

Gene Gagnon was the Chief Executive Officer of Gagnon and Associates, a Management and Industrial Engineering consulting firm established in 1960. He was a registered Professional Engineer and a Certified Management Consultant. He was very active member of the Institute of Industrial Engineering, an active member of the Council of Logistics Management (now CSCMP), and a charter member of the Warehouse Education and Research Council (WERC). He was the author of a monthly magazine column on Human Resource Management for *Transportation and Distribution* and *The Foodservice Distributor*.

Jim Barnes is a Senior Managing Partner and CEO at enVista. enVista is an enterprise and supply chain consulting firm focused on increasing profitability and eliminating waste for retail, distribution and e-commerce centric companies. He is an active member of CSCMP, WERC and a member of the Institute of Industrial Engineers. Barnes has written and published numerous whitepapers on the subjects of Supply Chain Design, LEAN Enterprises, Warehouse Management, Labor Management and Transportation Management systems. He is a featured speaker at supply chain, retail and manufacturing forums. Barnes also writes a monthly blog, enMotion and is the author of The Oracle Speaks, an entertaining podcast series, focusing on real life supply chain problems and solutions.

“Gene Gagnon’s book gives you the help you’ve been wanting for years. Warehouse managers and supervisors alike will benefit from Gene’s common sense, no nonsense approach to first line supervision in warehousing. This book should be read by every warehouse supervisor and new manager.”

Leslie Hansen Harps
President
Marketing Publications Inc.

“Supervising On The Line is written with the line supervisor’s point of view in mind - from the illustrations to the personal stories - it is a great book. The position of first line supervisor is often misunderstood and underrated - Gene clears up the mystery.”

Jerry Dobbins
Director of Operations
Associated Grocers of Baton Rouge

“This book was written for the supervisor who wants positive results. Gene Gagnon takes the realities of being on the firing line and addresses them in a clear and understandable manner. A must read for every supervisor and new manager.”

David Durtsche
Manager, Logistics Practice
Coopers & Lybrand

Supervising on the LINE

Second edition edited by Jim Barnes

by Gene Gagnon

Supervising on the LINE

A Self Help Guide for First Line Supervisors

by Gene Gagnon



Second edition edited by Jim Barnes

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FOREWORD

There have been numerous books written on management theory and practices. Many of these books tell you what a manager and first line supervisor need to do, but very few books inform the reader on how to actually lead, manage, communicate, direct and measure their associates.

I was given this book by Gene Gagnon's son, Al, in 2008. Gene managed to write what amounts to as a timeless first edition of a book that first line supervisors can still relate to, and more importantly, still take the stories and experiences from and apply them to the real world.

I never had the honor of meeting Gene Gagnon; he passed away in 2005. However, I was given the opportunity to edit the book and supply additional chapters, anecdotes and content based upon my 20 years of experience working in Supply Chain and Technology, and reflecting on my first 10 years as a young Industrial Engineer.

Although the first edition of this book was published in 1988, I believe Gene hit the bull's-eye. When I first read this book I could easily relate to it. I laughed and shook my head with acknowledgement as I related many of the examples and stories to my own personal life and work experience. Gene worked in a variety of warehouses over the years, yet he understood the fact that it is people, not machines, who make the difference between a good and a bad operation. This is especially true in warehouses, where supervision is complicated by both the nature of the work and the physical factors involved in a large and busy distribution center.

Above all, my goal for the second edition of this book was to update and augment the content, without compromising its integrity or essence. The genesis of the original book remains unchanged. The book is written through the eyes and experiences of Gene and myself and updated where appropriate based on industry changes, or to emphasize a point. This book does not insult the intelligence of the reader. The original ideas and practical theories are expressed in plain English, enhanced by attractive, compelling illustrations. Line supervisors and their bosses are likely to use portions of this book as the basis of training sessions, as well as a handbook for ready reference, since management challenges are faced on a day-to-day basis.

This book remains a significant addition to the literature on warehouse management and I am honored to have contributed to it.

