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Responsive Leadership

From Supervision to Inspiration

Circumstances are beyond human control, but our conduct is in our power.

— Benjamin Disraeli

❖ LEADERSHIP DEFINED

According to Northouse (2004), who conducted a survey on leadership in social services, “There are almost just as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (p. 2). He goes on to define what I prefer as one of the most simplistic and straightforward definitions of leadership, describing it as “a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve common goals” (p. 4). However, while I prefer simplicity, one may say that Northouse’s definition of leadership can also fit as a simplified definition of supervision. Supervision is not necessarily leadership, and not all supervisors are leaders. So in the spirit of the sentiment above and as a way of clearly differentiating leadership from supervision without complicating things further, I would like to throw my definition of leadership into the pool of definitions. The following definition of leadership has evolved from my experience of great leaders, what I have learned from

conversations on leadership with thousands of workers and supervisors, and research on leadership. More recently, however, my view of leadership has been influenced tremendously by the following quote:

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

— John Quincy Adams

I will therefore define leadership as *a process by which an individual or individuals inspire the attitudes and behaviors of others to engage in value-based and purpose-critical efforts in order to accomplish a set of shared objectives*. A leader inspires. For the purpose of this discussion *inspire* means to stimulate to action, motivate, be the cause or source of, or bring forth. Leadership is about inspiration! It is much more than an elaborate definition, a set of qualities or prescribed roles. Leadership is about a meaningful, significant, and valuable experience for both the leader and, more importantly, the person who is being led. Given the general state of poor-quality supervision across social services, workers need an approach to leadership that will connect with, inspire, and enhance worker motivation and commitment to feel better, be better, and do better as they carry out their role of helping.

Leadership and Accountability

It is important to note here that it was purposeful to make “value-based” and “purpose-critical” concepts an explicit aspect of the leadership definition. This is so because often values (vision and guiding principles) and purpose-critical processes and tasks (directly tied to mission and organizational objectives) are often implicit and left out of the scope of the definition and overall conception of leadership. When these two items are not named, they cannot be claimed. Great leadership is about holding oneself and others accountable. Organizational priorities and objectives are geared to driving the purpose of the work. Purpose-critical objectives help workers answer the questions, “Why do I have to do this?” and/or, “What’s the point?” Values and guiding principles help workers answer the question, “Why do I have to do the work in this way?” while they carry out the work of helping. When workers can clearly answer, “What is the point?” and, “Why are we expected to do it in this way?” they are able to hold themselves and each other accountable to quality and effective helping. I believe, as I will elaborate further in Chapter 3, that guiding

values and purpose-critical responsibilities are foundational to both accountability and motivation, and if left implicit or unclaimed, holding individuals responsible can be an elusive and frustrating process, more so within a highly bureaucratic, politically reactive, and crisis-oriented environment.

Leadership goes beyond what may seem to be, as I describe it, quality supervision. This is so mostly because social service supervision as we know it in the simplest way is composed of administrative, educational, and supportive functions (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Effective leadership as it will be discussed for the remainder of the book will focus primarily, as an absolute priority, on relationship quality between the leader and the person or persons being inspired as a key factor in the leadership process. I will refer to the person being inspired as member, employee, or worker rather than the common terms follower or subordinate. The latter two terms are less than flattering and connote a hierarchy of sorts.

A leader by the definition I put forth can be anyone who is responsible for directing, guiding, and supporting the work of others and has been identified as a leader by a particular individual or group. Such a definition of leadership opens up the possibilities for leadership by people in various roles such as colleague, mentor, supervisor, manager, director, and more, allowing for varying types of leadership arrangements such as coleadership or shared leadership among a group of individuals. The term supervision will remain in use as the mechanism, the interpersonal interaction and/or dyadic interface wherein leader and member come together in the structure and process of the leadership arrangement. Furthermore, it is not my intention to change the language we have come to know as most everybody understands what I am referring to and maintains their own experience of the mechanism of supervision.

A Practical Approach to Quality and Effective Leadership

Just as it is not my intention to change all of the terms and definitions that we have come to understand within a traditional supervision arrangement, it was definitely not my plan to put forth another model of leadership. It is my purpose, however, to offer insights and practical strategies for leadership that will inspire workers to feel better, be better, and do better in their work—to experience quality leadership, a strong sense of job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In order to fulfill this objective, it will be necessary to articulate what

I believe are the two most important aspects of quality and effective leadership. The first and most important determining element of quality and effective leadership is the employee's perception of the leader-member relationship as positive, meaningful, and supportive. The second key variable that determines quality and effective leadership is a leader's capacity to learn about, understand, and respond to the unique needs, values, goals, and strengths of individual team members. By illustrating the important cornerstones of quality and effective leadership, I will offer relevant research, practice wisdom, and evidence-based practice examples to support and strengthen the rationale for the insights and practical strategies offered to leaders throughout the book.

