

Leadership Barometer 125 Impact of Micromanagement Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Everybody hates to be micromanaged. So why do so many managers do it? We know that overbearing, but well-intended, managers micromanage all the time in an attempt to optimize performance. I will identify the cure for this habitual dilemma in this article.

The problem is that by micromanaging people, the manager is severely limiting performance rather than optimizing it, so the manager is operating at cross purposes to his stated goal. I am using the male pronouns here, but recognize that female managers are also prone to micromanage.

Unwittingly, the manager is removing the incentive for effort and creativity on the part of the employee. We are so familiar with this problem simply because it is rampant in many of our organizations.

Let us contrast micromanagement versus trust to give some insight on how the latter leads to greatly enhanced performance.

To micromanage someone implies a lack of trust. The manager is not confident the employee can or will do a job correctly, so the employee is besieged with "helpful" instructions from the manager on exactly how to perform tasks.

At first, the intrusion is simply irritating to the employee who has her own ideas on how to do the job. After a while, it degenerates into an opportunity to check out mentally and join the legion of disenchanting workers doing what they are told and collecting a paycheck. This leaves much of the employee's power on the doorstep of the organization every day.

Another drawback is that employees will try to avoid a manager who tends to micromanage, simply to reduce the aggravation. This leads to a circular decline, where the manager has less and less information, so he tries even harder to intervene and direct activities. This reaction makes people want to avoid him even more.

To trust an employee is to think enough of the person to treat him or her as a thinking person who can have good ideas if given a goal and some broad operating parameters. In an environment of trust, employees have the freedom to

explore, innovate, create, stretch, and yes, sometimes make mistakes. These mistakes can be thought of as waste, but enlightened leaders think of them simply as learning opportunities.

Here are nine ideas that can help leaders and managers reduce the tendency to micromanage, thus unleashing a greater portion of the power available to the organization.

- 1. Set clear goals and make sure your employees have the basic skills and tools to do the job.**
- 2. Be clear on the broad constraints within which the employee must operate. In other words, do not let the employee try to conquer the world with a tuna-fish can.**
- 3. Express trust in the employee and encourage creativity and risk taking as long as the risks are well-considered and safe.**
- 4. Reject the temptation to step in if the employee seems to struggle, rather make yourself available if there are any questions or requests for help.**
- 5. Provide the resources the employee needs to accomplish the tasks.**
- 6. Do not totally overload the employee with so many duties and projects that he or she cannot succeed at any of them.**
- 7. Express praise and gratitude for positive baby steps along the way.**
- 8. Give the employee time and space to try different approaches without having to explain why she is doing every step.**
- 9. If problems occur, consider them as learning experiences and ask the employee to describe how she will do things differently next time.**

These nine ideas are all simple, but they are nearly impossible for a micromanager to accomplish without constant effort. The concept of trusting employees does involve some risk, but the rewards of having people working up to their full potential rather than just complying is well worth that risk. You will see better, faster, and more robust solutions if you trust people and let their natural talents surface in an environment of less micromanagement.

Robert Whipple is also the author of The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals and, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online. Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders.

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