

THE SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF THE SUPERVISOR*

By GERTRUDE R. DAVIS
New York, N. Y.

I HAVE been asked to discuss briefly four aspects of the above topic; they are:

1. How does the Executive determine the kind of supervision needed for a particular agency at a particular time?
2. What are the criteria for selecting good supervisors?
3. What is to be observed and evaluated after employment?
4. How does the Executive know if the supervisor meets the agency's standards?

Thinking about the answers to these questions I find myself going back to certain fundamentals. My experience has re-enforced a natural conviction that the essential job an Executive does is primarily determined by his social case work philosophy. Scope, quality and especially methods are fundamentally conditioned by the principles he derived from professional ethics, training, practice and experience. The questions put to me seek answers calling for method. We know that the conscious evolution of method is a professional obligation. The honest Executive will feel this and seek constantly to develop and improve methods appropriate to the purpose of the agency. However, methods unrelated to sound case work understanding and conviction and ethics have no real

* This paper was prepared for the 50th Anniversary Meeting, but due to circumstances beyond control could not be delivered.

base. They soon lose pertinency and fall into the limbo of meaningless mechanics. The rest of what I have to say is predicated on this premise; there are no absolute blueprints; there are only principles. If we understand and accept the principles involved, the methods will come.

1. *How does the Executive determine the kind of supervision needed for a particular agency at a particular time?*

When an executive comes on a job, the agency he finds is to a great extent conditioned by the calibre of its Board. If the Board can interpret dynamically the program which the community has authorized, so as to offer the needed service in a way appropriate to changing times and social conditions, the Executive's task is well begun. For this kind of Board will welcome expert suggestion and will support any required rebalancing of the program, or changes in emphasis of the service, and will sponsor the acquisition of the best available professionally equipped staff necessary to carry out the evolving program. The Executive needs to estimate the agency's current professional resources, the training, experience, skill and creativity in the staff, particularly that of the supervisors. He knows that the quality of the service to the client is primarily conditioned by the supervision the workers have.

In a multi-functional agency, as so

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many of yours are, it is well to have supervisors skilled in the particular function they are supervising. However, if the agency cannot afford that many supervisors, skill in the special function becomes secondary to the generic skill of supervision. Eleanor Neustadter says: ¹ "The supervisor is the case worker with experience in and responsibility for assisting another to practice social case work." This means that as a case worker, she is professionally aware of the other person, and aware of herself. She has the capacity to relate and to use the relationship for the other's growth. In supervision, we call this teaching.

Every agency needs the best it can get in teaching. No agency should operate without skilled supervision available to its staff. A small amount of very good supervision is better than a large amount of indifferent supervision. Workers of all levels of experience respond to quality rather than quantity of supervision.

If the agency cannot have enough of the best in supervision, if compromises must be made, let these be in degree of originality and creativity in the teaching; in adaptation to function (that is, if the supervisor has been teaching family case work, to allow her to teach child placement, etc.); or in such external attributes as appearance, manner, presence, etc. It is better to have a relatively less experienced supervisor, who has herself been well supervised and who can eventually reflect this supervision in her own teaching, than a more experienced person whose training and supervision has been dubious.

It seems to me then that regardless of an agency's size, stage of development or function, the supervisors having the best generic equipment as teachers are the ones to be preferred. With adequate

¹ Paper at 100th Anniversary of CSS.

orientation they can be trusted to fit in with the agency's needs. They can accept these needs at the various stages of the agency's development, because their own training has given them an understanding of process and timing in process.

