



Are you a leader
that supports your team?

Description

The importance of good support in helping team members reach their full potential

By **Angela Civitella**

Imagine that you've arrived at work raring to go, but your laptop takes twenty minutes to boot up because of configuration problems.

Later, your eyes are sore because your desk lamp is flickering, and you have to wear your coat in the office because the heat is out – again. Plus, you need help, but key administration positions in your department are still vacant. And you can't find a stapler anywhere!

If you're in a management role, then one of your most important responsibilities is to ensure that members of your team have everything they need to work safely, comfortably, and productively.

Although this is an extreme example, most of us know how frustrating and stressful it can be to work without the right support – that is, without the help, tools, and resources we need to do our jobs effectively.

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The importance of good support

All of us need appropriate "tools" to do our work. These tools can be physical objects, such as a computer, a comfortable chair, a cell phone, and a bright desk lamp. Or they can be less tangible things, such as training, support from managers and colleagues, or the regular flow of reliable information. When we don't have the tools we need to get the job done, then our productivity falls, and we quickly become frustrated, angry, or stressed.



According to **Rodd Wagner** and **James Harter**, researchers at Gallup, providing your people with the right tools, resources, and equipment is the most important thing you can do to keep them happy and effective.

There are many advantages to making sure that your team members have the support they need. Clearly, it makes work easier, safer, and more enjoyable; and it helps your people to be much more effective.

After all, we all want to do our jobs well, and we want to make a difference in the world. When we don't have the right tools and support, we're prevented from doing meaningful work. This is a frustrating and emotionally draining situation to be in.

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When your team members have the resources they need to do their work well, this is a sign of support and confidence not only from you, but also from the organization as a whole. This is an important motivator!

Providing the right support

So, how do you make sure that your people have everything they need to work effectively? Follow the six steps outlined below to equip your team for success.

Step 1: Ask

It's an obvious thing to say, but one of the best ways of finding out what your team members need is to ask them. They'll be able to tell you immediately what's working and what isn't.

Sometimes, asking very specific questions can help you pinpoint the tools and resources that your team members need. Try asking the following:

- What are your biggest frustrations at work?
- Do you have the physical tools that you need to do your job?
- Do you often have to call around or search online for key information?
- Can you easily contact other team members?
- Is the flow of information within the department or team effective?
- Are any parts of your workday or workflow processes inefficient?
- Have you had the training you need to do your work well?
- Would additional training improve your work, or make it more efficient?
- What causes you the most stress during the day?

Step 2: Monitor work effectively

How closely do you follow your team's work? A key way that you can provide support is by staying involved with your team's tasks and projects. Visible leaders are more trusted than those who are distant, or hard to access.

One of the best ways of monitoring your team's work is to practice Management by Walking Around (MBWA). This gives you opportunities every day to stay visible, communicate with your team, and give your people the information they need to work effectively.

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Although you need to stay on top of your team's work, avoid micromanaging team members. If you follow up on them too often, or become too involved in their assignments, you'll make them feel stressed and resentful. Find the right balance by checking in regularly, displaying a sincere interest in what they're doing, and then trusting them to do their work well.

Another critical aspect of support is providing regular and effective feedback. This gives your people the information that they need to improve and grow. If they don't get feedback, they might start to think that you don't care, or that you're not paying attention. At worst, they'll feel as if their work doesn't matter.

Step 3: Provide managerial support

Your team members also need support from you as a manager.

First, make sure that they know what you expect from them. Make sure that job descriptions are clear, clearly define objectives, set goals and help people stay on track to accomplish those goals.

It's essential that you provide support by communicating with your team members. This means keeping them informed during stressful situations, making sure that they know where they are with large projects, and communicating through your general day-to-day work.

As their manager, you should be your team's biggest cheerleader. Do what you can to support your team's ideas, decisions, and initiatives.

Your team members also need to know that you're excited about what they're doing and that you'll support their efforts. Saying "thank you" and rewarding your team appropriately is another important way to provide encouragement.

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Lastly, look at your team members' training and skills. Do they have the knowledge they need to do their jobs effectively?

Step 4: Look at safety

Your people need and deserve a safe, healthy work environment. It's up to you to make sure that they're happy and comfortable, so they can do their work effectively.

Walk around your organization or department. Make sure that the space is clean, comfortable, and well lit. Your building should also be healthy and well ventilated and, ideally, should have a cheerful, comfortable working environment.

Also, look at your team members' desks and chairs. Is anyone complaining of discomfort or repetitive stress injury? If so, address these problems.

Step 5: Provide equipment and supplies

Your team's equipment and supplies are the physical objects they need to do their work well.



Try, whenever possible, to let your team members choose the tools and equipment they need to do their work. Not only will delegating this responsibility give them autonomy, but it's also more efficient: they are likely to know best what tools they need to do their work.

Step 6: Provide emotional support

There will also be times when you need to provide emotional support for your team members. Sometimes they'll just need a listening ear; other times, they might need you to help them work through a personal problem, or even offer advice.

After all, we all have lives outside the workplace, and bad things can happen in those lives. Sometimes you may have to show "tough love", but you also need to help your people when they're going through genuinely difficult times.

As part of this, make sure that you show an appropriate interest in your people's home lives, so that you know when things are going wrong for them.

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And ensure that you know how to listen to others when they approach you: use active listening and empathic listening techniques whenever anyone on your team comes for help.

Remember, your people wouldn't come to you for emotional support if they didn't trust you. Honour that trust by being there for them when they need you!

Key points

One of your most important roles that you have as a manager is to make sure that your people have the support, tools, and resources they need to do their jobs. If they have everything that they need, they'll be happier and more productive, and they'll also be less stressed.

Take these six steps to provide the right support to your team:

- Ask
- Monitor work effectively
- Provide managerial support
- Look at safety
- Provide equipment and supplies
- Provide emotional support

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