

Avoid Micromanaging

Observe eight coaching tips.



by Cathy Earley

MICROMANAGING damages engagement, saps the initiative of even motivated team members, undermines confidence, quashes innovation, and drives away top talent. And micromanagers often become exhausted and embittered. No one wins.

Micromanagement means managing with excessive control or attention to details, and our research indicates that more than one-in-three workers experience it.

Ironically, micromanaging leaders may be well-intentioned and behave this way because they are smart and achievement-oriented. They're eager to help their team, enjoy solving problems, and want to ensure quality results. They just don't know how to delegate.

Other leaders get labeled as *micromanagers* when they try to coach employees without a trusting relationship. Then, a conversation about a project's status feels like an interrogation, suggestions and check-ins are interpreted as meddling.

New managers often default to micromanaging. They've likely been star performers who move from producing results *on their own* to achieving objectives *through* their team, so they mistakenly believe that they now need to manage the details of others' work in addition to their own, not realizing that their new role is as a coach and leader of people, not a super-manager of multiple projects or tasks.

Still other new managers may control more because they lack confidence.

Whatever the cause, leaders who micromanage convey that they don't trust their employees' judgment or skills. The result: Disengaged workers who simply put in time.

Avoiding the "My Way" Trap

Here are eight reminders for effectively delegating and coaching:

1. You're a leader first, expert second. Coach employees to best apply their knowledge and skills. They're experts; you don't need to have all answers.

The most important actions you can take are to provide opportunities for employees to stretch and solve problems on their own. This requires a shift from *being an expert* to being an *expert leader*.

2. Establish relationships. Get to know the people you lead. They come to work with unique values, aspirations, experiences, and talents. The more you can tap into those qualities, the better. Solid relationships ensure trust and prevent miscommunication. And relationships work both ways. Make sure you let your team get to know you.

3. Size up the situation and individual. Good coaching is relative and relevant. One person's micromanaging may be another person's dream coaching. A talented team member may crave guidance in one situation and demand independence in another.

4. Provide context. When delegating, explain why the assignment is critical and how it fits into your business imperatives. Employees want to be part of something bigger. That connection *motivates* them to do their best work. When they understand the business context, they make better decisions—without you.

5. Keep to the what, not how. Assign a problem or task (*what* has to be done) by clearly describing the desired outcome and all parameters or constraints (scope, timing, resources, decision-making authority, internal politics). Then let employees explore ideas to determine the best action.

6. Ask open-ended questions and listen. Exploring ideas with people requires patience. You may have done their job before—or think you have great ideas. Instead of talking about *your* ideas, stop, ask a question, and listen.

7. Ask for feedback. Ask your team members what they need in terms of direction and coaching. What do you do that helps them do a better job *and also* makes them feel like they're making a contribution? When do they feel that they can move forward without you? Such conversations build trust.

8. Know when to tell. At times, there may not be options or room for new ideas. If regulations restrict the solution or a situation requires a directive, don't waste time exploring ideas. Ask when you can; tell when you have to.

Remember: the best way may not actually be *your* way. LE

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ACTION: Coach, don't "do."

