



# Session Builders

## *114 Leadership in Action*

### *Purpose/Objectives:*

This exercise gives managers and supervisors an opportunity to practice using leadership skills that will help motivate and develop their employees. Participants select a realistic problem situation, develop an approach for handling it, and then take part in or observe a role play of the problem-solving interview. By going through the entire process, participants are able to see what is necessary to produce adequate information for an interview, to learn what skills are needed to handle the interview appropriately, and to receive feedback from their peers.

**Type:** Role Play

**Time Required:** 90 minutes

**Group Size:** Unlimited

### **Some ways to use this Session Builder include:**

- A reinforcement exercise to build on key leadership skills necessary to meet managerial responsibilities.
- A learning aid to build on leadership skills which already have been presented and need reinforcement.

### *Preparation:*

Make a copy of the Instructions and Common Problems list for each participant. You will also need Observer forms for the problem situations selected by the participants. Please note there are different forms for specific problems.

- Participants will need pencils to complete the exercise.
- Have a chalkboard/chalk or flip chart/markers available to process the exercise.
- Make one copy of each of the Problem Description sheets (A, B, C, D, and E), cut them apart, and hand them out after problem situations are chosen from the list.
- Have a full stapler and paper handy in case the training problem is chosen.
- The room arrangement should be flexible enough to accommodate a role-play situation with easy viewing by the rest of the participants. A desk or table and two chairs will be needed for the role play.

## Process:

- Distribute the Instructions and Common Problems list to participants. Ask them to read the material and select one problem they would like to see role played.
- List on the chalkboard or flip chart the problem situations which have been chosen. This can be done by going around the room and asking which problem each person has selected. (For a group of more than 20 people, do a random check for selection, and ask how many agree with that choice.)
- Select three problems that appear to be the most common choices. Divide the session into four smaller groups that are roughly equal in size, and assign one of the chosen problems to each of the first three groups. Try to see that those who requested a particular problem are assigned to the group handling that problem. Distribute the Problem Description to match the problem title chosen by the group.
- For the group which has not been assigned a problem situation, ask them to act as the employees/managers who will be interviewed later by the groups in the role plays. Have this group come up with ideas on how to handle each employee/manager role for the problems chosen. Encourage them to think of previous situations which they've encountered or to come up with original ideas that are plausible. For example, ideas they might decide to use for these problems could be:

### **Counseling for Excessive Absenteeism**

*This employee had always been enthusiastic about the job and his or her assignments. However, six months ago a new employee was hired to fill a similar position and given the same responsibilities. The employee feels competition from and some jealousy toward this new employee.*

### **Counseling for Too Long Coffee Breaks**

*This employee has developed a small printing business on the side. The company does not specifically prohibit this. The employee has been taking longer coffee breaks and using this time to answer calls and make new contacts and has been making up this time during lunch.*

### **Counseling for Disruption of Others**

*Employee has been asking his or her manager for more information about the job assignments and has not been given adequate help. Therefore, the employee has been going to others to find out how to complete the assignments.*

In these examples, the underlying issue usually takes the supervisor or manager completely by surprise. Before finding out the employee's side of the story, many supervisors or managers assume that the employee's actions are in deliberate defiance of the rules. Though the employees' actions might not be acceptable to the company, supervisors may discover in examples like these that what is **actually** wrong is quite unlike what they **imagined** it to be. This helps supervisors learn that making assumptions about people can lead to unknown problems.

The group may want to work up examples where the employee is clearly in the wrong. An example of this might be:

### **Counseling a Poor Attitude**

*This employee enjoys parties and sports activities away from the work scene. As a matter of fact, work has become a bore and seems to be getting in the way of having fun. Lately, the parties back at the apartment complex have increased in number and have lasted longer. As a result, this employee finds it harder and harder to get to work on time.*

Let the group decide for themselves how they want to present the issue for the employee/manager point of view. Allow them to be creative and flexible in arriving at their position. You may wish to have an extra copy of the Problem Description(s) for this group.