Quality Leadership as an Experience

For the last decade, I have been working with thousands of supervisors in a variety of social service sectors to assist with the motivation, commitment, and engagement of workers. In particular, I wanted to help with those workers who seemed "less motivated," resistant, oppositional, or, as I referred to earlier, those employees that appeared disconnected, disengaged, and/or burnt out. For the most part, I have relied on the practical experience gained from what thousands of frontline workers and leaders have said contributed to quality leadership and, subsequently, preferred staff and client outcomes. In addition to relying heavily on what my social service comrades referred to as "doing what works," I supplemented my understanding of positive and not-so-positive experiences of supervision with knowledge from a variety of human behavior theories, models of leadership, and performance management approaches.

I began to understand that there was a strong connection between a worker's experience of quality supervision and two very important factors. The first was that workers who described a quality or positive experience with their supervisor often referred to the supervisor-worker relationship as a major factor. The relationship that contributed to a positive supervision experience was often characterized by key ingredients such as trust, respect, understanding, and integrity. The second prominent consistency was the strong correlation that existed between a worker's positive supervision experience and the expression by the worker that the experience was meaningful and or valuable, often because, in the workers' view, to some degree individual values, needs, and/or goals were being supported and/or accommodated by the supervisor.

Conversely, an opposite story was beginning to form with those workers that reported poor-quality or a negative supervision experience; that is, they reported an unsatisfactory supervisor–worker relationship and, unsurprisingly, low levels of trust, respect, understanding, or perceived integrity. In some instances, all of these ingredients were reported as hampered to some degree or missing all together. In addition to this, workers with a poor or conflicted relationship with their supervisors often expressed feeling misunderstood or unsupported by their supervisors. That was it! Workers with a positive supervision experience were feeling satisfied, motivated, and engaged; they were inspired. This was leadership. Those that reported a poor or negative supervision experience were less satisfied, motivated and engaged than their counterparts.

Changing the Environment Through Quality Leadership

One of the most profound realizations that hit me hard was that both satisfied and unsatisfied workers were working in similar working environments. This led me to question whether or not we could affect positive changes in worker motivation, commitment, and engagement if we could not change the larger systemic challenges and realities that negatively impact most social service work environments. The answer is a resounding yes! I began to look to the research on effective leadership and the connection to worker motivation, satisfaction, and organizational commitment. A great deal of literature and formal research on effective leadership and the positive impacts for workers and clients confirmed what I was experiencing in my interactions with frontline workers on the ground as key elements that differentiated quality and poor supervisor–worker experiences.

The evidence is overwhelming. We may not be able to alter the larger systemic challenges, but we can indeed enhance the overall quality of the supervisor–employee experiences by focusing on the capacity development of supervisors and managers to *lead*—to inspire workers and enhance performance.

It is in light of this strong revelation that I believe leadership, as an organizational dimension, is the primary source mediator of employee satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and engagement. Therefore, it reasons that the leader–member relationship is the greatest mechanism for fostering and facilitating overall employee performance toward the achievement of organizational and service outcomes. However, it is not necessarily the relationship per se but the perception of the quality of the leader–member relationship by the member that creates the greatest positive impact on employee satisfaction and performance.

While it is true that all employees, to some degree or another, have a relationship with their leaders, interpersonal and relational variance lies within the individual members' experience of the quality of that particular relationship. It is the employee's perceived quality of the leader–member relationship that characterizes and influences the member's level of satisfaction, motivation, and engagement with their job. In essence, high-quality leader–member relationships result in high-quality performance!

❖ QUALITY AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: KEY INGREDIENTS

Practice Wisdom and What We Know

Approximately 15 years ago, I began to develop frontline-practice training curricula from an appreciative and strengths-based perspective. I would often ask participants to reflect on and share a time in their career when they felt their best and were doing their best. What surfaced immediately as a consistent theme was the positive connection that existed between their best times at work and their best experience with a team leader, supervisor, manager, or director. Most people recounted their best times as being the time when they had the greatest quality leader–member relationship experience! This phenomenon was consistent and led to me to inquire specifically about their greatest leadership experience ever.

I would ask individuals and group participants to answer the following questions regarding their career history and experiences of past supervisors and/or managers:

- When was it the best?
- What made it the best?
- Who made it the best?
- What was it about your leader's behavior—their actions and/or interactions—that made your experience so great?

