Micromanaging Not Advised

As I met with the 6 staff members about their perspective on why the morale in the division was so low, one of the threads of concerns was that they didn't feel trusted by their supervisor, but instead felt micromanaged.

To their supervisor's credit we were able to talk through her staff's complaints and as a responsible leader, she made the necessary changes.

I recently spoke with one of the staff members and asked how it was going. He replied, "really good." When I asked why, he said the change came when she got out of the way and started trusting us to do what we were good at.

I remember another time when I was consulting a man who owned his own engineering firm. We were talking about personality differences in his company when he said something enlightening.

He stated that his engineering team kept quitting his company to work elsewhere. He went on to say that it dawned on him that the reason he wasn't retaining his workers was because his engineers were very bright and creative people and he stifled them because his philosophy as the owner was, "it's my way or the highway."

We discussed that as their boss it was appropriate for him to set the goals and terms for the current and future projects but then needed to get out of the way and encourage his bright team to reach the goals in the way they felt was best. He did that and the team stopped quitting!

I'm sure there are many other situations when good workers feel squeezed, followed and checked up on by a micromanaging leader.

A survey conducted by Trinity Solutions and published in author Harry Chambers' book *My Way or the Highway* showed that 79 percent of respondents had experienced micromanagement. Approximately 69 percent said they considered changing jobs because of micromanagement and another 36 percent actually

changed jobs. Seventy-one percent said being micromanaged interfered with their job performance while 85 percent said their morale was negatively impacted. *(Cited from the article-Damaging Effects of Micromanagement-March 31, 2015 Linda Barnes).*

You can see by this particular survey and book it is a problem in American companies of great proportions!

What drives such controlling, non-trusting behavior? Frequently staff and co-workers are confused as to why there is even a need to be so hovering or refuse to loosen the manager's grip on all the details. Below are a few ideas as to why this happens:

Causes of Micromanaging:

▶ **Temperament:** The need to control or pay hyper vigilant attention to details are negative traits in some of the Type A expressions of management. Although many times structured and organized, the Type A's can be fear based thus must be in control at all times.

▶ **Insecurity:** This writer's perspective is that this ultimately is what drives the need to be in control at all times.

▶ **Being burned before:** Perhaps the manager worked with a staff before that were lazy and irresponsible and was blamed for it.

▶ **Distrusting bent:** Maybe they were taught earlier in their career or life to "never trust anyone."

▶ **New position:** They don't want to miss anything or they are cleaning house due to the emotional debris left by the last manager.

▶ **Controlling tendencies:** If they came from an environment where they had no control, they can overcompensate.

▶ **Fear of loss:** Perhaps they know their position is on the line if they don't keep a tight grip on the staff.

▶ **Feeling like they will be judged as inadequate:** So they hold and hoard as much information and keep it as close to their chest as possible.

The Effects of a Micromanaging Boss

As stated above, the workers driven by a micromanager don't feel trusted or valued in terms of their skill set, training or passion. No doubt there is an increase in the stress levels of the employee that can impact their blood pressure, anxiety levels and personal relationships at work, not to mention their personal life.

Of course there can be a sense of intimidation in approaching their boss if they need clarity of instructions or direction. As a result their frustration increases and micromanaging bosses become more furious because staff won't ask for clearer instructions when necessary.

"Maybe we are micromanaging a bit too much."

In addition, there is rarely a sense of security with their job, since at times they can never quite get it exact since micromanagers have a tendency to have high exact expectations without giving all the necessary details.

How to Effectively Work with a Micromanager

"The best way to deal with micromanagers is to try to give them all the information they need. They feel insecure if they don't know what's going on or are unprepared. They thrive on details, so provide them with detailed reports. Also, try to clarify with them exactly what they're looking for. Repeat it to them and ask if that's correct. This is the only way you will know what's expected, because the micromanager expects you to automatically know what they want, they're not going to volunteer the information. You have to ask them specifically what is needed, in what format and by when (Linda Barnes Marc 31,2015)."

Managing from a White Horse

A great illustration of how to not micromanage is seen in the movie The Patriot. The British General Charles Cornwallis who led the "red coats" in the Revolutionary War fought against the patriots in Virginia in order to squash the revolution of the growing forces demanding freedom from Britain.

I noticed in the battle scenes that General Cornwallis never got off his white horse when the trumpet blast sounded the charge. He simply nodded to his commanding officers who led the charge. Not once do you see the General get off his white horse, grab a rifle and bayonet and run toward the enemy.

He had complete trust in his officers and as a result comfortably managed from a white horse.

There seems to be some common denominators that surface when a manager manages well.

"It would be better if you stood another three tenths of an inch to the left."

Tips on Managing Well

1. **Know your staff:** In the cases listed above, the managers didn't truly understand how capable their staff was. In their insecurity they assumed the work couldn't be effectively done without their tight control.

2. **Delegate the responsibilities to the right, capable person in your staff:** I'm sure, as alluded to earlier, that one reason micromanagers won't give up full control is because there could have been a time when they tried to delegate responsibilities but gave the reigns to the wrong person. This results in doubling the work efforts because the boss has to end up doing the tasks himself/herself anyway.

3. **Get updates from your staff**: Giving a project or task to an individual without remaining available to help with questions or support is called macromanaging. This exact opposite of micromanaging creates a different kind of frustration and morale problem. It can leave staff with a sense that they bear all of the responsibility with little information, clarity and support.

4. **Give credit to your staff:** Believe it or not one of the common complaints staff voice is when they complete a project, and are the ones actually doing the work with little help from their supervisor, the supervisor takes credit for their job well done. Thus a lack of respect develops for their boss. Yet I find that when a staff member is acknowledged for a job well done they have a tendency to work harder, complain less and increase loyalty to the manager they work for.

Conclusion

In both cases stated above in the introduction, once the managers became aware of their micromanaging tendencies, they changed their organizational culture by beginning to trust their staff's competence, taking their hands off of every detail, continued to seek input from their staff and changed from the "my way or the highway" model to an "our way is the right way" model, and the team from top to bottom improved!

Recommended Sources:

It's My Way or the Highway by Harry E. Chambers/Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Time Management or Self-Management in the Workplace: Track19, teamwork-works.com

Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.

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