

 U.S. Department of Transportation

# DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL MANUAL

## Chapter 315 Probationary Periods

**THIS DPM CANCELS AND REPLACES ALL PREVIOUSLY ISSUED  
DPM-315 BULLETINS, LETTERS AND CHAPTERS RELATED TO  
MANAGERIAL AND SUPERVISORY PROBATIONARY PERIODS.**

**DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER 315, Probationary Periods**

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## SECTION 1. Newly Appointed Managers and Supervisors

### A. Background

1. Managers and supervisors within the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) serve a vital role in recruiting, selecting and developing new supervisors and managers to enhance the performance of the Department now and into the future. This probationary policy for newly appointed managers and supervisors incorporates several new requirements and suggested best practices to assess their potential and to provide them with opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to be successful as leaders within DOT and its Operating Administrations (OAs).
2. Most supervisory positions are filled by people selected because they were outstanding individual contributors to the organization in a specialized occupation or career field and because they have demonstrated the potential to perform managerial and supervisory duties. However, they may not possess all the management competencies needed to be effective managers or supervisors. In their first position in management, they must learn how to accomplish organizational objectives through other people. The probationary period provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between perceived potential and actual performance. It provides an opportunity to assess the development of new managers and supervisors on the job and return them to non-managerial or non-supervisory positions without undue formality if they fail to perform satisfactorily in the managerial or supervisory aspects of the job.
3. Good performance management begins with the hiring process by determining whether the prospective employee is the right fit for the job. Performance management continues through the probationary period, a crucial time to prevent later problems by clearly communicating expectations, evaluating the employee's demonstrated ability to perform the supervisory or managerial aspects of the work, providing proper coaching and taking timely, appropriate action to correct performance deficiencies.
4. For over a decade, surveys of federal worker opinions have revealed that the majority of employees, including supervisors themselves, judge the response to poor performance to be inadequate. Although the primary focus of this policy is to ensure the success of newly appointed managers and supervisors, it also provides a streamlined process and tools for addressing performance deficiencies early and effectively.

### B. General

1. This Section sets forth policy for establishing probationary period policy for newly appointed supervisors and managers in the competitive service within the U.S. Department of Transportation. It supersedes all previous policy and instructions.
2. OAs may develop probationary period policies consistent with this policy to meet their

unique circumstances.

3. The probationary period requirements established in this Section are separate and apart from probationary requirements for initial appointments in the competitive service required by 5 CFR 315.801. See Section 2 of this Chapter for more details.
4. Probationary employees are expected to perform at an acceptable level (rated at level 3 or higher) in order to be appointed to a supervisory or managerial position.
5. With consistent monitoring and refinement of the process, the U.S. Department of Transportation will become a model for effective and quality leadership within the Federal government.

### **C. Authorities and References**

1. This Section is based upon and conforms to the requirements and policy set forth in Section 3321 of title 5 U.S. Code, as amended by Section 303 of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-454); and 5 CFR Parts 315.901-909.
2. This Section supplements policies and requirements contained in the reference cited above. It is not self-contained, and must be read with the reference cited.
3. FAA shall abide by the general concepts contained in this Section, but the FAA Administrator may use his/her discretion and the flexibilities authorized by Section 40122 of title 49 U.S. Code, in administering FAA's personnel management system.
4. A "Supervisory Toolkit" is available to assist supervisors and managers in the performance of their duties. It is located at: <http://dothr.ost.dot.gov/toolkit/toolkit.html>

### **D. Related Topics**

1. DPM Chapter 430, Performance Management, dated December 29 2003, rev. March 5, 2004 (<http://dothr.ost.dot.gov/HRPolicy/Subject/subject.html#PerformanceManagement>)
2. DPM Letter 300-26, Recruiting, Selecting, Developing, and Appraising Supervisors, dated October 17, 2002 (<http://dothr.ost.dot.gov/HRPolicy/Number/number.html#Ch300>)

### **E. Definitions**

1. **Probationary Period** – A trial period to assess a new supervisor's or manager's supervisory and managerial performance, particularly his/her aptitude for the human relations aspects of the supervisory work. The probationary period provides an opportunity to improve performance deficiencies or, if warranted, return or reassign an

employee to a nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial position without most of the procedures and appeal rights granted to individuals who have already completed a supervisory or managerial probationary period.