It is these questions and subsequent reflections that I have posed for years, in one-on-one interviews or small groups, to thousands of frontline workers and managers. I like to start many of my leadership trainings off with this type of appreciative inquiry in order to substantiate the important place relationship plays in the context of

an employee's greatest leadership experience ever. What I find so fascinating is that, embedded within and throughout the thousands of diverse and unique stories, four key ingredients have surfaced to the top of the list every time. These four elements that have contributed to so many employees' greatest leadership experiences ever are *trust*, *respect*, *empathy*, and *integrity*. While the individual manner and meaning in which these ingredients are defined and discussed can vary, they are clearly evident in many employee statements regarding their best leadership experiences.

The term *safety* is one that surfaces quite often in the discussion of great leaders and great leadership experiences. Sometimes, it is referred to generally at first and, when described in more detail, combines and reflects one or more of the four key ingredients above. While many employee responses have pointed to a variety of informational, educational, supportive, administrative, and organizational factors that were in operation and clearly contributed to the best leadership experiences ever, the most essential were those qualities that are and were interpersonal and relation-oriented in nature. The *relationship* is absolutely essential for a great leader-member experience. Quality relationships and quality leadership are inextricably linked.

The following statements were captured from participant responses with in a "greatest leadership experience ever" exercise from one of the many leadership training seminars I have conducted. There are clear and evident reflections of *trust*, *respect*, *empathy*, and *integrity*, and contributing factors of a *safe* experience are also present in the reflections.

- "My supervisor was a great listener and remembered what was important to me."
- "I was safe to take risks in my new job without being criticised, judged or blamed."
- "My manager was approachable; I could see her for almost anything. I needed that."
- "I was asked my opinion and it was taken seriously."
- "My supervisor just gets it; he's been there and understands how hard it can be."
- "I had the autonomy I wanted, but if I needed something he was there."
- "She was dependable and reliable; I could trust her that she would follow through."

- “I had a manager that always started with what I was doing well; that made it easier to tackle the harder stuff, because I didn’t feel like a total ‘screw up.’”

The above statements are valuable because they reflect and speak to the importance of *trust, respect, empathy, integrity*, and an overall sense of *safety*. In addition to this and just as important is that each statement also reflects a realization and/or accommodation of what is important for individual members—their needs, values, goals, and strengths! What is consistent is that most workers and supervisors report that their leader really knew them and had an understanding of their perceptions and experiences, what they needed, what was important to them, and what they wanted for themselves and their clients. Their leaders were able to be responsive in the process of leadership.

In this light, it is not at all surprising that these employees were feeling their best and doing their best at work at a time in their career when they had the greatest quality leadership experience ever!

Research and What We Know

The last chapter pointed out that many frontline workers are dissatisfied with supervision and that a poor-quality supervision experience was implicated in worker burnout, intent to leave, and exiting behavior. We now know that quality supervision, which I refer to as a mechanism of effective leadership, has a significantly positive impact on both staff outcomes and outcomes for clients.

There is considerable research from a variety of nonprofit, for-profit, and corporate sectors demonstrating unequivocally the importance and positive implications of quality leader–member relationships as an important antecedent to overall leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, available research also points to variables, such as trust, respect, empathy, integrity, and overall safety, within the leader–member relationship that contribute and are connected to favorable employee experiences of work and themselves within the work. Favorable, positive work environments and attitudes increase motivation and job satisfaction and enhance organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

Research on leader–member exchange (LMX) theory illuminates and reinforces the importance of a quality supervision experience through an effective leader–member relationship. LMX theory posits that leaders develop an exchange relationship over time with each member (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According

to Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia (2010), “In a high exchange relationship there is a high level of trust, liking and respect” (p. 561). Also, in a high-exchange relationship, the leader is able to provide desired outcomes of the subordinate, and “in exchange the subordinate is expected to be committed to the work and loyal to the leader” (Mahsud et al., 2010, p. 561–562). Leaders who are able to develop high-quality exchange relationships with members are likely to be more effective than leaders who are less able to develop a high-quality leader–member exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to Mahsud et al. (2010), there is a great deal of empirical evidence demonstrating a strong positive correlation between LMX quality and leader effectiveness (e.g., Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999; Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998). In a meta-analytic study of member–leadership exchange correlates, Gerstner and Day (1997) found that high exchanges were related to higher member satisfaction, greater organization commitment, better job performance, and lower turnover.

