What Is Micromanagement? And What You Can Do To Avoid It.
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“Fifty percent of the typical employee’s job satisfaction is determined by the quality of his/her relation-ship with the manager.”
– Leigh Brahnah, VP and Director of Professional Services, Right Management Consultants

“Four out of five workers say they’ve been a victim of micromanagement.”
– Harry E. Chambers, My Way or the Highway—the Micromanagement Survival Guide

What Is Micromanagement?
Micromanagement has become a very popular descriptor in today’s workplace. Webster’s Dictionary defines micromanage as “to manage with great or excessive control or attention to details.” Most people today hear these words and immediately think of the annoying manager who constantly looks over their shoulder, questions everything they do, won’t let them make any decisions; and runs his/her office like a military command and control center.

When Is Micromanaging OK?
To be fair, not all managers who are given this pejorative title deserve it. It is the role of a manager to monitor progress, control quality, evaluate performance, make decisions, give instruction, and offer advice and guidance. For example:

• If deadlines are missed or customers are not satisfied, a manager needs to get more involved in the details to help solve the problem.
• If a project is not going as planned, a manager needs the details in order to adjust the plan and/or make the necessary decisions.
• If a staff member is not able to perform, a manager needs to become more involved in their work in order to coach them effectively.
• If a staff member is not willing to perform, a manager needs to monitor their performance closely in order to motivate or discipline them accordingly.
• If a manager has to report on progress, he/she needs a detailed understanding of the processes and inner workings of the department.
• If a staff member is responsible for a sensitive file/job, a manager may need to know all the details in case the staff member is absent.

Sometimes these managerial responsibilities can appear intrusive or controlling to staff – particularly to those who are under-performing and require more supervision. It is only when a manager’s oversight or input is excessive or unnecessary that he/she can be reasonably termed a “micromanager.”
What Is Excessive or Unnecessary Oversight or Input?
For the purpose of this paper, let us say that a manager is micromanaging if he/she spends time trying to control the details of work done by "competent" staff, rather than focusing his/her energy on the strategic necessities of managing.

When Is Micromanaging Not OK?
If managers act in ways that are deemed to be micromanaging, the costs to an organization can be staggering. When employees are feeling micromanaged, they manifest this by being frustrated or fearful. Either way, the end result is stress, and stress can lead to sick-days or turnover. In fact, the number one reasons most employees leave a workplace is because of bad management—notably, they feel their managers don’t trust or respect their abilities and, therefore, don’t empower them with enough responsibility and/or micromanage them. In an era of scarce resources, the loss of employees to sickness or turnover is something that can no longer be ignored. It is shown to have a direct impact on productivity and, ultimately, the bottom line of most organizations. Micromanagement can also impact on the efficiency of an organization when managers choose to spend their time doing the detailed work of their employees instead of managing the more strategic issues they are assigned. In short, micromanaging is not ok when it affects the mental health of staff and the efficiency of an organization.

What Are the Tell-Tale Signs of a Micromanager?
They have a hard time delegating tasks. They likely spend more time “telling” staff what to do and how to do it versus “asking” them what they did and how it went.

- They believe that being a manager means that they have more knowledge and/or skill than their employees.
- They believe they can perform most of the tasks of their staff, probably better.
- They believe that they care about things (quality, deadlines, etc.) more than their staff.
- They feel it is more efficient to do the job themselves than give the job to a staff member.
- They are overly critical of their staff. When they review the work of staff members, they tend to find at least one thing wrong each time. They often suffer from the “red pen” syndrome.
- They don’t allow their staff to learn from their mistakes
- They get irritated if staff make decisions without consulting them
- They spend an inordinate amount of time overseeing single projects
- They pride themselves on being "on top of" their staff's projects.
- They are overworked, and their staff is not.
- They come into the office earlier than any staff member and leave later. If they are away from the office, they call in at least twice a day, including when they are sick or on vacation.
- They seldom praise staff members.
- Their staff appear frustrated, depressed, and/or unmotivated.
- Their staff do not take initiative – they have to check with the manager before doing anything
- They have been referred to as controlling, dictatorial, judgmental, critical, bureaucratic, suspicious, or snooping by staff, managers, or family members.
Causes of Micromanaging Behaviors

Poor Management Skills
Someone who tends to micromanage may be new to management or be an experienced manager with poor management skills. Some signs that poor management is the cause of micromanaging behaviors include:

- The manager still views him or herself as “a doer” versus “an overseer”
- The manager may be an expert in a certain field, or have a personal passion for a particular job or file, which makes it difficult for them to step back from the details.
- The manager will not, or does not know how, to delegate. They seem to struggle to get the work done that their staff “couldn’t or wouldn’t finish.”
- The manager will not, or doesn’t know how to, coach. They don’t take the time to help their staff learn.
- The manager can not manage projects effectively. They require frequent communication with their employees, including detailed status reports and updates.
- The manager has difficulty managing his/her time. They spend their time immersed in staff’s projects instead of performing their management functions.
- The manager has difficulty managing pressure from above or from outside the organization.

Poor Leadership Skills
Sometimes a manager can be good at managing projects and people but still be a poor leader. Being a good leader requires trusting one’s own abilities and the abilities/motivations of their staff. Managers’ personal life experiences may make this trust difficult and, therefore, encourage them to “take on too much.” For example:

- If a manager has had been held accountable for the failings of his/her staff in the past, they may find it difficult to trust the skills/knowledge of current staff.
- If a manager has been let down by staff in the past, they may be cautious of trusting the word and/or motivation of current staff.
- If a manager has developed personal control issues to satisfy internal needs, they may express themselves by the need to appear the most knowledgeable; by difficulty in sharing information or credit; or by the need to gain a sense of power from feeling “needed” by others.

Are You a Micromanager?
Read the list of tell-tale signs above and check any that apply to you. If you checked even one of these signs, you may be in danger of being—or becoming—a micromanager. Fear not. You can change.

Steps To Change the Micromanager Inside

1. Admit It
The first step to loosing the label is admitting you may have micromanagement tendencies.

2. Solicit Feedback from Your Managers and Staff
Once you recognize that you may be a micromanager, you will want to figure out if your actions are harmful to you and your staff or merely necessary for greater good of the organization.

3. Identify the Root Cause of Your Micromanagement Tendencies
If you find that you display tendencies that are harming your relations with your staff and potentially making you an inefficient member of the organization, you may want to explore the causes of your micromanagement.
4. Seek Advice, Guidance, and Training
Once you are more aware of the root cause of your “micromanagement” style, you will be able to seek the advice, guidance and training necessary to change.

Conclusion
Micromanager cannot delegate responsibility and often over-manage their staffs. Managers in general, and micromanagers in particular, should have the following training:

- Effective delegation
- Coaching and feedback
- Project management: The conventional wisdom is you avoid micromanaging by having project plans that require summaries and monitoring of longer-term milestones that can be tracked within a simple spreadsheet or list. This keeps the managers eyes off of all the small details and on the bigger picture.

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About the Author
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