Tips to Stop Controlling and Telling

by [Mike Hawkins](#)

Have you been a parent, a boss, or in a position of influence where you told people what to do? Or in a relationship where you decided or controlled most decisions? Or been in a role or had a habit of lecturing to students, colleagues, or friends?

Maybe telling worked for you, or at least you thought it did, but now you're in rehab. You are ready to move into a more engaging way of talking to people. Or, if you're not yet sure you are ready, at least consider for a few minutes that telling doesn't invite meaningful conversation. It doesn't create positive sustainable results. It turns people off. So, you are moving away from telling people what to do and toward having conversations.

Now that you've made the decision to stop telling and controlling those in your circle of influence, get ready to have deeper, genuine, and more productive conversations. Be prepared to share ideas and discuss differences of opinion ….. without getting upset or raising voices. Know that you will now be reaching compromises instead of merely getting your way or conceding to someone else's.

When people have been in a position of influence, especially for a long time, they can settle into a habit of giving the equivalent of monologs instead of having dialogs. They become accustom to people not giving feedback or sharing opposing opinions. This style of leadership seems effective because it is faster, but the downsides are significant and usually cause more time-consuming problems later than the time that was initially thought to be saved.

In the work place, controlling shows up as a reluctance to delegate and empower people to do the very work they were hired to do. These types of managers maintain a tight grip on everything and everyone for which they are responsible. They are often called *[micromanagers](#)*. The worst offenders even try to control that which is outside of what they are responsible. They struggle to *stay in their swim lane* as the cliché goes.

The result of controlling managers who don't delegate or empower is that people essentially turn their brains off. Many people just stop listening. They think "why bother?" They know they are not being invited into a two-way conversation and they must simply do what they are told. The controlling managers then miss out on people's ideas. They miss out on having motivated people. They miss out on having people who feel ownership for what they do. As a result, they create disengaged people who don't feel heard or valued.

Is it easy to stop controlling people and telling them what to do? No, it isn't. Like changing any engrained habit, it takes work. It involves frustration, humility, and effort. But as with any learned habit, it can be unlearned.

People who are recovering from telling and controlling start by shifting their mindset. They adopt an open mind that listens to and values other's opinions. They accept that they don't have all the best ideas, regardless of their experience. They believe that involving others produces better ideas and decisions. Then they are better able to overcome their tendency to control what people do and how they do it.

Listed below are a few additional principles to put into practice to help you or others make the transition from telling and controlling to discussing and empowering:

- Realize that you don't know everything, have all the answers, or possess the only valid opinions. Realize that you are biased, as is everyone, which means you could really benefit from others' input.

- Accept that not everything will be done your way and it's okay, even if it's not done as well. There are other important considerations such giving others the sense of ownership, letting them learn, and making them feel valued.

- Know that letting others have a voice and role is better for both you and them. For you, it can take the pressure off you of having to know or do so much yourself. It also frees you up to learn and do higher-value work.

- If still unsure, consider the many downsides of telling people what to do and the benefits missed when you don't let others play an important role in something …… including doing some of the thinking.

- Know that people will often exceed your expectations when given the opportunity. They just need the opportunity. You can often be delighted rather than disappointed when you give people a chance.

- Involve people in what you do. At a minimum, ask questions and invite them into discussions. Ask for their input early in whatever you are planning. Be patient and allocate sufficient time for them to share their ideas.

- You usually have to provide context to start a discussion. When you do, provide the background and "the why", but be as brief as possible. People's attention span starts waning after about ten seconds.

- Look for and appreciate what people say and do that is right. View people through a lens that gives at least equal weighting to what works as well as not works. Better yet, see them through a positive lens.

- Don't stop having conversations and empowering people when things don't go well. There will be problems. Learn from them and overcome them instead of giving up and resorting to old bad habits.

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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. For other articles on reaching your peak potential, visit: www.alpinelink.com/blog.