According to Mahsud et al. (2010), leader–member relationships that contribute to leader effectiveness are of high quality and characterized by a high level of trust and respect. This is an important point because this also confirms what many frontline workers and supervisors are saying contributes to a quality supervision experience. *Trust, respect, empathy, and integrity* are key ingredients in a quality supervision experience and effective leadership. This is not surprising, especially in light of the research and empirical evidence confirming the important place the qualities of trust, respect, empathy, and integrity hold for frontline workers, their supervisors, and the overall success of the organization. While these four variables are intertwined and mutually reinforcing of one another, it is important to have a look at them separately in order to understand the impact of each but also to shed light on the combined, subsequent implications of their simultaneous operation within the context of a leader–member relationship.

Trust and Integrity

Trust is the number one ingredient listed by workers—the most important aspect of a quality supervision experience—and is identified as the most important leadership variable that contributes to their best leadership experience ever. Robinson (1996) observed trust as “expectations, assumptions or beliefs about the likelihood that another’s future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to one’s

interests" (p. 576). According to Caldwell and Dixon (2010), trust belongs among the most important factors influencing interactions in organizations as well as organizational success.

Trust and *integrity*, while sometimes noted by workers as separate leadership variables, are indeed intricately connected. Lambert, Hogan, Barton-Bellessa, and Jiang (2012) describe trust as the belief that there will be a congruency between what is said and what is done. The connection between trust and integrity has been confirmed in research on worker perceptions of trust. Perceptions of honesty and reliability (Kramer, 1999; McAllister, 1995) as well as perceptions of fairness and consistency (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) are key factors that contribute to trust in a leader-member relationship. The alignment between a person's words and deeds as perceived by another person is referred to by Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2012) as behavioral integrity. Behavioral integrity by a leader forms a strong source for leader-member trust. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), leader integrity builds when leaders "practice what they preach" or "walk the walk"; that is, they do what they say they will do and follow through. This has been referred to as the acronym, DWYSYWD, which stands for "do what you say you will do" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

There is ample evidence on the positive effects and impact of trust and behavioral integrity for frontline workers and organizations overall. Organizations with workers who trust those in charge are more successful in the long run than organizations with workers who do not trust those in charge (Robinson, 1995). Workers who trust their supervisors and managers are more satisfied in their jobs (Yang & Mossholder, 2010). Trust in a supervisor will often lead to reciprocal behaviors and positively affect work behavior outcomes and is linked with greater productivity of employees (Mayer et al., 1995; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). There is also evidence pointing to a link between worker trust and workers' willingness to be more open to feedback (Lambert et al., 2012). Trust is also linked to feedback in that workers who trust their leaders are more willing to provide feedback on important matters related to the work or the workers' experiences of the work (Wong & Cummings, 2009). Just as trust can have a positive impact on overall worker satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment, the absence or breach of trust can have the opposite effect. Lack of trust can be a serious stressor for workers, and because it is a known buffer to burnout, the shortage or absence of trust has been linked to a whole host of negative employee outcomes (Lambert et al., 2012).

Respect

Respect, like trust, has been positively associated with workers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005). Clarke (2011) points out that trust and respect are highly correlated and interrelated in a leadership situation and that the ability of the leader to convey caring, attentiveness, and support increases the likelihood of respect. Respect is a central element of the leader-worker relationship and directly tied to overall leader effectiveness (Clarke, 2011). From a behavioral perspective, respect, according to Clarke (2011), is less of a quality and more a result arising from specific behaviors of the leader. Yukl (1999, 2010) also speaks to the importance of relation-oriented behavior in leadership and emphasizes its importance in generating and maintaining respect. Early research on the importance of relation-oriented behaviors and leadership consistently confirmed the importance of behaviors related to consideration and supportive leadership and found that there was a correlation between this type of behavior and member satisfaction with the leader (Mahsud et al., 2010). One of the most important relation-oriented leadership behaviors that is key to a caring and supportive experience is empathy.

Empathy

Empathy is gaining a great deal of attention in research across a variety of disciplines regarding effective leadership and preferred worker and organizational outcomes. Like trust and respect, empathy has been identified as an important quality that is correlated with effective leadership and positive worker outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and enhanced performance. In addition to being identified as critical to effective leadership, empathy is identified as being correlated and interrelated with trust and respect and is defined as the ability to recognize and understand the emotions, feelings, and needs of others (Holt & Marques, 2011; Mahsud et al., 2010). When workers feel listened to and understood, there is likely to be an increase in trust and respect within the leader-member relationship. In addition to this, there is a great deal of research on the importance of leader empathy and the importance of emotionally attuned and expressive leaders.