2. *What are the criteria for selecting good supervisors?*

Because our profession is young, terms of evaluation are not sufficiently standardized. Nevertheless throughout the country, common understandings of the nature of the worker and her work, are far more definitive than they were ten or even five years ago. Therefore, personnel records and letters of reference become an increasingly reliable source of information. With some experience, the Executive discovers the particular interest and emphasis of the different schools of social work and of the larger agencies and he learns to read their data accordingly. I have found that there is a general consistency between the school's evaluation and what subsequent employers think about the candidate's intelligence, originality, organization, work habits, general stability, relationship to other staff members and ability to accept supervision. It is in the area of the candidate's personality as it operates in practice and in the area of specific skills that the consistency wavers or that, too often, there is real paucity of material. We are told that a person is "secure," "accepting." Important distinctions and degrees in these generalized terms are often not made. We may read that a worker understands behavior or is a good diagnostician, but we are not told what use is made of his understanding especially in the supervisory relationship. There may be too little material on the candidate's knowledge of herself on the job; and where her problems are apt

to be. In interviewing applicants I have found relatively few who achieved this desired understanding of themselves or the objectivity to express it. In supervisors, of course, this kind of awareness is particularly important since faults in the establishment and use of relationship may pass to the workers and thus possibly to the clients. We need to know whether the supervisor is a "helping" person, if her skill in teaching is used to help her supervisees grow.

If the personnel record and references do not give enough of the necessary information, the Executive must try to get as much as he can from the employment interview. I have suggested, in an article of the February 1945 issue of "The Family," some of the skills required, and some methods that can be used in such interviewing. Much more needs to be developed on this subject, since its importance can hardly be exaggerated. The more conscious we can make this interview in which, as Waelder puts it, "So much of the dialogue of the unconscious" takes place, the greater the value to all concerned and to the profession as a whole.

If the agency has recorded notes of individual supervision of workers, this material can be used as a specific basis for discussion with the candidate to get a real exchange of ideas on her concept of the supervision involved, her judgment of the process, and related pertinent data. It is a practical way to evaluate the applicant's intellectual concept of the job.

Another criterion for selection is the written statement of qualifications required by the agency for the job classification. A realistic discussion of these helps the applicant know whether or to what extent she feels she can qualify. It

helps the Executive estimate the range of the applicant's qualifications.

To select good supervisors, the agency needs at least pertinent past professional history and the observations and reactions of a skilled employment interviewer who really knows what the agency wants for the job. (In some agencies the applicant is interviewed by more than one person who then exchange reactions.) Good candidates are scarce and the competition for them is keen. Executives must often compromise on candidates who present good potentialities rather than demonstrated success. This, however, demands even better use of the criteria for selection.

3. *What is to be observed and evaluated after employment?*

During the probationary period which may need to be extended, the agency can verify the expectations at the time of employment. The supervisor may give real indications of qualifying or may present a professional self that makes the hiring data only partially accurate or puts a different context on the material.

It is the agency's description of the qualifications for the supervisor's job that is the guide for the evaluation for her performance in it. The agency must take responsibility for defining its qualifications as fully and accurately as possible. These mirror the agency and describe its standards. These qualifications need to be kept flexible to meet any changing conditions or new developments in the program.

In general the supervisor's position calls for the following broad qualifications: Sufficient knowledge and skill and experience in case work practice to provide good case work leadership; the ability to impart this knowledge in such

ways as will develop in others; the ability to contribute to the agency's policy making at a formative stage so as to improve the service. These basic requirements may be expanded to meet or emphasize varying situations. For example: In some agencies, supervisors have as much or more administrative responsibility as teaching. The description of the qualifications should be as specific as possible. The supervisor should know whether she will be responsible for group as well as individual teaching; whether she will be teaching staff to teach—that is training field guides for students, or training assistants or associates; whether she is to keep records of individual supervision; the degree of responsibility for evaluating supervisees; the requirement or opportunity for the personal practice of case work; responsibility for the relationship to clerical staff; for special committees; community relationships; interpretation of the service, etc. The more clearly this is described, the clearer will be the guide to what is to be observed and evaluated, both by herself and by the agency. When the *WHAT* of the job is established, the *HOW* is more clearly seen.

