

Dealing with Micromanagers

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Have you ever encountered people who try to control you? They tell you what to do and sometimes how to do it. Maybe you felt so controlled and restricted in what you could do that you felt handcuffed. Or that you couldn't do anything right. Of course, parents control young children to keep them safe and teach them. Managers are legitimately controlling too when training inexperienced employees. But what about when managers, parents, friends, and spouses micromanage people long after they are capable of what they are doing?

Micromanagers are generally people who think their way is the only way. They are generally close-minded to new ways of thinking and doing. In their defense, they are often smart and experienced. They know a lot about what works and what doesn't. But how much joy is it to always be told what to do? How demotivating is it to rarely use your own ideas or perform tasks the way you would like to do them?

Micromanagers tend to be self-centered. They care more about having others conform to their methods, and even their perspectives, than to being open to others' methods and views. Their self-centeredness is sometimes disguised as doing what's best for the larger good such as what's best for the organization or the family. Or to best deal with a complex situation or underperforming employee. Sometimes intentions are valid. Letting go and trying new methods can result in mistakes and additional costs. But don't new methods and new ways of thinking also result in better methods and cost reductions? Don't new ideas produce new products, new services, and on the personal side, new sources of joy?

There are legitimate considerations in deciding to be a micromanager such as in matters related to safety, compliance, and mitigating risks. When keeping people safe, complying to laws, and using good judgment related to people's health and welfare, controlling what people do is generally acceptable. It is done for people's good, not out of selfishness. Although, we could point out a number of policies that don't seem to have been created with most people's best interest in mind.

To be fair to micromanagers, there are situations that deserve micromanaging and some that don't. But when there isn't an overriding legal constraint, a safety concern, inexperience, or an attempt to avoid a clearly bad idea, micromanaging is generally not the best approach. It demotivates people. It makes people feel unvalued. It inhibits new ideas and methods.

How should do you confront a micromanager? How do you deal with someone's unjustified controlling nature? Or if you are the micromanager, how do you let go and be more openminded?

In many situations, both micromanagers as well as those being micromanaged need to give more thought to why they feel and do what they do. Maybe we all should think about the pros and cons of our controlling nature or dislike for control.

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Here are a few questions to think about, discuss, and take action on for both the micromanaged and the micromanager:

For the micromanager:

- Might you be more open-minded to others' ideas and give them a chance to contribute? Be more open to learning something new?
- On trivial and lesser important matters, are you being too picky or so perfectionistic that you won't allow others the flexibility to do things a different way?
- Are you being too cautious and perhaps using inexperience, safety, or well-being as an excuse for that which isn't any more risky than existing approaches?
- Are you forcing your world views and biases on others such as your views on functionality, aesthetics, equality, or whatever you think is right vs wrong?
- Are you putting the value of being right above the value of maintaining good relationships? Could you accept an inferior solution in exchange for a superior relationship?

For the micromanaged:

- Are you being overly sensitive to being told what to do? Are you fundamentally against authority, structure, obedience, or to others knowing more than you?
- Maybe you lack the skill or knowledge that is needed to do the work that is being asked of you? Or might the reason you are being micromanaged be that you are underperforming in some way?
- Can you communicate more often, ask for help, better plan, or provide more updates to reduce the uncertainty of what is being done and reduce the need for control?

For both:

- Are you hanging on to habits simply because you've always done things a certain way rather than because the habits are truly the best way?
- Are you overly concerned about who gets the credit or blame? Can you simply allow work to be done without being the center of attention?
- Are you afraid of something? Is a fear holding you back? Maybe a fear of being wrong or making a mistake? Or a fear of not being the primary contributor?

Consider how you might change your thinking to be less controlling or feel less controlled. Maybe you'll discover that a more open mind to new ideas and approaches is the better alternative.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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