

The Supervisor's Role in Maintenance Error Prevention



What is a supervisor's role in maintenance error prevention?

When all of the human factors that affect our judgment are reviewed, it's found that a supervisor plays a very significant role. Supervisors need to have technical understanding, know the resources required, and have a good knowledge of the individuals and their personalities under their supervision.

The single most important point that every supervisor must remember is to recognize that mistakes will be made on the shop floor. Once you admit that this happens, you can focus on the big picture. From a human factors perspective, the big picture is knowing what safety nets we are endorsing, creating, and enforcing to ensure that the mistakes that do occur are found before the aircraft leaves the ground. Supervisors must always realize that policies and procedures are there to protect us from ourselves.

As supervisors, you have to ensure that communications between the technicians and management is encouraged and is actually taking place. This only happens when there is trust (without any backstabbing) and communication. Supervisors are responsible for establishing a common and level playing field.

As supervisors, there are many things you can do to foster teamwork. You can look for the positive in the events that are taking place within your organization, division, or the company in which you work. You can establish and maintain good lines of communication with technicians, management, and peers in other departments. Your role is to gather information from all concerned and disseminate the information accordingly. Your understanding of the individual personalities you have working on your shift will help to ensure work assignments are appropriate and that you are completing our work correctly. As a supervisor, you are like a coach. One of your jobs is to bring out the best in the people who work for you.

Supervisors must be aware of outstanding work and the morale of their staff. They have to be comfortable with providing sincere recognition for a job well done. They need to give credit when and where it is due. Empowering technicians to think for themselves and sharing responsibilities with them is a surefire way to motivate them. Nearly everyone wants responsibility and will work hard to demonstrate they can handle it.

As supervisors, you must make sure that there is time for the tasks to be accomplished safely and correctly. You must ensure that there is proper attention to detail, operations checks are completed, experience level is matched with tasks, and ensure that checklists and procedures are followed. One of your most important jobs is to ensure proper documented pass-downs are accomplished.

It is amazing how the rest of the shift will reflect the supervisor's attitude about what standards of workmanship are maintained. Supervisors are at the heart of the organization and play a big role in its overall success or failure.

The standards the supervisor sets will be reflected by and most likely adopted by the rest of the team.

About the author

Richard Komarniski is President of Grey Owl Aviation Consultants Inc. He has worked as an Aircraft Maintenance Technician for the last twenty-five years holding AME and A&P Ratings. Richard has been providing Human Factors Training to various aviation maintenance departments. For information on Human Factors training or assistance in setting up a MRM Program contact Grey Owl Aviation Consultants Inc., Box 233, Onanole, Manitoba R0J 1N0 Canada, telephone (204) 848-7353, or fax (204) 848-4605, www.greyowl.com or richard@greyowl.com.