

SECTION IV

INFORMATION

AND

RESOURCES

FOR THE

SUPERVISOR

SUPERVISION AS EDUCATIONAL PROCEDURE STUDENT/SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP

Supervision is a form of education which seeks to enhance learning from experience. As students work with people (what Anton Boison calls “living documents”) in situations rather than books, there is much possibility for learning. Growth and learning involve both joy and pain.

The formal aspects of supervision relate to the goals established in the contract for learning. Beneath the formal aspects of supervision lies the mystery of two human beings working with each other, that individual and common life may be enhanced. Central to such learning is a climate in which one can reveal vulnerabilities and weaknesses. If the student is required to be only strong, on top of things, competent, confident, much will be lost. Most important is a relationship in which a student can reveal feelings of disappointment or sadness central to anyone who seeks to respond to the mystery of God.

While supervision is not counseling, it should be a relationship in which strain and stress can be discussed. This is difficult to accomplish. The student may be willing to share weaknesses only if the Supervisor is also willing to reveal pain and sadness. Within this kind of open relationship comes the strength and power to move on in the face of the brokenness we know in our personal and social lives, still exploring the nature and purpose of ministry.

Supervisory Images

The relationship between Supervisor and student is a covenant relationship. It is a dynamic relationship between two persons who covenant to learn and grow together.

One useful image to describe the Supervisor is that of guide. Both Supervisor and student embark on a pilgrimage to learn. The Supervisor is somewhat familiar with the territory and can assist the student in anticipating the events of the journey. By virtue of the Supervisor’s experience, he/she is able to see meaning in and bring insight to the occurrences of ministry.

The Supervisor is also a theologian. To engage in theology is to reflect on life in terms of religious faith, symbols, and tradition. It is to place our humanity in conversation with ones faith tradition to enhance understanding.

The Supervisor is a teacher. The Supervisor as teacher, assists the student in mastering a rigorous discipline to bring about competence in ministry. As an adjunct member of the faculty, the Supervisor is recognized as one responsible for teaching and evaluating the student.

Counseling

Deals with the origin of feelings, causes, etc.

Spiritual Direction

Private, sacred contract. Not supervision.
We can certainly talk about the spiritual life and SHOULD.
Not a relationship of spiritual director/ee.

Theological Supervision

It dialogues about the ministry the student is doing
and what that ministerial act does to him/her as a person;
we only deal with feelings when they are connected
to that particular act of ministry.

For example:

*“When a parish council president laughed
at my suggestion, I felt foolish and embarrassed.”*

Talk about what it feels like to be publicly
embarrassed as a church person. That is OK.

Don't get into the feeling of embarrassment
itself, like, *“What other times in your life have
you been embarrassed and how did you feel then?”*

**Supervision does NOT deal
with the roots of feelings.**

NOTES ON THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS

Agenda is always student selected - always written or typed - always turned in two to three days in advance to the Supervisor.

Agenda centers on a “slice of real life” ministry in which they are involved and about which they still have some feeling (positive and negative). What issues remain or perhaps issues which flow from this described encounter or conversation.

One-on-one supervision is respected. Time is given to the student. Supervisor guides the student through the agenda mindful of the following steps:

THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS

CLARIFICATION STAGE Information; focus on obtaining an accurate picture of the event; Keep this segment brief.

EVALUATION STAGE Focus on core issues; sort out the real problem(s) and/or what Needs attention first.

EXPLORATION STAGE Focus on alternatives;. Available options? Which is most viable for continuing ministry?

THEOLOGIZING STAGE How this incident/conversation speaks to MINISTRY. Where is the Lord in all of this? What does this say about Church? about faith? about ministry? serving others? etc.? What is now “truth” in light of the Gospel?

COMMITMENT STAGE Focus on: “Where are YOU in this situation NOW? What ministering response do you offer?”

Supervision of the theological kind should help bridge the gap between theory and practice and learned theology and owned theology and self-identity and personhood.