Successful and effective leaders are not only sensitive to the needs and emotions of their members, but they can also regulate their emotions as well (Rajah, Song, & Arvey, 2011). A leader's ability to identify

and display appropriate emotions to accommodate the needs of members assists those members with their own social and emotional regulation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Rajah et al., 2011). According to Rajah and associates (2011), in times of negative affect and high stress, which are commonplace in social service environments, leaders who are able to understand the group's emotions and regulate them prove to be among the most effective. Further, "when managers are able to empathize with followers' emotional reactions to stressful situations, and are capable of regulating these emotions, these often lead to desirable outcomes such as lower stress levels, increased job satisfaction, and better work performance" (Rajah et al., 2011, p. 1113).

Safety

I stated that many frontline workers and supervisors alike have mentioned *safety* as a quality of a great supervision or supervisor-worker experience. Often the word safety is used in this respect to describe a general feeling and, when elaborated on further, the description of the experience of safety produces concepts and/or images that relate directly to trust, respect, empathy, or integrity. Sometimes it is a combination of these factors that are used together to describe a worker's sense of safety within the supervisor-worker relationship. Safety, then, is a key element of the leader-member relationship and contributes to effective leadership. This is not surprising given the research on quality relationships and the importance of relations-oriented behaviors on worker and client outcomes.

There is evidence that the perception of the leader's character influences the followers' sense of trust and vulnerability to the other party's actions (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). When supervisors listen, show consideration and caring, and are fair, consistent, reliable, and supportive, among many other types of relations-oriented behaviors, workers are more likely to feel safe—safe to ask questions, safe to be open to feedback and instruction, safe to give feedback to the leader, and safe to say, "I'm scared," "I don't understand," "I need help," or, "I don't know what I'm doing." Safety in the leader-member relationship is critical because the important people being served and supported by frontline helpers require that the workers are providing the most effective and highest quality service possible. Safety in the leader-member relationship creates an environment wherein workers can learn and develop optimally, which will assist them in performing to their greatest potential.

Quality Leadership and Relationship as a Pathway to Worker Experience

In light of the combined practice wisdom and research, it is clear that *trust, respect, empathy, and integrity* are undeniably key factors that contribute to effective leadership and quality supervision experiences. The leader–member relationship based on these factors is critical for enhancing job satisfaction, commitment, and overall engagement. The relationship is also essential for accessing a worker’s story—his perceptions and lived experiences of work and himself within that work. I mentioned in the first chapter that while formal training can be helpful for leaders, current stress-laden and crisis-oriented work conditions coupled with less time for worker–leader interactions can lead unintentionally to the interpretation and management of employee behavior. When we get to know our workers outside of our own biases, generalizations, assumptions, past experiences, human behavior theories, and models of performance management approaches, we can gain greater access to the things about work and about them and their experiences of work that motivate and engage them to perform at their best. I also stated earlier that the number one piece of advice I give leaders is “Get to know your staff.” A relationship built on the four key factors creates an avenue or pathway to learn the most about what, why, and how certain things are important to workers. What motivates them, why does it motivate them, and how can we as leaders keep them motivated, enhance their motivation, or resuscitate their resources and sources for motivation within the current challenging work conditions.

❖ THE ROAD TO A RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP APPROACH

One of the last things I wanted to do when I became a social worker was to put forth yet another approach to leadership. However, the reality for me was that the area of supervision within social services, what I believe to be the most salient mechanism available for helping workers feel better and perform better in their work, was actually a detriment to preferred practice, workers themselves, and their clients. It is my intention to take an honest look at what we know to be certain about the challenging realities of social services supervision as well as the subsequent negative implications for employees in order to develop the simplest and most practical, efficient, and impactful approach to leadership. I want to create an approach that will accommodate and mediate the effects of those challenges on workers in a

manner that enhances preferred outcomes for them and the important clients they serve and support.

We know that social service workers are a motivated group of individuals with varying needs, values, goals, and strengths for helping. We know for certain that workers' perceptions of their work environment directly affect their experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and, most importantly, how they perform in that particular environment. We also know that when social service employees operate in an environment that is perceived to be positive, meaningful, and valuable, outcomes will be better for both workers and their clients. We know that when workers find their work and work environment to be congruent with their values, accommodating of their needs and goals to help, and affirming and reinforcing of their strengths and capacities, they do better and their clients do better also.