2. **Managerial Position** – A managerial position typically involves directing the work of an organization, monitoring and evaluating an organization’s progress toward its goals, and assuming responsibility for the success of specific programs.
3. **Supervisory Position** – A supervisory position is established to accomplish work through the direction of other people and meets at least the minimum requirements for coverage under the General Schedule Supervisory Guide or, if under the wage system, the Job Grading Standard for Supervisors.
4. **Operating Administrations** – For purposes of this Order, the term refers to the Department's Operating Administrations, the Office of the Secretary (OST), and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

#### **F. Roles and Responsibilities**

1. The first level supervisor of a newly appointed supervisor or manager must:
  - a. Adhere to the principles and policy contained in this document;
  - b. Communicate Departmental, OA and office missions, strategic goals and objectives;
  - c. Communicate Departmental, OA and office policies, administrative procedures, work hours, leave policy, etc;
  - d. Inform the employee of the requirement for, and the purpose and duration of, the probationary period;
  - e. Collaborate with the employee to develop the mandatory supervisory/managerial performance expectations and standards that will be used to assess the employee’s supervisory or managerial performance, and discuss how performance assessment will be conducted;
  - f. Issue a performance plan within 30-days of appointment;
  - g. Monitor, provide formal quarterly feedback, appraise, and document the probationary employee’s supervisory or managerial performance;
  - h. Describe the multi-source feedback process, i.e., how it will be obtained, and how it will be used, if adopted by an OA;
  - i. Provide assistance, formal development, mentoring or counseling as deemed

appropriate;

- j. Follow the requirements contained in DPM Letter 300-26 for developing supervisors;
  - k. Notify the probationer of the determination regarding successful completion of the probationary period; and
  - l. Determine whether an employee has demonstrated his/her qualifications for retention as a supervisor or manager.
2. The second-level supervisor of newly appointed managers and supervisors must:
- a. Ensure compliance with Departmental and OA probationary period policies;
  - b. Meet periodically with the first-level supervisor to discuss the employee's performance and development of supervisory and managerial skills;
  - c. Meet periodically with the employee to provide feedback and discuss performance and development, consistent with OA policy; and
  - d. Ensure that appropriate resources are being provided to the employee, including resources for training and development activities, to assist in the successful completion of the probationary period
3. Newly appointed managers and supervisors are to:
- a. Take responsibility for successfully completing the probationary period;
  - b. Take full advantage of any training, mentoring, and/or counseling provided;
  - c. Be proactive in seeking assistance;
  - d. Provide input for any developmental activities to achieve the appropriate competencies;
  - e. Independently find ways to enhance their development;
  - f. Provide self-assessments of competencies and performance, as appropriate; and
  - g. Demonstrate good supervisory or managerial skills.

#### **G. Policy**

It is the policy of DOT to provide new supervisors and managers with (1) a reasonable opportunity to prove themselves as quality leaders; and (2) training, positive feedback, and

mentoring during their first year so that they develop and apply effective supervisory or managerial skills, through the following requirements:

1. Upon initial permanent appointment in the competitive service to a supervisory position, an employee is required to complete a probationary period.
2. Upon initial permanent appointment in the competitive service to a managerial position, an employee is required to complete a separate probationary period except as provided in Section H.
3. When an assignment to a supervisory or managerial position is expected to exceed 120 days, the employee is required to serve a probationary period. Nothing in this Section restricts the termination of a temporary assignment at any time.
4. OAs may vary the length of the probationary period for certain types of occupations, but in no case should the probationary period be less than one year. The probationary period begins on the effective date of the official personnel action assigning the employee to the position.
5. Within thirty (30) calendar days of appointment, the supervisor shall inform the newly appointed supervisor or manager of his/her probationary status; describe his/her duties and responsibilities; and provide him/her with a written performance plan.
6. All probationary supervisors and managers shall receive formal, quarterly feedback from their supervisors. To the extent possible, feedback should be given in face-to-face meetings. OAs shall establish internal controls to ensure that probationary supervisors and managers receive feedback every three months.
7. Within 90-days of appointment, a needs assessment will be completed on the probationary supervisor or manager that addresses the DOT's leadership competencies.
8. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) will be developed based on the needs assessment. The IDP should document training or learning opportunities that will meet the mandatory 40 hours of formal development specified in DPM Letter No. 300-26. For newly appointed supervisors, training in conflict resolution and performance management is strongly recommended.
9. Every effort should be made to ensure that the mandatory 40 hours of formal development is completed within the first six months of the probationary period.
10. Supervisors, with assistance from their Human Resource Office, are expected to provide assistance to probationary supervisors and managers to improve performance deficiencies.
11. Action may not be taken to reassign a probationary supervisor or manager to a non-

supervisory or non-managerial position earlier than 90 calendar days following appointment. This requirement does not preclude action based on misconduct.

