

You May Not Intend to Micromanage, But...

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You like making progress! You know what needs to be done, and you know how to do it. You remember hearing it when you were younger: "If you want something done right, do it yourself!"

Sure, your job includes building the skills of your team members. You just figure they'll learn faster if you drop by and help them get the job done. Hey, they've got a lot to do already, right? Besides, they probably respect you because you're willing to do the very same thing you've asked them to do.

Ah, self-deception! We are so capable of justifying our behaviors, aren't we? What's the real reason you check behind the folks you've asked to do a job?

Do you not trust them? Do you have doubts about whether their standards are as high as yours? Maybe on this project, there's something a little unusual and you're not sure they'll meet the deadline.

Who do you think decides if you micromanage your folks? Are you the appropriate person to evaluate that? I doubt it. You may know what you intend. But you don't have any idea what the members of your team are thinking--and maybe saying behind your back. So, go ask them to tell you.

Pull two or three team members aside and tell them you'd like some straight and honest feedback. Then ask them what you should stop doing and what you should start doing. Listen carefully, make notes, and don't interrupt. If you see them glancing back and forth at each other, they likely have something to tell you, but they don't feel comfortable.

Assure them you'd like the truth. Who knows what they might want to say to you? Insist that you'd like to know what they know (and be prepared--they might have just about anything in mind!).

If the topic of overmanaging doesn't come up, bring it up. Ask them if you meddle, overcontrol, or do too much of the work yourself. Ask how you might improve in delegating tasks and responsibilities.

If you learn that you've been guilty of micromanaging, don't be too hard on yourself. It's probably because you want to do a good job. Even experienced managers can sometimes be overzealous.

Allow your team members to help you identify the cause and to explore possible ways that you can step back and let them execute their responsibilities. Maybe they'll reveal some ways in which you can help them develop their skills, so both they and you will have more confidence in their abilities.

Envision yourself as a successful delegator of responsibility. If that's hard for you to imagine, seek the help of your boss, some other mentor, or a coach.

Go to the "Article Archives" page of my website. Scan down to find the article entitled, "Winning Over a Boss Who Delivers 'Drive-By' Delegation." This article was written from the viewpoint of individuals whose boss is an incomplete delegator.

The article identifies five pieces of information that, together, identify a complete set of expectations. Sit down with a team member who is willing to help you consider your past behaviors in light of these five elements of a thorough delegation.

You might also find some interesting insight in Daniel Pink's 2009 book, *Drive*. He suggests that many managers have too strongly adopted the carrot and stick mentality of motivating people. He cites research that shows that many human beings are driven to do work independent of the extrinsic rewards and punishments "the system" might deliver to them.

Pink identifies three intrinsic motivators that exist in all of us in different proportions. Consider to what extent each of these drivers tends to stimulate your commitment and diligence.

"Autonomy" is the innate desire we humans have to direct our own lives. Your past micromanaging behaviors probably conflict directly with this desire in some of the members of your team.

"Mastery" is the urge to get better and better at something that matters. If you would identify your desired outcomes and resources, your team members might be turned on to enhance their skills.

"Purpose" is the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves. From aging baby boomers to Gen Y, individuals want to serve. Help them find ways to improve, if not the world, at least your organization's operations.

Once you become skilled at recognizing these inherent motivators, you might start thinking about how they apply to each of the individual members of your team.

You may not intend to micromanage, but if you have actually been doing so, you've limited the contribution and satisfaction of the individuals under your authority. Start now to view them as allies, collaborating with you to improve your skills in developing your direct reports, delegating, and building an effective team.