THEOLOGICAL SUPERVISION BRIDGES

Theory and Practice
Learned Theology and Owned Theology
Self-Identity and Personhood

THE NATURE OF FEEDBACK AND SOME CRITERIA FOR USEFUL FEEDBACK

“FEEDBACK” is a way of helping another person to help consider changing his behavior. It is communication to a person (or to a group) which gives that person (or a group) information about how he affect others (or how the group is affecting more of its members).

As in a guided missile system, “feedback” helps a person keep his behavior “on target” and thus better achieve his goals.

SOME CRITERIA FOR USEFUL FEEDBACK:

1. It is descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing one’s own reaction to another’s behavior (a specific bit) it leaves the other free to use it or not use it, as he sees fit. **BY AVOIDING EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE**, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively (learning is well nigh impossible when one’s defenses are up).
2. It is specific rather than general. To be told that one is “domineering” will probably not be as useful as to be told that “just now when we were deciding the issue, I felt that you did not listen to what others said and that you were expecting me either to accept your point of view or face attack from you.”
3. It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver of it. For feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs as giver and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.
4. It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some short-coming over which he has no control.
5. It is solicited, rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver himself has formulated the kind of question which those observing can answer.
6. It is well-timed. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior - depending, of course on the person’s (or group’s) readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.
7. It is checked to insure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback he has received to see if it corresponds to what the sender has in mind. Also, both giver and receiver need opportunity to check with others in the group the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one man’s impression or is it an impression shared by others?

FEEDBACK, then, is a way of giving help; it is a corrective mechanism for the person who wants to learn how well his behavior matches his intentions; and it is a means for establishing one’s identity, for answering Who am I?

The How - To of Constructive Criticism

SETTING: Comfortable, but professional; a professional appointment; the relationship takes on a constructive attempt to help an Intern improve who he/she is and what he/she does.

SOLUTION: 1) It is never easy to point out a person's problem in development, but concern for the student would outweigh your discomfort.

2) Determine the learning goals you have mutually agreed upon in the contract.

3) Give honest appraisals of YOUR PERCEPTIONS of how those goals are being met or are not being met.

4) Deal with the fact versus assumptions - be clear and precise
Always use examples for the concrete situation
It is valid to ventilate feelings - but identify them as FEELINGS.

5) Handle misunderstanding, misconceptions, apprehensions as they occur and as they are part of the whole learning process - this always puts things in their proper place, gives them appropriated emphasis and treats them in a manner which allows the student to cope - he/she begins to trust you because you always tell him/her where they stand.

6) Deal forthrightly with a difficult situation or issue

- *clarity of diagnosis*

Exactly what do I know about this situation? Where is the student in this learning process? What is the nature of his/her problem here?

- *directness in handling*

Directness is not negative - only if it is motivated by hostility. It is possible to suffer far more from not knowing than from knowing.

7) What is legitimate?

Deal with issues, with feelings as they affect an act of ministry, and with behavior - both professional and personal.

** The spiritual life may be dealt with insofar as it is manifested in the public sphere - e.g. he/she does not attend Liturgy, he/she refuses to participate in the prayer group.

8) Always allow time for student reflection and response - never say your piece and then decide you have an appointment.

9) Always end the conversation by determining new goals or refine the "old" goal - with a view to improvement - e.g. What can we do about this in the future?

**Basic Supervisor Skills
Participants Personal Evaluation Form**

- 1) Listens well _____

- 2) Identifies feelings _____

- 3) Check perceptions _____

- 4) Defines issues _____

- 5) Facilitates problem-solving _____

- 6) Maintains boundaries _____

- 7) Employs theological reflection _____

- 8) Invites follow-up _____

- 9) Demeanor _____

- 10) Other growth issues _____

RECURRENT THEMES IN SUPERVISION

AUTHORITY - Personal and that of others

CONFLICT and **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

ROLE IDENTITY and **COMMITMENT**

SELF-AWARENESS (Strengths and Needs)

INTIMACY/DISTANCE - Relationships

MOTIVATION for **MINISTRY**

DIFFERING THEOLOGIES

COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS

TIME MANAGEMENT vs. **EXPECTATIONS**

Common Supervisory Problems

Acting Defensively:

It is possible that a student could elicit defensiveness in a Supervisor. If this is the case, the Supervisor needs to be aware of what triggers this in him/her. Defensiveness minimizes effectiveness.

