SURVIVING

a Power-Hungry Boss

How to understand and diffuse the disruptive nature of a micromanager

By Harry E. Chambers

Is your boss a micromanager? Join the crowd. In a recent workplace survey of 133 managers and 128 non-managers conducted for my consultancy, 80 percent of the 261 respondents know firsthand the woes of being shadowed closely by a boss.

Micromanagers hurt productivity and morale—and often drive employees away. In fact, one out of three respondents have changed jobs to escape a micromanager. The good news? There is a lot you can do to survive and succeed with a "my way or else" boss. The first step is understanding this behavior and how it manages to disrupt people and performance.

Bad Behavior

Micromanagers often are labeled as control freaks. Yet, to really understand and deal with this type of boss, it's important to know the specific behaviors that define them.

They exercise raw power. These bosses love to flex their muscles, asserting their authority just because they can.

They steal your time. Micromanagers don't trust people to assess their own workload, so they routinely dictate priorities and distort deadlines. They are notorious for interrupting, misusing and mismanaging meetings, and perpetuating crises.

They control how work gets done.

Micromanagers want everything done their way.
They dismiss others' experience and ideas—no matter how good—then hover to make sure their staff is doing things "right."

They require constant approvals. No one can move forward without their OK.

They demand frequent updates. Needless reports are required, focusing on activity over outcome.

Taking Action

If you're committed to overcoming the difficulty of working under a micromanager, understand the realities.

You are not a victim. Victims have no options.

You have plenty. While the extreme choice is to quit, why not try to

improve the situation before giving up?

It is not about fixing him. You cannot force a micromanager to change on his own. You can, however, find your own way to defuse his disruptive behaviors.

Consider the following

Defusing the Bomb

strategies.

Find out her agenda. Figure out what is really important to your boss, and then work with her—not against her.

Feed her information. The micromanager is driven to know what is going on. Don't wait to be asked; find out what she needs to feel confident, then get it to her ahead of time.

Provide project updates. No one fears inertia more than the micromanager.

Show that you are in motion on

priority projects by
communicating in three
specific areas—awareness,
reassurance and timelines.

Stay clear on expectations.

Clarify your conversations and agreements in a trail of follow-up memos and e-mails.

Rework priorities. The micromanager loves to pile on the work. Come up with a simple method—such as a

numerical or color-coded system—for reordering the ever-shifting priorities.

Be preemptive on deadlines. Be the first to talk, offering a timeline for when you can do a task—not when you cannot do it.

Play by the rules. The micromanager enjoys catching people in the act. Avoid being an easy target, particularly on office policies regarding personal use of company time and technology.

Learn from others. Micromanagers often have favorites on staff, Watch those coworkers closely to learn the secrets of their success.

Pick your battles. The micromanager will go to war on every issue. Don't try to

match him. Pick the issues that are critical to you.

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