- Allow the groups 20 minutes to discuss how they're going to handle the interviews. You may monitor the interviewing groups to ensure sufficient time is being taken to analyze the problem. However, try to avoid offering suggestions at this point.
- You will begin to realize that the interviewing groups, left unaided, will have a tendency to **assume** certain information about a given problem. They will tend to make judgmental decisions on how to handle a problem before guidelines are established to determine what the real problem is. Several examples of this might be:

### **Groups handling "Counseling Excessive Tardiness"**

*This group often feels the employee is taking advantage and is defying organization policies. While this is sometimes true, the problem is often more complicated. For example, the employee could be having medical problems with a dependent at home, and daily morning hospital visits make him or her late to work. The employee may simply find it hard to share this problem with the supervisor or manager, and unknown to the superior, has been working through his or her lunch break to make up the lost time.*

### **Groups handling "Counseling for Apparent Drug/Alcohol Problem"**

*Here the group handling this problem often comes up with elaborate plans on how to reform the abuser without first determining if the problem is concrete. Again, perhaps the employee is taking medication for a cold which contains an alcoholic cough depressant. Because this employee has diabetes, the medicine has caused an alcoholic breath, lethargic behavior, and a staggering gait. (This suggested employee role is from an actual case which did occur in a large company.)*

## Discussion:

- After about 20 minutes, begin discussion having one of the groups role-play its problem with a participant from the employees/managers group.
- Before each role play begins, distribute the appropriate observer's forms to the rest of the participants. Ask them to complete the sheets while the interview is in progress; and at the end of the interview, give the completed sheet to the interviewer. Please note that there are different forms (A, B, C, D, and E) for specific problem situations.
- To enhance the learning experience and assess current skills, do not show the observer's form to the interviewers prior to the interviews. Let the interviewer groups establish their format using only their present knowledge. When they view the form after the interview has taken place, it helps them see areas which they've overlooked or that were unknown to them. (You can also use the form as a springboard for discussion followed by additional role plays for skill building.)
- When the role plays begin, the interviewer usually takes charge using the guidelines which have been set up by the group. If the guidelines have been carefully worked out, there are no surprises. However, this is rare.
- Most often the interviewer starts off on a given train of thought about what is going wrong, only to learn that the real problem is not what the group had decided it would be. This startles the interviewer, and he or she must attempt to regain control of the situation. Whether he or she is successful depends entirely on the recovery skills of the person doing the interviewing.
- Some interviewers are quite adept and can change direction in midstream to recover the interview and bring it to a successful conclusion. Others, however, are dead set on what they think is going on, can't make the transition and feel indignant that it isn't what they have decided it should be. These temporarily hurt feelings on the part of the interviewer fade away as the discussion proceeds.
- At the end of each role-play interview, ask the interviewer how he or she felt the interview went. Often, the interviewer will say he or she was totally taken aback by the introduction of new information about a given problem. Other participants will remark that this is the way it often happens on the job. Most of the participants will begin to feel it's quite important to seek out all the information about a problem before taking judgmental action.
- Next, ask the employee if he or she felt the situation was handled fairly, and why or why not? Then let the other participants add their comments about what they observed.

- Allow the discussion to last about 10 minutes. Then ask the participants to give their sheets to the interviewer for further feedback. Encourage the observers to make realistic, informative comments to help each interviewer. Be sure, however, that criticisms of the role players do not become rude, caustic, demeaning, or personal. If this happens, remind participants that this is a learning experience, a place to make mistakes and learn how to better handle a given situation.
- Follow this same procedure for each interview.