However, we also know that the social services are not without serious systemic, organizational, and workplace realities that pose serious impediments to preferred ways of working and preferred outcomes. In addition, we know that myriad environmental challenges negatively impact many workers' experiences of the work and of themselves, leading to high levels of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, burnout, intent to leave, and turnover. For many workers who remain working in environments that may be challenging, they are not immune to the negative impacts on their own experiences of job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, commitment, and overall performance. Among the many challenging realities listed in Chapter 1 are some that may seem difficult if not impossible to change, like bureaucratic structure and hierarchy, political reactivity, fiscal restraint, mandated and legislated paper priorities, and more. However, there is a need to look to places within the system where immediate and impactful change can indeed be made. I pointed out in Chapter 1 that our greatest possibility for change may exist in what we commonly know as the mechanism of supervision.

Supervision: An Environment Within an Environment

Supervision as a mechanism can operate as an environment within an environment, as a pod-like shelter to protect workers from the detrimental effects of harsh working environments. Supervision can provide a type of necessary protection so that workers may be held up and built up, supported and developed in a manner that enhances their resiliencies to cope and work simultaneously to achieve meaningful and valuable results as they carry out their role of helping. We know

that effective supervision can buffer the negative implications and effects of working in the social service industry. We know that supervisory social and emotional support and quality interpersonal supervision interactions result in a host of beneficial employee outcomes such as overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. We know that when employees are motivated, engaged, and committed to their work and their organization, when they feel better and perform better, preferred outcomes for clients are also more likely.

Unfortunately, generally speaking, supervision in social services is in a serious state of crisis. To a large extent, many workers are dissatisfied with supervision and report that their experiences of supervision are often inadequate, of poor quality and/or lacking in meaning or value. We know that inadequate or poor-quality supervision is a major factor in burnout, intention to leave, and high worker turnover. We also know that quality supervisor interactions and supervisory social and emotional support are negatively related to detrimental outcomes for workers. Given what we know about the inextricable link between workers' well-being and client outcomes, the current state of supervision and its consequences are absolutely alarming!

Enhance Support in the Support Component of Supervision

A major part of the problem leading to this dilemma is that the supportive aspect of supervision is given little priority in training or supervisory capacity development overall. In addition to this, supervisors are not given the skills to enhance the interpersonal, relationship-oriented, and supportive capacities for quality supervision. Supervisor training curricula often prioritizes theories, models, and performance management strategies necessary for interpreting and managing the behavior of employees, inadvertently leaving little room for micro-practice skills necessary for connecting with and engaging the subjective experiences and strengths of workers. Furthermore, the supportive aspect of supervision is not only largely missing from training and development, but also as a practice priority, it tends to play third fiddle to the administrative and educational supervisory functions on the ground and can be almost nonexistent in the supervision experience of many frontline workers. When these realities are combined with the fact that many inexperienced supervisors operate in a stressful, complex, and crisis-oriented system that demands more and more from them, it becomes exceptionally clear how a quality and supportive

supervision experience that is both meaningful and valuable can be lacking for many workers in the field of social services.

The current state of supervision does little to inspire workers to feel better, be better, and perform better in the role of helping. I believe that attempting to dismantle and reconstruct what we know as supervision may be a daunting and arduous task. How can we effect change? Where can we start to do this? I propose a simple proposition based on an important and well-known reality: When workers can operate in a positive work environment that is meaningful and supportive, outcomes will be better for employees and their clients. So therefore, I agree with Patti (2009) and believe that our priority for effecting the greatest change is to create organizational conditions that will lead to positive perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that will lead to the highest quality and the most effective services possible. We may not be able to change the environment altogether, but we may indeed have the capacity to change the perceptions and experiences workers have of the environment that they operate within.

Accept What We Can't Change and Change What We Can

I think that quality supervision and a quality supervision experience can be enhanced if we adopt an approach to leadership that embraces the challenging impediments to preferred practice and prioritizes what we know to be the mechanism within our control to effect the greatest change—that is, the environment within the larger system environment, the mechanism of supervision. It is this idea of an environment within an environment that makes change more manageable and possible. Instead of focusing on the whole system and its challenges, how about placing the focus on an approach to leadership that prioritizes the individual experience of one worker at a time? By enhancing the overall job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and performance of each worker within the context of supervision, we can impact the larger team and organizational environments in which they operate.

It is this thinking combined with the idea that social service employees require more than supervision that led me down the path of constructing an approach that will result in the most effective and highest quality leadership experience possible. Social services require an approach to leadership that will acknowledge, enhance, preserve, and even resuscitate frontline employees' motivation, engagement, and commitment. Workers require an approach to leadership that is simple, practical, and impactful and supports their needs, values,

goals, and strengths in a manner that positively enhances their work and the experiences of themselves within the work. In addition to these things, the model of leadership must embrace and accommodate the challenging realities of the current social service environment in order to prioritize the preservation of the most valuable resources of time, energy, and funding.

