

CASE 3-1: Supervising a New Work Group

Rita Meyers had been a supervisor of five research specialists in her company's marketing department for nearly two years. She had been promoted to the position after working as an employee in marketing for eight years. At the time of her promotion, she had more experience than the specialists she supervised. She had even helped train three of them when they were first hired by the company. The workers thought a great deal of Rita. In fact, many of them said she was the best supervisor they had ever had.

Rita's work coach, Jesse Suarez, was most impressed with the good relations among the employees and with the excellent work Rita's department did. Mr. Suarez was so impressed he encouraged Rita to consider advancing into middle management. He believed that supervising a larger work team would be an important step in Rita's development. There was an opening for a supervisor of 10 data entry specialists in the accounting department. Even though Rita had not worked in accounting, she did have experience with computer systems and data entry as part of her marketing work. Jesse told her she would be perfect in the new job and would enjoy working with a new group of employees. Rita applied for and received the promotion.

After only two months, however, Rita had already received several complaints from the employees she was supervising in the accounting department. She knew her relationships with the new group were not as positive as with the employees in the marketing department. Also the work output had declined steadily since she had taken over as supervisor.

"What's happening, Rita?" Jesse asked when they met to discuss the problem. "Why isn't it working out? You're the same person who was an effective supervisor in the marketing department. What has changed?"

Rita responded, "I don't know. In the marketing department, I always discussed problems with the workers, and as a group we worked out solutions acceptable to everyone. Those employees wanted to be involved. In accounting, no one wants to discuss problems and solutions. They say they don't have time to meet as a group. They say solving problems is what a manager is for. You know that's not my style. I like to spend time with employees, help them, and get them to feel like a team. I don't feel I should make decisions on important problems without at least talking with them."

THINK CRITICALLY

1. Is it possible that a person might be an effective leader in one situation but not in another? Explain.
2. What type of leadership style does Rita practice?
3. What do you recommend that Jesse and Rita do to improve the situation in the accounting department?
4. If you could have talked to Rita before she moved from marketing to accounting, what recommendations would you have made to help her avoid the problem she encountered?