### Options/Variations:

- If the group is small (5 or less), let each person do a role play of his or her choice. This way each person is given an actual opportunity to go through the interviewing process. Ask others to play the employee's role, and have the rest of the participants complete the observer's sheets.
- If facilities are available, you might choose to assign these roles ahead of the session and have the people videotaped during the interviews. Here you could play the role of the manager/employee; or when possible, ask another participant to take that role. Then have each participant observe how the interview went by allowing him or her to privately view the tape. When tapes have been especially successful or especially poor, you might want to use them to demonstrate a particular point. Ask the participants for their permission to use their taped interview. (You should not use any of the taped interviews for any purpose without the person's express [signed] permission.) Then take one good example and one poor example and show them to the session for comparison purposes when demonstrating particular leadership skills.
- As a learning aid, follow the above process of videotaping or let an individual select a role; and then you act as the employee/manager for them. When finished, discuss how they feel the interview went.
- If you know some of the problems the group is having prior to the session, you may want to choose specific problem situations ahead of time and present only those to the group. This will save time in choosing which problem situations will be discussed during the session.
- Use any one of the suggested problem situations with other Session Builders as additional role-play situations.

### Notes:

- Participants find this exercise particularly beneficial. Often the problems chosen are ones they are currently dealing with back on the job. This exercise gives them immediate feedback about how to handle the situation.

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## **LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

### Instructions

Listed below are common managerial problems. Select one you would like to see presented during the session. (You'll be given a more complete description of the selected problem later.)

The purpose of this assignment is to give you additional experience in handling these situations. So, rather than picking a topic you're especially familiar with, choose a topic that you feel would be more difficult to handle.

Work out how you would handle the problem. Be prepared to present your topic in a role-playing format with another participant acting as your employee (or manager).

By doing this, you'll gain experience in researching the problem, presenting it before others in a learning environment, and receiving constructive feedback on how the problem was handled.

The session atmosphere gives you a unique opportunity to try out these skills without fearing reprisal, losing job recognition, or feeling humiliated.

### **Common Problems**

A

1. Counseling for excessive tardiness
2. Counseling for excessive absenteeism
3. Counseling for too long coffee breaks
4. Counseling a poor attitude

B

5. Counseling for disruption of others
6. Counseling employees who refuse to cooperate
7. Counseling physical confrontations (fistfights)
8. Counseling for apparent drug/alcohol problem

C

9. Delegating a new work assignment
10. Counseling for late monthly reports
11. Counseling complaint for unfair workloads
12. Counseling resistance to change

D

13. Handling welcoming phase of orientation
14. Teaching an employee a skill (how to staple)
15. Training a transferred employee
16. Counseling for job corrections

E

17. Resolving excessive work overload with manager
18. Discussing a new ruling with your manager
19. Requesting development for employees
20. Resolving peer supervision conflict



## ***LEADERSHIP IN ACTION—A***

### ***COUNSELING EXCESSIVE TARDINESS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You've called one of your employees in to talk about his or her excessive tardiness. You've casually mentioned the situation to this person several times, but the situation has continued for a month. This employee tends to keep to him/herself, and you don't have any concrete information why this is happening.

### ***COUNSELING FOR EXCESSIVE ABSENTEEISM***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Your employee, a generally active, talkative person, has been with you five years. This person always seems to be in the middle of things, knows what is going on, and yet gets the work out in an average way. In the last six months, you've noticed this person has missed an unusually high number of days with vague excuses. Work quality has also slipped, and a few complaints have been received.

### ***COUNSELING FOR TOO LONG COFFEE BREAKS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Lately, you've noticed that your employee has been absent from the work area longer than normal following the morning break. This has happened before in your department, and the issue has been brought up in the staff meetings. Most of the staff has complied with the general warning, but this employee continues to take an extra 30 minutes almost every day.

### ***COUNSELING A POOR ATTITUDE***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Your employee has been an average worker getting the work out, showing good attendance, and arriving on time. However, for the past two months, this employee has had lower production, arguments with employees, and has generally shown a poor attitude in the workplace. Several mornings last week, the employee arrived to work 30 minutes late without explanation.



## ***LEADERSHIP IN ACTION—B***

### ***COUNSELING FOR DISRUPTION OF OTHERS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You've noticed that one of your employees spends a lot of time talking to others under your supervision. One of your other employees has complained that he or she is having difficulty getting work done with these frequent distractions. You've given this talkative employee enough work to do so you cannot understand why this is happening. You've called the employee in to talk about these distractions.