❖ THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Earlier in the chapter, I defined leadership as a process by which an individual or individuals inspire the attitudes and behaviors of others to engage in value-based and purpose-critical efforts in order to accomplish a set of shared objectives. A leader inspires. How do leaders inspire? We know already that a quality leader–member relationship and a quality supervision experience are inspiring and have contributed to the stimulation of many workers to feel better, do better, and perform better in their work. Earlier in the chapter, I indicated that practice experience, research from leader–member exchange theory, and research on effective leadership point to the importance of trust, respect, integrity, and empathy behaviors as critical to developing a positive and quality leadership experience for the employee. Keep in mind, it has been well established that it is the employee’s perception of the leadership that dictates the quality for that particular worker’s experience to be both meaningful and valuable. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Worker as Expert

While a quality leadership experience is indeed inspiring for most people, purposeful inspiration can be difficult for a leader to accomplish and maintain unless the leader knows what it is that inspires individual employees to feel, be, and perform better. Therefore, tuning into the employees’ experiences of the work and their experiences of themselves within the work is the only way a leader can learn about and know for certain the unique needs, values, goals, and strengths of employees. Knowing and understanding a worker’s experience is only one aspect of the Responsive Leadership Approach. Responding to what a leader understands with the right response at the right time is what makes the approach the most effective and impactful with and for employees. An accurate response by a leader to accommodate the perceived subjective experience of the member is what sets Responsive Leadership apart from

other approaches to supervision. So what is it that leaders are responding to in their role as supervisor or manager? The employee experience of the work and their experiences of themselves within the work.

The Importance of Needs, Values, Goals, and Strengths

You may have noticed by now that when I discuss getting to know employees and their subjective experiences, I often refer to four main areas: needs, values, goals, and strengths. This is so for two important reasons. First, for the last decade I have been supporting supervisors and managers to tune into these particular areas, as I have come to understand them, as key sources of information for learning about and understanding what motivates workers to perform optimally. And rather than encourage an interpretation and management approach to professional development and/or performance management, I would encourage supervisors to work to understand the subjective experiences of a worker's needs, values, goals, and strengths—to respond to those key areas the most accurately, in a facilitative and engaging manner,

Because I had been out of the academic arena for many years, focusing my attention *in* the work versus *on* my work, I wasn't really aware until recently of the scholarship that had accumulated and evolved in the field of work motivation theory (WMT). WMT scholarship is what brings me to the second reason for my emphasis on a diligent focus on employees' needs, values, goals, and strengths. A great compilation of WMT and research by Latham and Pinder (2005) has increased my understanding of the powerful role individual needs, values, and goals play when it comes to motivation at work. I was surprised that a focus on strengths is missing altogether within the discourse regarding WMT; however, I have seen firsthand the powerful influence a strengths focus has on worker motivation and overall performance enhancement. I will discuss the positive implications of a strengths focus in leadership further in Chapter 5.

Work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond the individual's being to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Pinder, 1998, p. 11). This definition speaks to the important implication of both the individual and the environment as impacting motivation and, more importantly, the interaction between the worker and the worker's environment. I have always known that needs, values, and goals were separate concepts yet were also intricately related. The work offered by Latham and Pinder (2005) presents a clear conceptualization of the interconnectedness of these

three motivation factors. They write, “Values are rooted in needs and provide the principal basis for goals. . . . Goals are the mechanism by which values lead to action” (Latham & Pinder, 2005, p. 491). In this light, needs are at the root of most behavior and, according to Kanfer (1991), are internal tensions that influence and mediate cognitive processes which result in behavior variability. Behavior variability refers to the differences that exist between and among individuals. This point emphasizes the need and importance for leaders to get to know the unique needs, values, goals, and strengths of their members so that they can respond to and accommodate those preferences, to the extent possible in the context of the work and work environment.

A great deal of scholarship and research clearly point out that effective leaders are those supervisors and managers who get to know and understand the unique needs, values, and goals of their workers (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Mahsud et al., 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, & Xie, 2009; Rajah et al., 2011; Vinokur-Kaplan, 2009; Yukl, 1999, 2010). Getting to know workers is only part of the equation. More important is what happens as a result of that knowledge, especially when we consider that work motivation emerges not only from within the individual but also from the interaction between the individual and the environment. It is critical that leaders, to be the most effective, understand what needs, values, and goals are important to workers in order to look for opportunities and resources available within the work environment to fulfill those needs, align with values, and accommodate goals, to the extent possible. Furthermore, effective leaders that know and understand their members well can choose appropriate relations-oriented, supportive, helpful, and developmental responses to increase the meaning and value of the work and their experiences of self in the work for members. I refer to this as a leader’s capacity to choose the right response at the right time to accommodate and/or approximate the unique needs, values, goals, and strengths of workers in a way that inspires them to perform at their absolute best as they carry out the role of helping.

