2. What can management do to help alleviate the toll emotional dissonance has on employees?
3. Is emotional labor required in all jobs? Why or why not?

---

1.5 Being the Boss isn’t Easy

Robert S. Fleming

**Keywords:** promotion, supervision, job transition

**Courses this story could be used in:** Organizational Behavior, Principles of Management

**Topics:** change, communication, empowerment, human resource management, management, motivation, promotion, stress, supervision, supervisor-subordinate relations, workplace behavior

The Story

Sally had worked in a clerical capacity in a busy medical practice for the past six years. The office staff was composed of an office manager, Lisa, who had been with the practice since it was established fifteen years ago. Upon Lisa’s retirement, Sally was promoted to fill this position eight months ago.

Over the years the size of the office support staff has grown in accordance with a steady growth in the number of patients, as well as the increased workload resulting from insurance reimbursement requirements and practices. In just the past five years the practice has more than doubled in the number of patients served and the medical staff has grown from the original three doctors to the current five physicians. The current office staff consists of the office manager, a lab technician, three full-time clerical staff, and two part-time clerical staff.

It was known by all that Sally would be the likely replacement when Lisa retired. Sally had actually aspired to this position and was excited about assuming these additional responsibilities and having the opportunity to make some changes that she believed would enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and customer service of the practice. After eight months in this position she began to reconsider her decision of accepting this position. While things had been going well and the transition has been fairly transparent to
the patients, she has become increasingly frustrated and concerned about her working relationship and effectiveness with her office staff (whom she has always counted as her close friends). This concern was actually raised in her first performance evaluation as the office manager.

Sally had just assumed that the clerical staff would rally around and fully support her and respect her authority. The physicians in the practice had likewise assumed that this would be a successful transition and that Sally and her staff would further excel as the practice continued to grow. While for the most part this has happened, there have been some personal challenges where the line between supervisor and subordinate with her former peers has become somewhat fuzzy.

Certain members of her staff, particularly those who have worked with her for a long time, began to take advantage of her on an increasingly regular basis, which caused some disruption—such as asking for days off at the last minute or coming in late and asking Sally to cover for them. Additionally, there has been a growing number of instances where the doctors have treated her as one of the clerical staff, rather than as the office manager.

Sally has become anxious about this situation and has doubted herself and her ability to be a good manager. She has even considered stepping down from the supervisory position and returning to her former position. She did not bring up her concerns during her performance evaluation with all the medical partners but has since spoken to the physician that she originally worked for and with whom she feels most comfortable about this issue. In thinking about her recent challenges Sally has begun to see that she did not allow herself time to ease into a transitional period; rather, she jumped right into this new role assuming she would be treated the way her predecessor was.

She has also come to appreciate the fact that it can be difficult and perhaps undesirable for her to supervise former coworkers. While she loves her new job, she has come to the conclusion that she values her friendships with a number of her former peers and having a manageable level of stress at work more than being the boss.

**Reflection Points**

When an individual is promoted within an organization it must be recognized that he or she is “making a transition.” This transition can be more difficult when, as a result of a promotion, an individual now supervises former peers. It is a responsibility of management to be proactive in supporting a successful transition.

**Three Questions**

1. What factors contributed to the current situation that exists in Sally’s office?
2. What could the practice physicians have done to prevent this situation?