

Kelly MacCallum

Stay.

MANAGING
MICROMANAGEMENT



January 2024



Managing Micromanagement

Your job as a manager is to provide your employees with guidance and support.

To do this effectively, you need to create a healthy environment where employees are motivated to do their best - reaching their full potential by having the autonomy to do their roles, while building their confidence.

Unfortunately, if you are a micromanager, you are doing the exact opposite.

This is the most common complaint against ineffective leaders. It's a massive red flag, a huge faux pas, and should practically be considered an office felony.

For some leaders, they are aware they do this - and if this is you - shame on you. Do the research, check all the playbooks - this is NOT serving you well. Consider the following.

The Damaging Effects of Micromanagement

1. Loss of morale
2. It stifles creativity
3. Loss of motivation
4. It discourages teamwork
5. You'll start to see more attrition
6. Employees lose self-confidence
7. Makes employees feel powerless
8. It negatively impacts productivity
9. It impacts employee wellness, contributing to burnout
10. It causes extreme mistrust between leader and employee

The Importance of Autonomy

Research is clear.

Employees are primarily motivated intrinsically - intrinsic motivators include autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Micromanagement is a clear violation against autonomy.

When an employee is given the freedom to do their work, when, where and how they want, they can reach their full potential and contribute to a results-driven, high-performing culture.

All you need to do is give the employee a clear, measurable task with a quantifiable outcome, then get out of their way - except when they reach out to you to help remove obstacles or seek your support.

It's that simple.

The Role of Self-Awareness

Here's the thing about self-awareness - 90% of people think they are self-aware, but in reality, only 10% of people actually are.

So how can you as a Leader do a gut check to ask yourself if you are a micromanager?

You could simply ask your employees about it. However, be mindful that if you are a micromanager, it usually takes a big toll on trust, so your employees may not be confident they can be open with you about it.

If you would describe yourself as a control freak, there's a strong inclination for micromanagement.

You may simply be uncomfortable in a leadership role, and/or insecure and anxious that your team will reflect badly on you.

This is all fear driven - and if you struggle with it, I highly recommend you engage a coach.

Some leaders excuse the behaviour under the auspice of “wanting to help”.

Whatever your reason, you need to get it in check.

Signs you are a Micromanager

So if you’ve gotten this far, you probably already suspect this is something you do. Let’s illustrate the classic traits of the micromanager.

01

Every task needs approval

If the idea of giving your team members control gives you heart-palpitations and you believe that you are the only one capable of doing the task or making the decision, you are probably a micromanager.

When your people find themselves having to request approval about everything, it will swiftly destroy their self confidence.

02

You get in the weeds

If you are getting bogged down by the details, you likely aren’t seeing the big picture - and as a Leader, that is where you are needed most. Do you find yourself double checking math, scrutinizing the minutia, correcting spelling and grammar? Do you need to own the most simple tactical items? These types of things are all classic micromanagement.

When you do this, you may lose sight of strategic priorities that need your attention. You start to become a transactional manager and not a transformational leader. You focus on the next thing not the end goal and as you get stuck in details, your creativity and inspiration drains away.

03

An obsession with constant updates and being the expert

This can result in your people spending more time updating you on meaningless details than focusing on what they are employed to do. With people feeling the constant need to justify themselves comes the feeling that they are not trusted to do their jobs.

A leader that behaves this way will rarely, if ever, trust an employee to give a presentation to the Leader's Leader or anyone else the Leader deems as important. Usually you'll do this to keep control of what goes out there since you believe it is a reflection of you.

You waste a lot of time trying to be the subject matter expert rather than empowering and leveraging the subject matter expert.

04

You won't delegate

This causes two big problems.

Firstly, your team members will wonder if they are actually allowed to do the work for which they were employed to do. This is a confidence killer. Also, as the micromanager, you will become so overloaded with someone else's work, you fail to do your own.

Sometimes leaders do this because they truly enjoy the work, but as a leader, you need to embrace your position which is to support and enable the day to day work, not do the day to day work.

05

You insist on being copied on every email

The need to have visibility of every single piece of communication at all times is a tell tale sign of the micromanager.

It screams fear of being left out of the loop.

This can become an obsession as you worry people are discussing details and making decisions you think should be out of their control.

06

You have an insatiable need to feel needed

Your need to be needed causes you to overcomplicate instructions with so much detail, things get confusing. That means, your employees end up coming back to you for clarity and direction.

07

You just don't believe anyone is as capable as you are

Micromanagers often believe that they are in a management position over lesser talented people because only they can be trusted to work as effectively.

This is usually why you get involved in everything (and make sure that their team runs every single decision past you for approval before moving forward).

Moving Past Micromanagement

There are a few things you can do to move past this damaging habit. It will take intention and self-awareness, but it is totally possible to catch yourself, and start to do things differently.

You will see the positive impacts in a short period of time.

01

Know when you're in the weeds.

Are you getting wrapped up in tactics and seemingly urgent, but small and even petty details of work?

If you are constantly being pulled into the latest "fire", it usually means employees and other stakeholders feel at risk for making a decision. They will be reluctant to take accountability and/or will be unsure how to proceed.

02

Consider what is motivating you to be in the weeds.

If you're easily distracted by solving tactical problems and spend too much time troubleshooting operational issues, it is important to stop and think on why this is happening.

Do you feel like no one else can handle the problems as well as you?

Does it calm your anxiety about things falling through the cracks?

Is this your way of building relationships with your team members?

If any of these sound familiar, low trust is probably the issue. Ask yourself what you might do to build trust or set your team members up for success on their own. And, just as importantly, consider how you might lead this work rather than doing it.

03

Acknowledge

Once you start to understand what it means to be in the weeds and your motivation for jumping in, it is time to talk to your team about it.

Be transparent. Let them know you are on a journey to self-awareness and this is a habit you know you need to change. This kind of vulnerability can serve to build trust in and of itself. But it will require you to take it seriously if you want to see change.

Because you've created an atmosphere where your people are used to coming to you to solve their problems, you're going to have to start to undo those expectations, and your employees may be hesitant as they adapt new habits.

But as you begin to let go and set your employees up for success, you will quickly notice improvements in morale, motivation and productivity.

04

Start Delegating

As a micromanager, you will not be naturally inclined to delegate. But if you don't, you'll never get out of the weeds and it will be near impossible to build accountability and high performing teams that remain motivated and engaged.

Embrace the tension that you need to be more essential and less involved. When you justify holding on to work, you're confusing being involved with being essential. The two are not the same—just like being busy doesn't mean you are productive.

When you start delegating, you will be able to finally do the work that actually needs you.

05

Set goals and measure success.

This piece is most important. You will need to set clear goals for your team as a leader. Clarify what you want to accomplish over the coming quarter - knowing that circumstances will always change.

These goals should align with the strategic direction and priorities.

Drill down on the specifics of how you will measure success. How do you define success, and what markers will indicate you've achieved it? These measures need to be very objective so that there is no doubt if the employee has successfully accomplished the ask.

In Conclusion

While it may be hard at first, as you start to let go, you will notice a big change in the attitudes and outputs of your team. The science tells us that empowered, autonomous employees are highly motivated, positive, productive, creative and drive results.

By engaging your whole team to do what they do best, they can move mountains and as a team, you will accomplish far more than you ever could on your own.

And THAT will reflect well on you!