



## BEST PRACTICES

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# Help production managers produce

**A**re you getting the most out of your investment in production supervisors? In many cases the answer is no. The position has evolved into more of a firefighter or a gofer for account managers. To be effective, the person in this position needs to focus primarily on improving the effectiveness of the crew leaders he or she supervises.

I believe this skill set is much different from being a crew leader, which is the position from which most production supervisors have been promoted. The management of production supervisors is generally inconsistent as a practice. In some cases it's lacking entirely.

In select companies, account managers are supposed to manage and train production managers. In other companies, branch or operations managers are responsible for this task. Unless the person managing the supervisors has a passion for operations, the supervisors are left pretty much on their own.

The primary responsibilities of a production supervisor should be: 1.) quality control; 2.) improving crew efficiency; and 3.) crew leader development. Owners frequently look at how many crews a production supervisor can oversee effectively. I hear numbers wavering from four to 10. That's a big variable. The company that has a 1-4 supervisor-crews ratio has a much higher cost for supervisors than a company that has one supervisor for 10 crews.

I believe the key to getting closer to a 1-10 ratio lies in training the production supervisor and developing great crew leaders to achieve less supervision. It sounds simple, but it isn't or it would be more common.

There are several important factors to consider to make sure this position pays for itself.

› The production management side of the business should have targeted goals for lowering costs and increasing gross margins on work.

› Companies must develop best practices and/or standard operating procedures for doing work efficiently. The production managers must buy into them and ensure the work is consistently performed that way.

› Production managers should work along with crews, training them on the right way to do things and correcting mistakes in the field.

› Production managers should be trained on how to manage production. It's common for a company to take a good foreman and make him a production supervisor or manager, assuming he will be a good manager. We all know how well that works.

› Measure crews for performance and for delivering the quality work you desire within target hour ranges.

› Companies must have a measurable quality control program.

› A key piece of the equation is hiring the right people. I believe companies need to spend more effort finding employees who have the right qualities to become crew leaders and supervisors. Compromising on hiring criteria can perpetuate problems, resulting in incompetency.

It's an over simplification to state that unless the production managers can save enough in labor costs to pay for themselves, you may be better off letting the crews go unsupervised. For this reason, it's essential the position have very specific goals for increasing efficiency and controlling quality.

Company owners must get out of the office and watch their crews work so they can see what they're actually doing and then coach and mentor them to reinforce best practices. Crews respond favorably to recognition and they covet the owner's approval of their work.

If your company is going to be successful, your production managers must be able to observe their crews with an eye for efficiency and wasted or nonproductive activities. Next, they need to retrain their crews to help them develop the right habits.