❖ THE GUIDING PRIORITIES OF RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

The Responsive Leadership Approach was developed out of my understanding of stories regarding best leadership experiences gathered from thousands of frontline staff, supervisors, and managers. Responsive leadership builds on leader–member exchange (LMX)

theory, work motivation theory (WMT), and has been influenced by both my clinical and organizational knowledge and experience. Responsive Leadership represents an approach to leadership that prioritizes quality leader–member relationships as critical to enhancing employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior. Responsive Leadership encourages leaders, through a relations and strengths orientation, to learn about and engage with employee needs, values, goals, and strengths in order to optimize motivation, employee satisfaction, and overall performance. Furthermore, Responsive Leadership, through the enhancement of employee outcomes, aims at the simultaneous approximation of enhanced climate and culture as well as preferred outcomes for children, families, and communities.

The following represent the guiding priorities of a Responsive Leadership Approach to supervision and management. In order to achieve optimal leadership quality and effectiveness, to positively impact employee motivation, engagement, commitment, and overall performance, a responsive approach to leadership must

- focus on the mechanism of supervision (dyadic interface) as the primary level for leadership development,
- make quality leader–employee relationships an essential focus,
- promote the operationalization of trust, respect, integrity, and empathy to enhance the meaning and value of a quality leadership experience,
- emphasize interpersonal and communication skill development,
- utilize relations-oriented and strengths-based tools/strategies for accessing the employee and the employee’s story,
- encourage the accurate identification and engagement of employee needs, values, goals, and strengths through a variety of responsive tools and strategies,
- strive for greatest “fit” between employee experience and environment in order to optimize worker motivation, engagement, and overall performance, and
- work to improve and attain preferred outcomes for both staff and clients.

In addition to the guiding priorities, one of the most important objectives of the Responsive Leadership Approach is that it was

constructed to be simple, practical, and impactful. It was developed as a way of uncomplicating leadership. The concepts and processes involved are simple and quite basic, the tools and strategies highly concrete and tangible, and the impact immediate and transformative. The Responsive Leadership Approach truly epitomizes the saying, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

The individual parts of the approach are helpful, but it is the way that the pieces of the perspective work together to mutually and reciprocally influence the other aspects of the approach that gives it profundity. This is the part where some people wonder if my excitement and my statements are embellished. However, to date I have utilized this approach to leadership with more than 2,500 supervisors, managers, and executives across a variety of social service sectors. One hundred percent have reported a positive change in their leadership development and overall experience. More importantly, 100% of the managers trained and supported in this approach have also reported that the Responsive Leadership strategies, tools, and processes have resulted in an increase in individual worker and team morale, motivation, engagement, and performance. Furthermore, most have reported the by-product of major savings in time, energy, and money. In an environment where time and money constraints are endemic, these particular by-products of the Responsive Leadership Approach were unexpected yet welcomed gifts.

Overall, Responsive Leadership posits that leaders are responsible for inspiring workers to feel better, be better, and perform better in their role of helping. The remainder of the book will offer simple, practical, and transformational concepts, tools, and strategies for putting into practice the guiding priorities of a Responsive Leadership Approach.

❖ SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

- Leadership is about inspiration—to stimulate, motivate, and bring forth greater worker motivation, engagement, and overall performance.
- Quality and effective leadership is defined by the perceptions and experiences of the worker.
- Greatest leadership experiences are built on the key qualities of trust, respect, integrity, and empathy.

- Quality supervision through effective leadership can positively alter a worker's perception of the work environment, leading to better outcomes for both employees and clients.
- A responsive approach to leadership sets leader–member relationships as the highest priority.
- A responsive approach to leadership encourages supervisors to engage and understand worker needs, values, goals, and strengths.
- A responsive approach to leadership can enhance worker motivation, engagement, and overall performance.

❖ PERSONAL LEADER REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider a time in your career when you had the greatest leadership experience. When was it the greatest? What made it so great? Who made it so great? What was it about your leader's behavior—their actions and/or interactions—that made your experience so significant?
- Consider how your perceptions and experiences of great leadership were related to operationalized qualities such as trust, respect, integrity, and empathy.
- Consider what you do in your role as a leader to promote, endorse, and/or foster the qualities of trust, respect, integrity, and empathy.

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