Authority:

Supervisors may themselves have some ill feelings about those in authority over them, consequently they may handle authority over another with difficulty or may choose to abandon the authority they do have. Feeling comfortable with the authority one has over a student is a needed attribute; such authority needs to stem from the question, "How can I best help this student learn what he/she needs to know?"

Negativism:

Students learn from when what they do is correct and from when they act or speak incorrectly. Constructive criticism is healthy and life-giving. Negativism and/or cynicism challenge vocational discernment in unhealthy ways. The student rarely has the experience to see through negativism as perhaps situational or as something someone has done to him/herself; often what is concluded is - "This is what ministry does to a person."

Confrontation:

While constructive criticism is central to the act of supervision, confrontation must be seen as a service and not as a negative learning. "How" it is communicated is as significant as "What" is communicated. Students must be confronted with the implications of what they are doing and what it means for those served as well as what it means for him or her.

Not Supervising:

Observation, analysis, reflection and dialogue are part of the Supervisor process. Students learn THROUGH being supervised. Assigning a task to be accomplished by the student with no observation of any kind, no analysis of what took place, no dialogue - is not supervision. Busy work given to the student leaves no time for significant work which can be supervised and shared. Students feel demeaned and manipulated.

Student Advocacy/Fighting the System

Confusing the role of "friend" with "learner", some Supervisors tend to be overly positive; remember their own real or imagined hurts, they err on the side of being "nice" and disguise their real perceptions and judgments - hence they remain "nice" but the student never receives an accurate appraisal of him/herself. On the other hand, students tend to interpret "nice" as pushover; the integrity of the Supervisor is suspect. "If he/she doesn't know me better than this...if he/she withholds information about me from the faculty, what is he/she withholding from me?"

Wholistic Development

Some Supervisors prefer to deal with skill development only. Wholistic development (we admit of no other kind) includes formational and professional development. Some are anxious to learn of the spirituality of the priest; how he/she sustains a prayer life in the midst of busy ministry; how he/she relates to people of all ages and temperaments; how he/she view and acknowledges the celibate life. These are the formational issues for the student.

Role of the Supervisor

Questions for the Supervisor to reflect on as part of personal evaluation of their Supervisory role

I. What is this person's ability to integrate work and theology?

II. Note how the student deals with **authority**.

His/her own

The Supervisor's

That of the Word

III. How does this person operate in the clergy role?
in a servant/leadership role?

IV. Personal reflection on the **skills** of ministry and supervision.

My ability to listen.

My recognition of and ownership of my own feelings.

My ability to enter into the feelings of other persons.

My openness to the lifestyle of other persons.

My ability to create a helping relationship.

My ability to ask the right questions.

My sensitivity to "where the supervisee is" (Ability to deal with reality as perceived rather than as stated.)

My ability to wait for the supervisee's growth, to resist the temptation to manage his/her life.

My recognition of the supervisee's resistance to growth; ability to know when it is appropriate to probe the resistance, and a willingness to do so.

My ability to reflect the process going on between Supervisor and supervisee so as to produce deeper personal insight.

My ability to share the agenda setting with the supervisee.

My honesty in evaluation processes.

Questions for the Supervisor

1. *Am I dealing with this student honestly?*
2. *Am I evaluating their work?*
3. *Am I giving this student my perception of their behavior?*
4. *Am I presenting positive areas of success as well as pointing out areas of needed growth?*
5. *Am I honest about their failure or lack of accountability?*
6. *Have I taken into account how much of their productivity, or lack of it, I can attribute to inexperience?*
7. *Am I able to point out character weaknesses such as: stubbornness; lack of common sense; poor pastoral judgment; immaturity; irresponsibility; discourtesy; insensitivity toward others; authority-problems, poor social behavior, etc.*
8. *Is my advise evasive or is it direct enough for the student to get the point?*
9. *Do I challenge their potential? Do I ask the student if they are satisfied with the quality and the quantity of the supervision they are given?*
10. *Do I set aside time to allow the student to respond to me?*
11. *Do I balance out “what I say with the way that I say it?” (cognitive and emotional content of my message); Do I have a feeling tone for this person? Am aware of their feelings?*
12. *Do I honestly think that the Christian Community can be served by this student later on? Do I point out areas where they come on too strong? Would I want to live with them and share ministry with them?*
13. *Do I share my own spiritual life with my student? Do I feel comfortable praying with my student?*
14. *Do I exercise my authority as I should or am I intimidated by the fact that I am working with a student? Do I go “public” about what I think and feel so that the student can feel free to be more open or “public” about his thoughts and feelings?*

