

Help! I'm Micromanaged

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Micromanagement is a cluster of behaviours used by managers who closely observe and/or control the work of their employees. Instead of giving general instructions for small tasks and supervising larger concerns, the micromanager oversees and assesses every step.

Recently one of my audience members wrote a note asking how to be resilient when her supervisor micromanages her. She feels unappreciated and increasingly dislikes her manager and her work. She's not alone in longing for Free Friday to arrive.

In a 2005 study Don Lowman of Towers Perrin said, 'What we're hearing is that people want to contribute. But they say their leaders and supervisors unintentionally put obstacles in their paths.'" A 1999 study concluded that personal achievement and work relationships were more important for job satisfaction than salary and benefit factors. Then in 2006 Thomas Ng and other researchers reported that employees' sense of control over their work is crucial for motivation. Regardless of the statistics, being micromanaged is a disempowering experience. As one person said, "It sucks!"

Let's look at this dynamic from both ends--the micromanaged and the micromanager.

Micromanaged:

If, after receiving basic training, you do your job adequately and your manager is still acting like "big brother," you may conclude "I am micromanaged." No one likes others peering over their shoulder and snooping into their desk drawers. It becomes problematic when you develop stress symptoms and feel lethargic, fearful, frustrated and depressed. The result is minimized productivity, suppressed or explosive feelings, self-doubt and ultimately sick leave or dismissal.

What to do:

Consider the following options:

- Get a confidential second opinion from a peer, company Ombuds, Occupational Health or HR department.

- Do a reality check with yourself. Are you inviting over-supervision? Do you take initiative or do you look for direction for even small tasks?
- Volunteer to do a task that showcases your skills and strengths.
- Make an assertive statement such as, “I’m confident that I can do this job independently. I will let you know when it is complete.”
- Keep a record of when you are interrupted with unnecessary direction. Log the date, time, topic, length of conversation and what was said.
- Request a meeting with your manager or supervisor and express your concerns and why your work satisfaction has suffered. Explain how you feel and state what would be helpful. Keep to the facts. Speak with an attitude of, “I have a problem and I want your help.”
- Avoid sentences that begin with “you.” Begin your comments with “I.” “I feel incompetent when I don’t have some freedom doing my job.” “I like tackling jobs and running with them.”
- Ask clarifying questions, “What do I need to do so you will trust my work?” “Will you clarify my job responsibilities?”
- If you don’t make progress with your manager, go to the supervisor or senior management to see if anything can be done.
- If, after significant effort, change doesn’t happen, you still feel disrespected and your morale is still sinking request a transfer to another department and/or begin a job search. You deserve better.

Micromanaging:

If you are a manager and tend to worry about details, feel pressure from senior management and/or feel insecure in your position, you may be micromanaging those who report to you. Hopefully you don’t choose this style of behaviour to eliminate unwanted employees from your roster. Also, hopefully the above facts have convinced you that over-controlling has a negative effect on employee satisfaction, health, attitude, cooperation, mutual respect and productivity.

What to do:

Consider the following options:

- Ask yourself if you are acting out some childhood feelings of powerlessness.
- Try to be honest with yourself. Employees seldom feel safe enough to confront their supervisor with complaints until they are ready to quit.
- Discuss your concerns with managers who have effective working relationships with their staff. Observe and learn. Be willing to change.
- Develop this belief: “My job is to inspire, support and lead.”
- Ask for assistance from your manager, company Ombuds, Occupational Health or HR department.
- Listen more than you talk and direct your employees. Ask for opinions, directions and solutions.
- Read *How Full is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life* by Tom Rath & D. Clifton and *The Leader's Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success* by Jim Clemmer.
- Arrange for Jim Clemmer (<http://www.clemmer.net>) or Merge Gupta-Sunderji (<http://www.mergespeaks.com/index.html>), who helps managers become leaders, to make a presentation at your company.
- Have me present **7 Secrets of Recognition: Words that Build Workplace Resiliency** for your management team.
- Resolve to have those who report to you feel competent, responsible for their results, heard, seen and appreciated.

Other Resources:

- Cava, Roberta, *Dealing with Difficult People, Revised 2006*
- Goldfarb Consultants, Study on Workplace Satisfaction in Private, Public Sectors, October, 1999, Toronto
- Ng, Thomas W. H., (Locus of Control at Work) School of Business and Economics, The University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong, 2006
- Markham, Ursula, *How to Deal with Difficult People*, 1993
- Towers Perrin and HR Services, 2005, <http://www.towersperrin.com/hrservices>

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