### ***COUNSELING EMPLOYEES WHO REFUSE TO COOPERATE***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You have two employees working different shifts who must coordinate information in order to keep production flowing. Both people have been heard denouncing each other, and they've often been seen arguing when the shift change takes place. Lately, the second-shift worker has been coming in late and has not been getting instructions from the first-shift worker. You've called in the first-shift worker to find out what's going on.

### ***COUNSELING PHYSICAL CONFRONTATIONS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Today, you walked out into the hall because you heard two of your employees arguing loudly. As you rounded the corner, they were physically fighting with each other. You separated them and put each one in an office. You didn't see who threw the first shot; but, according to general gossip, you know they don't like each other. You're now talking with the first one to find out what happened. Both employees are the same age and have been with the organization for about the same period of time (about one year).

### ***COUNSELING FOR APPARENT DRUG/ALCOHOL PROBLEM***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

It's been brought to your attention that one of your employees appears to be either taking drugs or drinking. This person has been seen staring into space without moving for extended periods of time and staggering when walking. The person's appearance has become quite unkempt, and others are starting to get nervous about this person's lack of coherence at times.



## ***LEADERSHIP IN ACTION—C***

### ***DELEGATING A NEW WORK ASSIGNMENT***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Your manager has given you a special job that needs to be done accurately and quickly. You have two employees, one who is fast but not always accurate and another who is slow but extremely accurate. You tend to give most of the rush jobs to the former, and this assignment is no exception. You know he or she will get the job done quickly. However, this person has the heaviest workload right now, and you will have to convince him or her to take on this new task.

### ***COUNSELING FOR LATE MONTHLY REPORTS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Your employee supervises a large and busy department. He or she is a good supervisor, but the monthly reports you require are frequently late and/or incomplete. You need the details because quite a bit of overtime has been reported lately, and you've sensed that a number of changes have taken place in his or her department. However, other employees have been experiencing similar circumstances, and most of them have come through with the reports on time. It's time to speak to your employee about the late monthly reports.

### ***COUNSELING COMPLAINT FOR UNFAIR WORKLOADS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

One of your employees has come to you with complaints that you are delegating more work to him or her than you are to your other employees. This person is at the same level as the other employees but has been with your organization about two years less than the others. You've been giving some of the bigger jobs to this employee because his or her work is outstanding.

### ***COUNSELING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You and your staff are in the process of updating and streamlining the workflow. You're trying hard to get the department reorganized and working smoothly again. One of your older and always-loyal employees, who have been with the organization for 20 years, has become a problem. He or she has fought the changes that are taking place and keeps insisting that "the old way was best; it got more results." This attitude has hindered and upset the work of others.



## ***LEADERSHIP IN ACTION—D***

### ***HANDLING WELCOMING PHASE OF ORIENTATION***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

The object of this phase is to put the new employee at ease. The new worker is eager to exhibit skills and working experience but may be somewhat apprehensive about a new working environment. You will talk to him or her later about the rules and regulations of the job, working hours, vacations, etc., and show him or her around the department.

### ***TRAINING AN EMPLOYEE TO STAPLE PAPERS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You've already gone through the welcoming, job overview, and introduction phase of the orientation program for this new employee. Now you're ready to teach the actual job skills. Using a stapler and paper, teach this employee how to use a stapler by demonstrating, telling, and letting the employee do the operation.

### ***TRAINING A TRANSFERRED EMPLOYEE***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

A change of workload means you'll have to put some of your people in different positions. You now have the task of taking one of your employees who is presently doing one phase of an operation and putting him or her on another phase of a similar operation. It's important for you to find out how much training will be necessary before a program is set up for this new person. When meeting with this person, outline the job and put him or her at ease. The purpose of this interview is to make the transition go as smoothly as possible with a minimum of production time loss.

### ***COUNSELING FOR JOB CORRECTIONS***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You've just noticed that one of your employees is not following the correct procedure for getting a particular job done. This person was trained by someone else about four months ago and should be able to do the job with minimum errors. Lately, however, the error rate has been high enough that you must take some kind of corrective action.