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR SUPERVISORS

1. You shall not try to make the seminarians into your own image and likeness; one is enough.
2. You shall not refuse a student's need, or refuse your consideration, solely because of the trouble he or she causes.
3. You shall not blame heredity or the environment in general; people can surmount their environment.
4. You shall never give a seminarian up as hopeless.
5. You shall try to help ministers-in-the-making become, on the one hand, sensitive and compassionate and, on the other, tough minded.
6. You shall not steal from the seminarians their rightful responsibility for determining their own conduct and accepting the consequences thereof.
7. You shall honor the students engaged in the pursuit of learning and share with them the discipline of knowledge and skills with which you are familiar.
8. You shall have no universal remedies or expect miracles.
9. You shall cherish a sense of humor, which may save you and the supervisee from becoming either depressed or complacent.
10. You shall remember the sacredness and dignity of your calling, and, at the same time, you shall not take yourself too seriously.

By Regina Coll, C.S.J., Supervision of Ministry Students, p. 28

Goals and Objectives

1. The presumption under which I operate is that the seminarian has chosen a site primarily for two reasons: to focus on a particular ministry and to learn or polish the skills appropriate to that ministry. Setting clear, specific goals improves the chance of attaining the skills and attitudes desired. Occasionally, students are unfocused or unclear about specifying what it is they intend to learn. Involvement in ministry without attending to goals is tantamount to being involved in reactive ministry, waiting to see what crisis will arise and then attending to it. Proactive ministry (still open to the exigencies of the day) is a better model from which to operate. Students, therefore, are better served if we can help them to clearly and succinctly state where it is they are heading.

2. The student is the one who plays the major role in the setting of goals. Authority figures, including Supervisors, are not responsible for what learning will be sought. Of course consultation with the Supervisor and the field-education director play a part in deciding on learning-goals, as do curriculum requirements and the student's time schedule. But a student-minister is ultimately responsible for his or her own learning and "must be willing and prepared to take major responsibility for the education-formation process in the midst of a system and people who are used to 'caring for' and controlling others."¹ In our desire to be nurturers, we are sometimes tempted to assume the responsibility that belongs to another. We then encourage what Jean Baker Miller has called "lesser" behavior.

3. My experience with ministry students impels me to advise all Supervisors to be a "brake" of sorts to the goals that students set for themselves. Seminarians are idealistic, full of energy and expectation. They want to save the world, eliminate pain and suffering, and have it all done by Sunday. They are often too demanding of themselves and as a result sometimes overburden themselves and taste failure unnecessarily. Focusing aims and setting realistic goals is one of the first contributions a Supervisor can make. I have never had to advise a student that their goals were too easy; I have never had to suggest that perhaps they were being lazy or inattentive. My job and the job of any Supervisor is to help the students set realistic, attainable goals so that their energy may be well spent.

4. A goal is a statement of purpose. It may indicate just what the student intends to learn or what the student intends to contribute to the setting. I am not suggesting that these two facets of the field work do not overlap and influence, but for purposes of clarity, they are spoken of separately. A goal is a broad statement of what the student hopes to attain -- neither so broad as "save the world for Jesus" or "become an experienced campus minister" nor so narrow as "teach every fourth grader to memorize the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes" or "preach on justice six times."

1. George I. Hunter, *Supervision and Education-Formation for Ministry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Episcopal Divinity School, 1982) pg 16.

