

Building Higher Trust 24 Trust and Micromanagement

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



One of the more debilitating practices of leaders and managers is to micromanage their people. Nobody enjoys being micromanaged regardless of the level, so it is an interesting conundrum why so many leaders fall into the habit.

In this article, I will explore the justifications most leaders use to micromanage people and describe some ways to prevent the practice in your organization.

Leaders who overdo the interventions believe they are doing the smart thing for the organization and even the employee being micromanaged. The rationale is that the leader's intention is to ensure the job is being done "right" and that the employee has a successful outcome. This is thought to be a "good outcome" for the organization and the employee.

The blind spot here is that the leader is showing a lack of trust and faith in the employee, and so that leader feels a need to hover and make sure every step is being handled the "right" way.

I recall one brave technician who had a supervisor who was over the top in terms of micromanagement. The technician was doing some complex testing on a piece of critical equipment. The supervisor kept poking his head in the lab to be sure all steps were being followed correctly.

In reality, the supervisor was interrupting the technician while he was performing the tasks, which actually created problems. At one point the technician had enough of the abuse and brought in a pair of handcuffs. When the supervisor came into the lab next time, the technician held up his chained wrists and said, "You know, I could do this job a whole lot better and easier if you would stop interrupting me about every hour."

A far better approach is to give the person a task and ask if there are any questions on how to do it. The supervisor needs to give the employee specifications upfront for the outcome. The employee must be aware of what is important to the supervisor.

Then back off and tell the person that you are always available to answer questions or even help with the job, if necessary. That approach shows trust, and the employee will feel empowered to do his best work.

It is very easy to fall into the habit of micromanaging. Most leaders are not even aware they are doing it. If a culture of high trust has been established, then employees will be forthright about the situation before it gets out of hand.

Watch the body language of employees when you are giving them instructions. If there is a look of fatigue or pain, check out what the employee is thinking.

One way to detect if you are guilty of too much coaching is to simply ask the employee if you are being too prescriptive. That phrase opens up a dialog that can allow the employee to tip you off so you can correct the problem.

Micromanagement is a disease that can be cured, but only if the leader is smart enough to detect that the practice is happening. The trust needs to go both ways. The supervisor needs to trust the employee to do the job correctly and the employee needs to trust the supervisor to lead appropriately.

Bonus video

Here is a brief [video on the topic of Trust and Micromanagement. It includes an example of how I was able to prevent a known micromanager from getting to me.](#)

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

