

## A Leader's Job is to Lead (not Do) Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR

Managers routinely fail to give employees one of the most important things they want (and, no, it's not a pay raise). In the book, *The Enthusiastic Employee*, David Sirota and his co-authors describe the results of a multi-year survey completed by more than 2 million employees. Based on these survey results, one of the three most important things that ALL people want to have at work is a sense of:

- Achievement – To take pride in one's accomplishments by doing things that matter and doing them well; to receive recognition for one's accomplishments; to take pride in the organization's accomplishments (equity and camaraderie are the two other things that the survey results say employees want to have at work).

On the other hand, micromanaging is one of the most common complaints that employees make about their supervisors.

When you micromanage, everyone loses. Your employees are deprived of having one of the most important things they want – a sense of achievement. They are also deprived of the opportunity to learn and to grow. Internal and/or external customers lose because it takes longer for things to get done because most everything must go through you. You are deprived of the opportunity to learn, to grow, and to have a more significant impact on those you work with AND on the organization. Your boss suffers from your micromanaging because you are not fully capable of doing all the things that he/she needs you to (how can you be when you're doing your job AND your employees' jobs?). The organization suffers because you and your team's productivity is not what it could be because you and others on your team are not learning, growing, and achieving at the levels you could be.

The most common reasons for managers to micromanage are:

- Many managers are promoted because they were good at doing the job that they are now managing.
- Many managers believe that they can do many things quicker and/or better than others can.
- Many managers don't want to add to the workload of what they consider to be their already overworked direct reports.

Given these reasons, it's easy to understand managers' reluctance to delegate. Understanding the behavior, however, does not make it right. A manager's job is to manage others (not do). A leader's job is to lead others (not do). How do you know if you are a micromanager? You might be a micromanager if you spend much of your time:

- handholding employees. Ask yourself: Why do I do this? Are they not capable? Is there training needed that would improve their skills and therefore free up the time I spend hand-holding?
- overseeing particular projects. Ask yourself: Which projects do I spend the most time checking in on? Am I micro-managing the employees working on these projects? Have I given them a chance to prove their capabilities? If not, why not?
- telling people exactly what to do and how to do it. Ask yourself: Is this kind of instruction really necessary? Is there a way to give less (or different) instruction and allow employees to find solutions to issues themselves?
- irritated when others make decisions without consulting you. Ask yourself: What is wrong with me? Am I on a power-trip? Or am I simply trying to make sure things are running smoothly? How can I work on letting go to allow others some autonomy?

If your job is to lead (and not do), then what can you do to change your micromanaging ways? Here are some tips to help you start leading more (and doing less):

1. Assess your current level of delegation by:

List all the work for which you are currently responsible. Then, classify it using this categories: M – manager work that you must do yourself; S – work you can share with others; and D – work others can do. Then, examine the work you categorized as M. Are all the M items really work that you must do yourself? Are you holding on to things? Could you further develop your team by passing along some of the work?

2. Ask for feedback from others about your delegation skills. If others tell you that you do not delegate enough, ask what they believe you should delegate. Also, remember that sometimes it is not the amount you do/do not delegate but **WHAT** you delegate that matters. Also, ask employees for their ideas about things they'd like to do (e.g., new knowledge or skills they'd like to learn). This information can give you new ideas about what to delegate.

3. Assess the strengths and develop needs of your direct reports. Use this information in your decisions to delegate? Who has a strength related to something you are currently doing? Could you delegate that project/item to this person? What development needs do each of your direct reports have? What are you currently doing that you could delegate that would help him/her improve or strengthen in that development area?

4. Consider delegating the following types of work:
- Routine tasks and/or decisions (e.g., anything that is done daily, weekly, monthly and/or quarterly)
  - Individual contributor work
  - Less complex tasks that may not be the best use of your time
  - Work that requires knowledge or skills that you want people in your group to develop. Delegating this work will increase the number of people who know about a certain area or have critical skills related to your operation.
  - Any of the phases needed to solve problems, including identification, analysis, issues and alternatives, stakeholder opinions and feelings,

and solution options. These phases could be assigned to individuals, or one person could be responsible for the whole effort.

- f) Elements of a complex, multistage project.

5. Make clear assignments and expectations whenever you delegate. Tell the person what you want done and by when and let them know what you expect in terms of outcomes and deliverables. Then, let them know how you will monitor progress (e.g., weekly check-in; email updates, etc.). Then, let the person do the job and follow-up with them consistent with the process you both discussed at the beginning of the project.

Remember, when you lead (and not do), everyone wins. Your employees get to experience one of the most powerful motivational needs they have - a sense of achievement. They also get to learn and to grow. Your internal/external customers benefit because your team is able to respond faster to their requests and they have better quality interactions with your fully capable staff. You benefit by learning and growing your leadership skills, thus, better preparing you for new/more challenging opportunities in the organization in the future. Your boss benefits because you are fully available to meet their needs related to what they've been asked to do. Finally, the organization benefits because you and your team are doing what you're supposed to be doing at the best level possible.

#### **About the Author**

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