over, except that as a mosquito, you don't know when and where to start biting.

As a supervisor, you need to gradually feel and understand the whole situation. It should be easy as you've known your co-workers for some time. You need only a little adjustment to ensure a smooth transition from being one of the gang to someone a "little above" the rest.

An adjustment is needed to achieve a healthy balance between managing people and achieving department goals at the same time. It's not easy. There will be a constant struggle to satisfy both ends. And to avoid those "certain issues," you need to learn and understand some broad rules to ensure sound working relationship with people. With that in mind, the following should help:

- 1) Understand the strengths and weaknesses of people.** This can help you determine what to assign the workers on the basis of their interests, capability, past performance, and career goals, among others. It doesn't mean, however, that you should only give assignments to those capable of doing it, but to give opportunities to others who are willing to be trained.
- 2) Treat everyone equally with dignity and full respect.** As a supervisor, there will be time when you're tempted to play favorites, especially with hardworking and non-

complaining people. Whatever happens, avoid any situation when you would be perceived as someone giving the slightest hint of favoritism. Instead, give everyone every opportunity to shine and prove their worth.

- 3) **Show concern for your subordinates. Be proactive.** Try to understand those issues from the perspective of everyone, and not only from your interest or certain individual. There's no harm in asking people how you can be of help to make their work easy. Know what company resources would be available for use, but without burdening the organization with additional expenses.
- 4) **Promote co-ownership in achieving department goals.** This includes defining the target, the manner by which to achieve it, choosing responsible persons to manage it, identifying resources to use, and the timeline to be followed. If you do, it would be easy for everyone to contribute doing his or her share knowing that they're part of it all from the beginning. Otherwise, it would be difficult to seek cooperation.
- 5) **Have a regular feedback session with everyone.** This includes having a frank and honest discussion with people about their work performance. Whatever happens, criticize with utmost care. Remain positive and impersonal. This means having a private meeting with those concerned if it involves poor performance and giving praise in public when they deserve it.
- 6) **Be a friendly mentor, not a toxic, dictatorial boss.** Do this while maintaining a certain degree of distance so you won't be perceived as either too soft or too hard on people. You can show leadership by helping people on the best way to do a job, defending them against unjust criticism from other departments, and lending a little of your personal money under certain emergency cases, if warranted.
- 7) **Celebrate small wins with the team.** Take a break whenever possible and practical. Even if the company doesn't have a budget, create an atmosphere where you recognize individual or team effort for achieving something. It doesn't have to be expensive. Among us Filipinos, an inexpensive pizza or noodle meal, even if it comes from the company cafeteria, will surely be a delight.

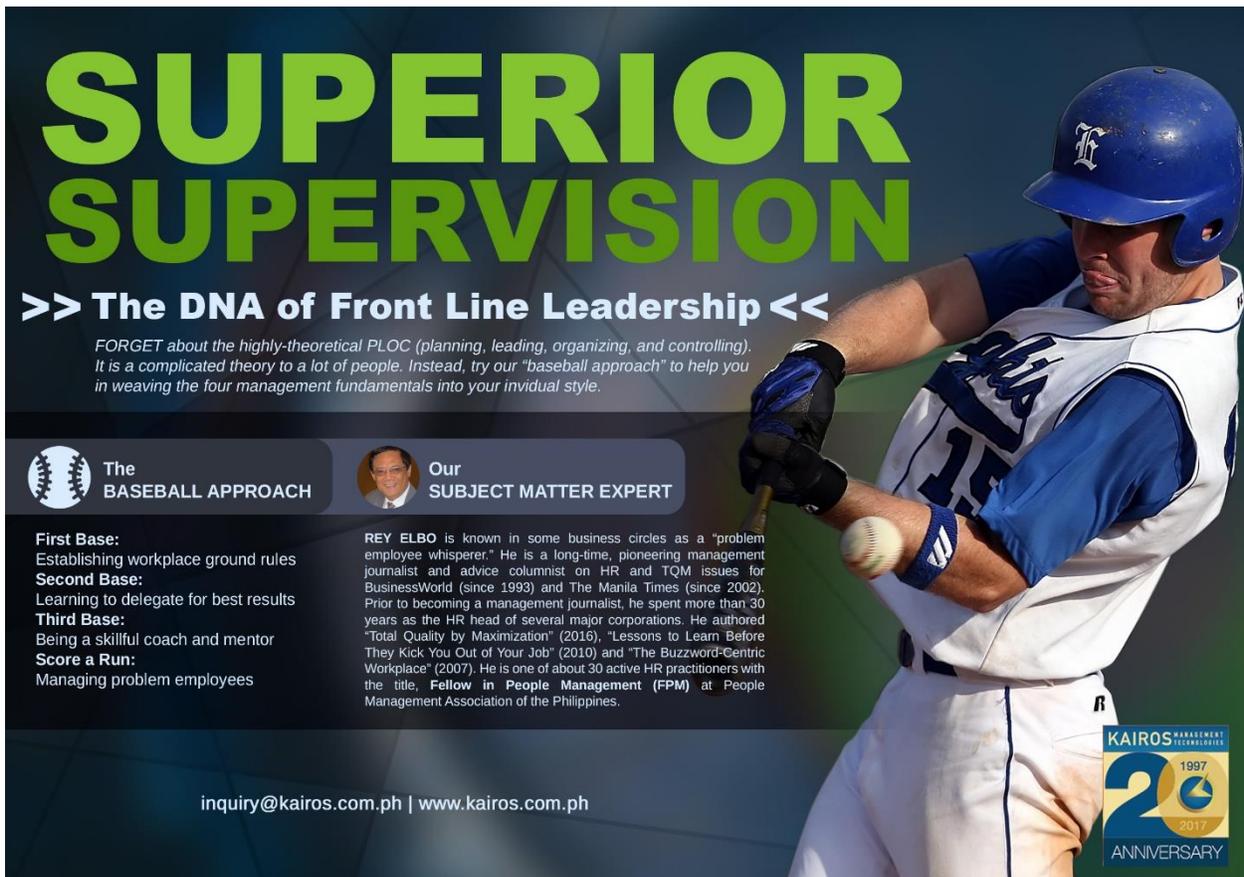
You really can't become an overnight management sensation for doing all of these. Sometimes, despite observing these basic rules, you may still experience a recurrence of those little issues that leave you disappointed. If that happens, make adjustments according to the demands of the situation.

It's easy to moan about losing your grip on the situation. Whatever happens, don't blame the workers or even your boss. It's an exercise in futility. Instead, take stock of your situation. Do whatever is necessary. Sometimes, your situation may need an adjustment of the layout of your work area to create an open and positive work environment.

Don't be a perfectionist. At least not yet. When your workload is excessive, you can end up focusing on your own assignments and tend to miss out on your relationships with people. You have to achieve some balance in your work life by making time for leisure activities, whether it's bowling or just relaxing with your co-workers in your favorite restaurant. If you believe that hard work alone will do the trick, then you're wrong. It's not enough.

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