

How to Stop a Micromanaging Boss

By DIANNA BOOHER APRIL 1, 2021



Maybe you haven't worked for micromanaging bosses, but no doubt you've heard about them. Employees buzz about these bosses over lunch, complain about them around the watercooler, and chew them up around the family dinner table.

At the least, for the individual reporting to such managers, frustration leads to deep-seated resentment that often triggers a job change or career move.

You may recognize some of these behaviors from bad bosses (or even in yourself). If so, you may find the antidotes that follow each description helpful to keep projects on track — and to stay sane.

“Gotcha” Micromanagers

These micromanagers never seem to focus on the positive. Instead, their first comment calls attention to your inconsequential mistake. For example, they ask for trivial back-up data that you failed to bring to the presentation.

Or they imply that maybe you have misunderstood the politics surrounding a situation and therefore have written the related email with a more aggressive tone than appropriate.

These micromanagers may:

- Distrust you for any number of reasons
- Fear you and fear losing control if they don't keep close watch on you
- Attempt to boost their self-esteem by lowering yours with tight controls, with threats that instill fear of firing, and with constant put-downs and corrections.

So if you work for a micromanaging boss, your first two challenges are to develop trust and help your boss feel secure. Tall order!

Antidotes to the “Gotcha” Micromanager

1. Practice direct communication. State directly what you need or want. No hints.
2. Ask questions. Listen carefully to the answers before you draw conclusions.
3. Put things in writing. Ask for clarifications and approvals in writing.
4. Aim to have other people besides your boss in the conversation when discussing important matters.
5. Look for ways to build trust in the relationship. (Truth-telling. Doing what you say you will when you say you will. Being transparent in your actions.)

“Process” Micromanagers

Effective leaders assign a project, state the goal, provide the resources, communicate any warnings or safeguards, and state any required check-back points along the way. Then they let you go about your task until it's completed.

Micromanagers, however, haven't learned how to delegate. Instead, they assign a project, blindfold team members, and then lead them through the process. Result: A huge waste of time for the micromanagers themselves and frustration for team members.

Antidotes to the “Process” Micromanager

1. Clarify the overall goal, deliverables, and deadline with your micromanager.
2. Ask what resources are available to you as you complete the project.
3. Clarify at what points your micromanager wants you to check back.
4. Ask about any special precautions, pitfalls, or danger points that you should be aware of in handling the task (decision points along the way that the micromanager would like to know about before you make them).
5. Ask if the micromanager has a specific process in mind that you must follow.

“Know-It-All” Micromanagers

Although great leaders learn to hire people smarter than they are in key disciplines, micromanagers feel less confident. Often, they feel out of control around brilliant staff members and colleagues.

So they have to keep reminding people that they are the smartest person in the room. They communicate that know-it-all attitude in various ways: by doing all the talking, by refusing to listen to new ideas, by lots of I-told-you-so lines, and by telling a plethora of war stories.

Antidotes to the “Know-It-All” Micromanager

1. Punch up your patience. You'll need it.
2. Continue to express respect for your micromanager's expertise.

Ultimately, your own strategic decisions about “managing” your micromanager determine your success — and satisfaction — in the job.



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