

## Micromanaging Versus Coaching

### *One is a Tactic, Not a Style*

By Nathan Jamail

One of the greatest misunderstandings in leadership and coaching is the term “micromanaging.”

Most leaders never want to be thought of as a micromanager. In fact, it could be considered an insult or weakness of any manager. When micromanaging is used as a coaching or leadership style it will most likely:

- Deliver bad results;
- Stifle creativity;
- Limit employees’ self-worth; and without a doubt,
- Decrease productivity.

On the other hand when a coach or leader must deal with a bad performer it is imperative to help the employee either become a better performer or help him or her find a job that is a better fit. Leaders should strive to be coaches who, when necessary, uses *micromanaging* activities to improve specific areas, but who use *coaching* skills while getting the team ready to win (i.e. succeed).

#### Why Micromanaging and Coaching are Often Confused

Micromanaging and coaching are often confused because from the surface, the activities and the leader’s involvement appear very similar. The key difference lies in the leader’s *intent* and desired goals of their actions. Both require the involvement of the leader; setting clear expectations, well-defined management, accountability, and a huge time commitment from the leader as well as from the employees.

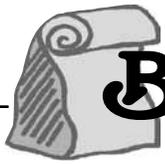
The difference lies in the *purpose* of these activities. For example: a leader sets expectations to ensure there is complete understanding of what they expect from each employee in order to maximize productivity and limit confusion. Here are some examples:

- A micromanager does this with the intent of merely setting sometimes arbitrary boundaries and rules.
- A coach shows his commitment to the team by holding *everyone* accountable.
- A micromanager uses accountability to ensure the employee is earning their paycheck (often focusing on single employees versus the team).
- A coach manages tasks to ensure that employees are on the right track and that they are in the best position to succeed.
- A micromanager uses tasks to justify effort or discipline.
- A coach, however, understands it is not the amount of time an employee contributes as much as it is the *focus* and *effectiveness* of the time they contribute.
- The intent of coaching is to develop and prepare the employees to succeed using the leader’s knowledge and experience to guide the employees, *not* to justify actions.

❖ **Action item:** Don’t be afraid of being a coach because you don’t want to micromanage. Get involved and share the intent of your actions with your team so they understand your goals for not only yourself, but for them, *which ultimately is the goal for success.*

#### Every Great Coach Must Use Micromanaging Tactics

As stated, the main issue with leaders and managers is that they misunderstand what “micromanaging” is and is not. Micromanaging is a tactic of coaching (or should be); it is *not* a leadership style. Micromanaging should be used as a consequence of those employees that are not meeting expectations or are bad performers. A bad performer does not necessarily mean a



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bad employee (and definitely does not mean a bad person).

There are many employees that are not performing well because they are in the wrong job, not because they are bad people, or they are not doing what they are passionate about in general, thus they have no desire to be successful. Micromanaging the details of an employee like this allow the leader and the employee to make the best decision about what action should be taken next.

## When to Micromanage and For How Long

Let's say there is an employee who appears to be unhappy and their tasks and results are not meeting expectations. The leader should get involved early on to determine if the shortcoming is a lack of desire, ability, or both. To help determine the issue, the leader should implement more disciplined expectations and activities and explain to the employee why this action is being taken as well as the desired outcome. The desired outcome should be to either help the employee reach the expected activities, attitude and results or help them find a role that is a better fit. These micromanaging activities should be *short-term* activities.

The leader needs to make assessments quickly and take on the continued shortcomings, which results in moving the employee out of the position. In turn, the leaders should also take quick action to recognize great efforts and achievements as warranted. A leader should not have to implement a micromanaging activity for an employee for more than 90 days and can be stopped in as little as 30 days depending on the level of involvement, improvement and accountability, as well as overall attitude and commitment of the employee.

❖ **Action item:** Micromanaging is a tactic, not a style. When you have a poor performing employee, implement a performance plan of daily and weekly activities and micromanage those activities to help the employee either “move up” in terms of performance or “out” of the position that does not fit this individual. You owe it to the employee as the workplace leader and coach.

## Why Most Leaders Don't Like to Coach

The majority of leaders prefer to avoid

confrontation. This is unfortunate because it's only in *constructive* confrontations and discussions that progress can be made. This is, or should be, the intent of the confrontation. If the intent is to just belittle, or point out all the obvious issues with an employee, then yes that is a destructive and useless conversation and it's understandable why one would want to avoid it. However, in order to be an effective coach, a leader must approach confrontation with the intent of *helping* the employee.

It is absolutely impossible to coach without confrontation and discussion regarding areas of opportunity. When an employee is confronted by a leader who expresses the desire to help them achieve success, points out areas of opportunity for improvement, and suggests a game plan to help the individual achieve improvement, the confrontation just took the route of establishing a plan for success. It is a win-win for both parties. Of course at this point it is up to the employee to demonstrate their desire for success and jump on board, but it is also the leader's job to micromanage through the issues until a satisfactory ending is in sight. Is this hard to do? It is, but only if the intent is wrong. Is it necessary? Absolutely.

