

## When the Boss Won't Back Off

If you've ever felt as if your supervisor was a "control freak," you have plenty of company. According to Harry E. Chambers, author of *My Way or the Highway: The Micromanagement Survival Guide* (2004, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.), 79 percent of respondents to a workplace survey indicated that their managers practiced MBHH: Management by Hovering and Hounding. In addition, more than 70 percent say that being micromanaged has interfered with their job performance and led to negative morale.

What can you do to survive a micromanager? First, understand that you can't "fix" the person, says Chambers, president of Trinity Solutions, Inc., a training and consulting company based in Atlanta, GA. Instead, defuse the manager's disruptive behaviors with several strategies:

**Take preemptive action.** "If they sense inactivity, any lack of forward motion, or stalled progress, micromanagers will take immediate steps to increase their influence, exercise some measure of control, and stimulate activity," Chambers observes. "Determine what information the micromanager needs to be comfortable and confident, then provide it ahead of time. Do not wait to be asked."



Each week, for example, you might provide a one-page "Monday Morning Update" or "Stoplight Summary." The latter lists your top priorities, color-coded by their status: Green means "everything is a go," yellow indicates a potential problem, and red means "something isn't moving forward."

As for deadlines, take the initiative to suggest a timeline for when you can complete a task. Then you won't have to disappoint a micromanager who imposes an unrealistic deadline.

**Communicate at every opportunity.** In addition to written reports, use e-mails, voice mails, and in-person visits to update

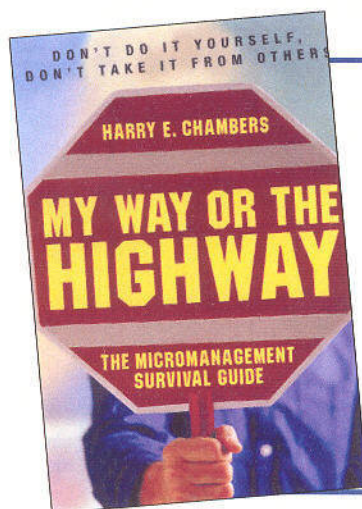
the manager on what tasks you have started and completed. To reduce the potential for misunderstandings, establish a paper trail of e-mails and memos that summarize the priorities and timelines the two of you have agreed to. Otherwise, cautions Chambers, "Your silence can be interpreted as a lack of success, unresponsiveness, or inactivity."

**Play by the rules.** "Micromanagers are intensely focused on time and always have their antennae up, trying to detect violations in policies," he continues. Avoid making yourself a target: Always arrive at work and meetings on time, skip the long lunches, and don't spend time on personal phone calls or Internet searches.

**Pick your battles.** "Decide when it is worth bucking the micromanager and when it is best to go with the flow," recommends Chambers. If you do take on the manager, avoid articulating a directly opposing position—that is sure to trigger his or her negativity. Instead, build and expand upon the manager's stated position with your own recommendations.

Adds Chambers, "Micromanagers tend to press or pursue every issue. Do not try to match them—or you may become them!"

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**My Way or the Highway:**  
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