Jim Barnes
President/CEO
enVista

FORWARD TO SUPERVISING ON THE LINE

When I was 12 years old my Dad, Gene Gagnon, bought me a book, “The Boy Engineer,” and stuffed it in my stocking for Christmas. Needless to say, it wasn’t quite the present I was looking for when I was only interested in playing hockey 24/7. Bobby Orr was my idol and the Minnesota North Stars had just arrived in my home state as an expansion team three years earlier giving us hockey crazed kids a local team to cheer for.

I couldn’t have known at the time how much influence my dad would have on me over the next 35 years, following in his footsteps as “The Boy Engineer.” I ended up graduating from college not in Industrial Engineering, but as a double major in business management and marketing. While my path would be a slightly different one, I was fortunate enough to join my dad at his consulting firm, Gagnon & Associates. My focus was business development and marketing; his was an innovative one that had a major impact on the warehousing industry in the late 70s and 80s.

Dad was an innovator through and through. He came from a manufacturing environment working as an industrial engineer for Honeywell Corporation. In 1961 Dad, along with one of his fellow IEs at Honeywell, felt there was a market need for a consulting organization that focused on classical industrial engineering techniques for the thriving local manufacturing market in Minneapolis. Soon projects at local companies like Target Stores, Control Data, Medtronic and Toro Manufacturing would follow. A breakthrough came around 1981 when Supervalu, the large wholesale and retail grocer based in Minneapolis, called Dad to ask if the work he was doing was applicable to warehousing. Gagnon & Associates had been focused on manufacturing environments, but Dad thought, why not. He met with the Supervalu executives and a plan was hatched to

implement a Work Measurement and reporting program (now popularly called Workforce or Labor Management) in three distribution centers. These were a few of the very early Labor Management initiatives in the Warehousing industry.

The success or failure of those early projects was at times dependant on the internal IT department’s ability to produce some simple labor reports to support the standards data the engineers were developing. Dad saw a need for a commercial Labor Reporting system to support his Work Measurement programs and released the first commercial, batch processing, Cobal labor reporting system for the warehousing industry in the early 80s.

Dad published the original version of “Supervising on the Line” in 1987 to support a passion of his, providing tools to help first line supervisors do their jobs better. The book had a great reception from Supervisors and Managers who rarely had a publication specifically targeted toward them. For the past ten years, I have been interested in having Dad’s original book updated or re-written.

Jim Barnes, CEO of enVista, read the book for the first time in 2008 and asked why I hadn’t updated the book. With his creativity and similar passion for supporting warehouse management personal, he was just the guy my Dad would have liked to provide a fresh version. Jim is an innovator like Dad, and he has done a wonderful job keeping the mainstream theme of the book intact (including illustrations) while providing the proper edits and updates it needed to resonate with today’s supervisors and managers.

I want to thank Jim for taking the time to edit this book. I also appreciate everyone who has supported Dad’s work through the years and thank you, the reader, for helping his legacy live on.

Al Gagnon

PREFACE

The foreman of a machinery department, a charge nurse in a hospital, the manager of accounts payable or the supervisor of receiving all share the same responsibility. They are the first level of management. They are the first line supervisors.

The industries may be different, but the jobs have a common base; they require dealing with people. To the employees they supervise, these people represent the company. During my years as a consultant I have gained a great deal of respect for the people in these positions. I've seen that many times these supervisors are pulled between the workers and management, trying to satisfy the needs of both while still maintaining their own sanity. Their effectiveness, I've learned, depends on a variety of factors, including experience, training, self-esteem, confidence, leadership ability, communication skills and the backing of upper management.

In addition to these skills, the first line supervisor in a warehouse has a unique problem. He can't usually observe all the people he supervises at any one time. They are scattered over many square feet of racks, stacks, trailers, boxcars, coolers, mezzanines and small rooms. Contrast this with a machinery department where a foreman can see with a glance whether or not his people are present at their stations; or the supervisor of a clerical department who can count "heads-up-heads down." How much easier it is to manage in those circumstances!

But a unique problem doesn't mean the situation is impossible. It just means special skills are needed. That's what this book is all about - to give the first line supervisor the tools he needs.

It's impossible to put all of the ideas from 30 years of learning into 131 pages, but this is an attempt to give you the most important ones. If you try some of them, you will be a more effective supervisor - and you will like your job better. And when you do, I'll feel I've done mine.

Gene Gagnon