## Summary

Not every hire is the right hire and not every job is the right job, but accepting either one just because it is easier is wrong. Micromanage through the issues by helping your employees either become great at what they do, or helping them to find something else they *will* be great at. Outside of issues with poor-performing employees, your job as a leader is to coach your *entire team to success*.

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## A Workplace Exercise ... and Reflection

Consider some of the jobs you've had in the past, and then examine your present position. Did you have a favorite boss? Someone you disliked? If you're fortunate, maybe you consider your *current* manager or supervisor to be an inspirational leader. If not, it's possible you're frustrated enough with your current boss that you're looking for a different job! Or perhaps the truth is somewhere in between. Regardless, try the following exercise:

**For employees:** Write down five traits you like about your current manager or supervisor.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Next, anonymously if you wish, turn in these notes to your manager.

**For managers:** Write down five positive characteristics you *believe* you possess in the workplace.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, have employees and managers sit down together and compare notes. If they're similar, chances are you have a positive workplace in which managers understand the characteristics they need to have to succeed – and their employees agree that their boss, indeed possesses these traits.

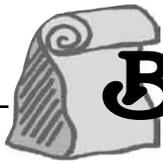
*This work team should turn some of these traits into goals to ensure further success.*

If, however, these notes greatly differ, you have some serious discussing to do. For whatever reason, the manager thinks he/she is doing a much better job than his/her employees do. That's probably just for starters. *This work team needs to improve communication between employees and management, and increase understanding about workplace expectations – for everyone's success.*

Consider the specific examples below of a micromanager and a coach. It won't be hard to spot which is which. (While the names and locations have been changed to ensure privacy, the examples themselves represent actual work experiences.)

❖ Arnie, an editor at a small daily newspaper in Bug Tussel, WI, seemed to enjoy doing everything. He served as the wire editor, managing editor, and nearly everything else in between. It was a classic example of someone who knew how to do everything so he figured he might as well do it. You didn't have to work hard working for Arnie, but by his unwillingness to delegate responsibilities, he not only was overworked, but you also didn't learn anything working there either. If he called you into his office, it was to be told you were being let go, with little reason why.

❖ Mitch, an editor at a weekly newspaper in Sibley, WI, focused on teamwork. Mitch was also a believer in annual performance reviews, something Arnie never did. When you've been let go after being called into an office, such meetings can be very nerve-racking, but Mitch's intent was to let you know what you were doing well, and the areas where you could stand to improve – constructive criticism, not criticism for criticism sake. In addition, he believed in having his reporters "swap beats" so they did not get pigeonholed into only understanding one area – but in having them learn as much as possible about the various aspects of government while working at the paper. ■



## Ten Characteristics Anyone – Employee or Manager – Needs in Order to Excel at Work

**1. People who excel work with enthusiasm.** Regardless of whether the job is big or small, everyone needs to give it their best. Great actors, for example, give their best effort regardless of the size of the audience.

**2. People who excel sharpen their skills.** Such employees and managers never stop developing, growing, learning and improving. It takes more than desire to excel; it takes skill! Remember: You're never wasting time when you're sharpening your "ax."

**3. People who excel keep their word.** They are reliable. They can be counted on to do what they say they'll do. They excel because people of integrity are rare in our society. Everyone talks about how loyal or faithful he is, but try to find someone who really is!

**4. People who excel maintain a positive attitude.** Even under pressure, change, or unrealistic demands, they don't allow themselves to become negative. Remember: It's not so much the problem that causes stress; it's how the person reacts to it.

**5. People who excel do more than is expected.** Anyone can do the bare minimum. Going the "extra mile" is a secret that every successful person has discovered.

**6. People who excel are patient.** In today's fast-paced, "gotta have it now" society, people make the mistake of thinking that results should be instantaneous. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's understandable to feel frustrated with the seemingly slow progress you're making on the job. But people who excel understand that results take time.

**7. People who excel work hard even when other people aren't looking.** Employees who lack integrity will work hard at a task when they know their boss is looking, but then slack off when their manager or supervisor is away. People who excel at work are diligent about their tasks and responsibilities even when no one is nearby to watch.

**8. People who excel work well with others.** They recognize the importance of teamwork in order to complete a given task. They don't have petty attitudes or differences that get in the way of workplace success.

**9. People who excel are problem solvers.** They aren't afraid to resolve difficult tasks in order to get the job done correctly, and on time.

**10. People who excel listen and follow directions.** They do a job correctly and the way their superiors want to see the task done, not the way they might prefer to do it.

*Food for thought: The Broadway lyricist Oscar Hammerstein once told the story of seeing the top of the Statue of Liberty from a helicopter. He was impressed because of the incredible detail the artist had sculpted on an area that no one was expected to see. In fact, the Statue of Liberty was completed with no idea that man would someday be able to fly over the statue! ■*

*Source: Purpose-Driven Life ([www.purposedrivenlife.com](http://www.purposedrivenlife.com)).*