Supervisory Artifacts

5. I insist that students write goals by saying “I will . . .,” not “I would like to . . .” or “I hope to . . .” The very writing in that way seems to strengthen the commitment. If we say “I will get a home run,” not “I want to get a home run” or “I hope I get a home run,” our chances are better that we will hit one over the fence. Of course, “I will” is not a guarantee, but it is stronger than “I hope” or “I want to.” And, of course, even if I hit a home run, there is no guarantee that the game will be won.

6. Goals may be professional (What do I want for myself out of this experience?) or project (What am I willing to contribute in this setting?). Professional goals are those skills and abilities that the student wishes to learn. They are a reminder that the student is at the field placement primarily to learn--learn through ministry, yes, but learn. Professional goals may include such things as, “I will develop better listening skills.” “I will be more assertive in expressing my beliefs.” “I will be less aggressive in my relationships with the opposite sex.” Professional goals are often expressions of ideals that will have to be worked on for years or a lifetime.

7. Project goals may include such things as, “I will improve the parish music program.” “I will minister to hospice patients and their families in a compassionate manner.” “I will develop a youth program for Resurrection parish.” While students may choose a field setting in order to develop some specific professional goal themselves, the project goal usually depends more on consultation with the Supervisor. Since the Supervisor is the person who knows the needs of the parish or agency better, it is not possible for student, new to the placement, to set realistic and appropriate goals alone. As I have mentioned, Supervisors can be especially helpful in keeping goals manageable and attainable.

8. As anyone who has ever decided to go on a diet knows, goals alone do not do the trick. We have set up very specific steps toward reaching the goal. These specific steps are objectives. Objectives flow from goals. An objective is a statement that focuses more precisely on the general direction in which a person is heading; it provides the specific steps that will be taken to attain the goal. Objectives are concrete, measurable, attainable.

9. For example, if my professional goal is to improve listening skills, some objectives may be, “I will read three articles on the art of listening.” “I will maintain eye contact when speaking on difficult subjects.” “I will get the advise of my Supervisor concerning leading questions. I will ask Chaplain Costello (who has the reputation of being a good listener) if I might accompany her once a week on hospital rounds.” “I will not interject my own stories and experiences but keep focused on the patient.”

10. If my project goal is to serve St. Mary’s parish through the RCIA program, my objectives may be, “I will participate in the weekly staff preparation meetings.” “I will meet with each catechumen individually each month.” “I will prepare three presentations for the group.”

11. Suppose your goal is to develop a better understanding of the relationship between ministry of the ordained and professional lay ministry. Write your own objectives! Keep them concrete, measurable, and attainable.

12. We do not always accomplish our goals. Students are not judged by their success or failure to attain their goals, but they can be held accountable for carrying out their objectives. They may never get to hit that home run, but they can be expected to show up at practice, eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, exercise, and whatever else the coach demands. So too with ministerial goals. In a discussion of goals, there can be a difference of opinion as to whether or not the goal was attained. A Supervisor may recognize improvement in interpersonal skills, but the student may still be disappointed in the progress made. He or she may think, "I am a little better, but I am not there yet." Not so with objectives. Questions about objectives can usually be answered with a yes or no. A student and Supervisor can usually be answered with a yes or no. A student and Supervisor can go down the list and answer whether each objective was carried out. That is where the responsibility of the student lies.

13. This part of the contract/covenant may be checked for adequacy by using the SPIRO model.² The acronym stands for "specificity, performance, involvement, realism, and observability." Specificity demands the contract be in concrete terms; contracts are not the place to pious platitudes or fuzzy phrases. Performance lets us know exactly what the student will be doing; it is essential that those expectations are clearly understood by everyone involved. Involvement spells out the extent of the seminarian's activity in the placement: Is the student expected to become involved in extracurricular activities at the parish? To attend liturgies? To socialize with the staff? Realism insures that the goals are attainable within the time limit; young people are often impatient with the slow process of life and set unreal demands on themselves. We help hold their feet on the ground even as their spirits may soar. Observability suggests that it ought to be obvious to the student and others involved whether or not the objectives have been carried out and progress made toward the goal.

2. SPIRO was developed by Claus Rohifs and cited in Doran McCarty, *The Supervision of Ministry Students* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1979) 145.

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