12. An OA may exclude newly appointed managers from serving a probationary period, provided such exclusions are based on a written policy which has the following requirements:
  - a. Exclusions are made only on an individual basis;
  - b. The reasons for an exclusion are documented and contain evidence (including successful completion of a supervisory probationary period) of the individual's demonstrated success as a supervisor in exercising the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics including an aptitude for the human relations aspect necessary to perform those duties; and
  - c. Official(s) authorized to approve such exclusions are identified.
13. Operating Administrations are strongly encouraged to adopt the following processes:
  - a. Assign a mentor to the probationary supervisor or manager for the duration of the probationary period. A "mentor" is one who has supervisory or managerial experience in the OA to which the new employee is assigned, has a demonstrated ability to effectively supervise employees or perform managerial duties, is savvy concerning how to navigate the organization's culture, and can provide advice from personal experience, leaving the decision to act up to the mentee. To be effective the mentor must also be someone who is accessible to the mentee, is skilled in establishing a positive rapport, and is committed to helping the newly appointed supervisor or manager succeed in his or her position. The mentor is not involved in any facet of the employee's performance evaluation; rather, he or she serves as a resource to the newly appointed manager or supervisor. This approach provides an environment in which the new employee is free to share ideas or concerns that he or she might otherwise be hesitant to share with a first level supervisor.
  - b. Use multi-source feedback to provide formal, quarterly performance feedback and to determine the developmental needs of the probationary supervisor or manager. Generally, multi-source feedback is received by supervisors from subordinate employees, customers, and peer supervisors who have observed the employee's supervisory or managerial performance. This feedback is used to identify strengths and weaknesses with an emphasis on what can be done to improve supervisory and managerial skills. Multi-source feedback shall not be used for evaluative purposes unless the OA has formally developed such a program that is applicable to non-probationary supervisors and managers.
  - c. Establish a plan for assigning a probationer to a non-supervisory or non-managerial position if he/she fails to satisfactorily complete the probationary period prior to the

employee's appointment.

## **H. Creditable Service**

1. OAs shall determine whether to waive the requirement for serving a probationary period for newly appointed managers when an employee has already satisfactorily completed the required probationary period for a supervisory position while on a temporary assignment (120 days or more).
2. OAs shall determine the extent to which temporary service in a supervisory or managerial position prior to probation shall be credited toward meeting the probationary period requirement.
3. If an employee serving a supervisory or managerial probationary period is assigned without a break in service to another supervisory or managerial position anywhere in DOT (and not for cause), all time served in the first position will be credited toward completion of the probationary period in the new position.
4. No credit shall be given for time served in a supervisory/managerial probationary period when:
  - a. A probationary supervisor or manager leaves the position for any reason before the end of the probationary period and is later reappointed to another supervisory or managerial position.
  - b. An employee transfers into a supervisory or managerial position from another agency and did not successfully complete a supervisory or managerial probationary period prescribed by the former agency.
  - c. Absences in non-pay status (other than for compensable injury or military duty) are in excess of 22 workdays. Non-pay time in excess of 22 workdays extends the probationary period by an equal amount of time.

## **I. Performance Counseling**

- a. Besides the quarterly feedback sessions, supervisors should counsel probationary employees whenever performance appears to be deficient. The *Supervisory Toolkit* provides additional information for correcting performance deficiencies.
- b. OAs should ensure that supervisors of probationary employees are skilled in coaching and feedback.

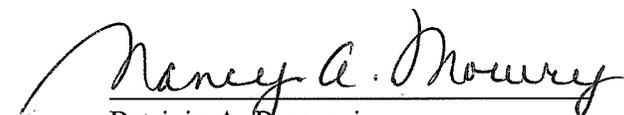
**J. Failing the Probationary Period**

1. Employees serving a supervisory or managerial probationary period who do not perform at an acceptable level may not continue in their supervisory or managerial position, and must be returned or reassigned to a non-supervisory or non-managerial position. The decision to return or reassign an employee to a nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial position is not grievable. However, OAs may develop procedures for additional internal review, as deemed appropriate.
2. Prior to the effective date, employees serving a supervisory or managerial probationary period must receive written notification of the decision to return or reassign them to a non-supervisory or non-managerial position because of supervisory or managerial performance deficiency.

**SECTION 2. All Employee Probationary Periods (Reserved)**

**EFFECTIVE DATE AND IMPLEMENTATION**

This policy is effective immediately upon signature.

  
for Patricia A. Prospero  
Director, Departmental Office of  
Human Resource Management

6/3/05  
Date

**Effective Date:** The date of signature.  
**Review Date:** One year from effective date.  
**Distribution:** Human Resources Council and OST Administrative Officers