

HOW TO...

Manage a micro-manager

Are you being micro-managed at work? Have you ever been? Unfortunately, a vast majority of people have had to endure this type of manager.

Bosses can be tough to deal with in general and the micro-managing boss is no exception. They can be especially difficult to handle if you are a creative and innovative person, keen to make your own mark in the organisation.

Some people may describe micro-managing as meddling. Dictionary definitions of micro-management vary, yet the core meaning is about management with excessive control. Basically, these managers oversee their employees too much. They will constantly be looking over everyone's shoulders and making comments about all their activities and tasks.

These meticulous and strict bosses are not to be confused with the micro-manager. The meticulous boss will be on top of everything and always know what everyone is working on at any given time. This type of boss can be effective and productive. The strict boss will work you hard but lets you get on with it. The micro-manager, however, will actually get in the way of you doing a good job, which in turn can create resentment, damage trust and lead to the employees feeling frustrated.

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR BOSS IS MICRO-MANAGING

Here are some indicators that your manager may be on the verge of nano-managing:

- They struggle to delegate any tasks and when they do, they often take it back before the project is complete

- When given an assignment you are told exactly and very precisely how it should be done

- You are expected to report on the status of your work more often than advisable to be perceived as constructive

- Your boss is so involved in every single minute detail that it prevents projects from moving forward

- Individual thinking and decision making is discouraged

What are the reasons for micro-managing?

The urge to micro-manage can come from three main sources:

- This person held a front line role where a close degree of control was important. As a manager, they struggle to relinquish control as they assume this is what got them promoted in the first place

- It is simply and purely a personality trait

Lack of understanding about the product or service

How to manage a micro-manager aka P.A.I.N.S.

Much has been said and written about changing your boss, but unless your boss actually wants to alter their behaviour, you are fighting a losing battle. Besides, if your manager is a typical micro-manager, being told what to do by a subordinate is unlikely to go down well. P.A.I.N.S takes you through handling a micro-managing boss:

1. Personal

Take a look in the mirror and analyse your own performance. This is the most important starting point. Does your boss have the same behaviour with everyone else? Are you producing top-quality work? Are you lazy? Harsh as it may seem, there could be a valid reason for your manager to keep you on a short leash. You need to address your own personal inadequacies before you can go around blaming your manager. Prove yourself at work so your accomplishments speak for themselves, which should inspire your boss to ease up.

2. Awareness

Try to perceive the behaviours as good intentions taken to the extreme. Their interpretation of positive characteristics such as diligence, reliability and commitment is rather radical. However, the important factor remains that they possess these. Remind yourself that the constant checking is no reflection of your work and is not personal; it is about your manager and their management style. Avoid the temptation to become defensive or resentful. Focus on how to deal with the situation rather than dwell on how you wish things were different.

3. Interaction

Communication and interaction are crucial in any working relationship and with a micro-manager even more so. To ensure you are providing what your manager wants, ask how they prefer to be updated (email, memos, meetings). By offering regular updates the micro-manager gets a sense of involvement and being in control which in turn may facilitate delegation of future assignments. You may not want to have to prepare that weekly report or copy your boss in on every mail, but it is a simple and effective way of keeping them off your back.

4. Notice

With time (and patience) you will start to identify what your boss wants and how they operate. Pre-empt possible questions by having relevant information handy. On the same token, ask your manager questions too. Micro-managers tend to love being asked for advice so soliciting suggestions is a sure-fire way of getting into their good books. You may also want to keep a note of your meetings and interactions so you don't forget any important details and hence emphasise that you are on top of everything.

5. Standpoint

Try to see things from your boss' perspective. Take a look around. It may be that those surrounding you are not as competent, so your manager has had to adopt a tighter rein. If you are fortunate enough to be surrounded by equally talented people, this behaviour may stem from a previous experience. Once bitten twice shy.

Working for a micro-managing boss can be exhausting. However, you are not powerless. Try out a few of these tips and ideas and hopefully you will reduce your levels of stress and frustration, as well as free up some time to take on more interesting projects.