## ***LEADERSHIP IN ACTION—E***

### ***RESOLVING EXCESSIVE WORK OVERLOAD WITH MANAGER***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

You've been assigned to another manager who, for the past six months, has been loading on the work. You've tried to explain that there isn't time. He or she insists it's only a matter of better planning. You want to be cooperative; but it's starting to get you down, and you're not sleeping well. You feel it's time to try and resolve the matter before you're given a poor rating on your performance appraisal.

### ***DISCUSSING A NEW RULING WITH YOUR MANAGER***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

Your manager has recently adopted a way of handling people and has put it into effect throughout the department. You don't agree with the idea, and it's caused you a great deal of difficulty with your people. You tried to talk with your manager about it before it became a required practice but without success. Because people are now threatening to leave, you feel you must talk with your manager again.

### ***REQUESTING DEVELOPMENT FOR EMPLOYEES***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

In order for your employees to keep abreast of the latest developments, they need to attend seminars, conferences, and courses outside of the organization. Your manager, who is responsible for the department's budget, usually denies this type of request. Your employees have become quite upset. Some, feeling they needed further development, have left the organization over this issue. You support the need for such development programs and have decided to try to convince your manager of their value. You are to meet with your manager today about this issue.

### ***RESOLVING PEER SUPERVISION CONFLICT***

**Interview Time: 10 minutes**

**General Instructions:**

One of your employees has come to you with a problem. He or she tells you that another supervisor working on a project with you has been interrupting his or her work to request other work take priority. This employee is finding it hard to know what to do. The other supervisor is very aggressive and doesn't seem to notice that the employee is already busy working on an assignment from you. You've arranged a meeting with your peer.



**LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

Observer's Form A, B, C

Please observe the interview and check the appropriate column for each of the items shown below. At the end of the interview, complete the sheet and give it to the interviewer. Please be as fair and realistic as possible in your answers.

<b>Did the interviewer:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>Comments</b>
State the problem clearly and precisely?				
Use documentation to support the known information about the problem?				
Allow the employee a chance to state his/her side of the story before taking a specific direction or judgmental action?				
Use open-ended questions and active-listening techniques to get to the heart of the problem?				
Reach an understanding with the employee concerning the problem?				
State specifically how the problem would be handled in the future?				
Set a deadline follow-up date to check on progress?				
Use a good closing to end the interview on a positive basis?				

**General Comments:**



**LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

Observer's Form D

Please observe the interview, and check the appropriate column for each of the items shown below. At the end of the interview, complete the list and give it to the interviewer. Please be as fair and realistic as possible in your answers.

<b>Did the interviewer:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Begin the interview by putting the employee at ease?				
Explain the general specifics of the new job skill?				
Use open-ended questions to find out how much previous knowledge is known by the employee about this type of work?				
Seek out specific problem areas or questions which the employee may have about the job?				
Run through the operation of the job verbally with the employee?				
Demonstrate physically how to do the job in a manner that was clearly visible by the employee?				
Let the employee do the job skill under his/her supervision?				
Divide the job learning into components for easy absorption and understanding?				
Adapt the training process to the amount of knowledge already known about the job by the employee?				



Observer's Form D (continued)

<b>Did the interviewer:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Allow the employee to question areas of the training that were not clear?				
Give the employee written documentation of what had been discussed and demonstrated?				
Close the interview with specific information about what will take place in the next several days of the training program?				

**General Comments:**



**LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

Observer's Form E

Please observe the interview, and check the appropriate column for each of the items shown below. At the end of the interview, complete the sheet and give it to the interviewer. Please be as fair and realistic as possible in your answers.

<b>Did the interviewer:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Understand the opponent's style of doing business?				
Give positive signals such as attentive listening, unwavering eye contact, alert responses, etc.?				
Discreetly probe for reactions to issues?				
Make it clear what was wanted?				
Have a contingency plan?				
Know his or her trade-offs and bottom line?				
Use a straightforward approach?				
Make verbal and non-verbal messages say the same thing?				
Avoid triggering unproductive responses?				
Build trust in the opponent?				
Search for a win-win solution?				

**General Comments:**