4. *How does the Executive know that supervisor is doing the job the agency wants done?*

For the purpose of this discussion, let us choose the size of agency most commonly represented here—say one of four to eight supervisors—fifteen to thirty-five case workers—with an assistant executive who may be a case supervisor. In agencies of this size, the Executive is able to maintain active contact with and have a real relationship to all the supervisors.

The Executive will see them in regular group or special committee meetings and get to know their personality patterns

and how they behave in groups. He will be aware of attitudes of security, anxieties, competitiveness, drives of one kind or another. He will become acquainted with the way they learn. Individual willingness to take on too much or too little can be noted. How they lend themselves to the group and any natural leadership qualities will show up. In discussions oriented to policy-making he can observe the capacity to discuss data for client or worker welfare objectively and the capacity to make recommendations for the improvement of the service. Most of the case work staff, if not all, should be seen by the Executive at least once a year at the time of their annual evaluation. The Executive renews contact with the worker, whom he has probably hired, reads the case records on which the evaluation is based, can make comparisons with previous evaluations, and affords the worker an opportunity to discuss those matters significant to her progress in the agency. He is able to see whether and to what extent the worker is learning and what she has gotten from the supervision. This is a most significant area for evaluating a supervisor's ability to help. When the Executive has seen several of a supervisor's workers he can decide whether her supervision is meeting agency standards. The progress in her workers is the key to the evaluation of a supervisor. A small change in some workers may be more significant than a spectacular change in others. The thing to be measured in each must be understood. This understanding is a required qualification in the person evaluating the supervisor.

In the larger agencies, the Executive may have to delegate responsibility for evaluating some of the workers, but in that case the staff must know that there

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is a common standard and common values. A close relationship between the Executive, his surrogate and the supervisors and as many of the professional staff as possible give a sense of uniformity to the agency and a consciousness of relating the parts to the whole. The Executive must maintain first-hand contact and feeling with the supervisors, since they are the significant link between the ad-

ministration and the eventuation of the service.

I see I have been requiring the Executive to be a paragon and we all know that there are not many such paragons, however, here one of the "Sayings of the Fathers" seems appropriate—"It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither may you desist from carrying it forward"—that is, as far as you can.

LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANNING TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED HEALTH PROGRAM

By **ROBERT MORRIS**

*Council of Jewish Federa-
tions and Welfare Funds,
New York, N. Y.*

Background of Community Interest

IN this period when planning is a common byword it may still be helpful to give some attention to the basis for *general* community interest in planning voluntary health services. This is important because in the field of health and in the field of other welfare services, agencies have sprung up with a greater or lesser degree of autonomy and independence and have for many years developed independently according to the strength and vision of their individual agency boards and professional staff. Health and welfare services are still in a transitional period towards the development of services on a community-wide basis rooted in community-wide needs.

It is not uncommon these days to see blazoned headlines in the newspapers, in special publications and in magazines, "New medical center program planned. Cost thirty-two million dollars." What lies behind this type of headline which carries with it the impression of a well integrated comprehensive modern scientific medical institution? What stake does the community have? What is the interest of agencies and individuals other than those who are directly concerned with the responsibility for a medical institution?

To a group such as this it is not

necessary to repeat all of the complex information gathered together through the help of the Federal Security Agency and many national health agencies and presented at the 1948 National Health Assembly. However, four factors in the general health field which call for general community attention may be touched on briefly. First there is the matter of desperate shortages of professional personnel. Since a community's health depends upon a skilled and trained health personnel, it naturally has an interest in such shortages. The situation varies from community to community, is different in rural areas and urban areas but in general there is an impression of an overall shortage of doctors with adequate specialized training capable of keeping them abreast of most modern developments in medical science. This is wholly apart from the maldistribution of personnel with concentration in urban areas. Even in cities, however, there is a crying shortage of trained and registered nurses to staff hospitals and to meet private patient needs as well. Shortages of beds are a little more difficult to assess. There is no adequate and acceptable standard of bed ratio to population but in many communities doctors must wait for long periods of time before they can admit patients for elective treatment, treatment