



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Learn When it is Okay to Micromanage a Project

One of the common responsibilities of all managers is the management of people and the management of work. (If you don't do either, you are not really a manager.) All managers need to have timely, relevant and accurate information so that they can manage their people and work effectively. The trick, of course, is to know how much information you need, and at what level.

Some managers like to stay out of the details. In fact, they may never have an answer to questions about the status of projects in their department, perhaps because they are not interested in the work or have a hard time keeping specific details in their heads. They may be able to tell you whether the work is generally on schedule, but generally not what the projects are working on at any given time. Sometimes you can get away with this. However, in some cases, you can be seen as aloof and out of touch. The problem is that sometimes these managers need to get engaged in the details of a project to determine what is going on, and they are not able to do it. Sometimes, they prefer to stick with the "big picture" even when the details are a mess.

On the other hand, you could be on top of people all the time, asking them how things are going, helping them resolve minor problems, assigning some of their work to someone else if it looks like they are a little behind. You know these types of managers as well. They are the infamous "micromanagers." They actually spend so much time in the details that it takes them twice as long to get anything done. They also cause frustration on the part of team members because it seems you don't trust them to get anything done.

A good approach to work management is to be a "situational manager" instead. This implies providing some overall guidance and coaching to the team at a high level. Also, make sure that you can help remove any roadblocks. However, when a project gets behind, or the project gets to a point where a lot needs to happen in a short amount of time, you can quickly move down to the details.

Summary

Many managers are afraid of being labeled a "micromanager" because of all the negative connotations. These fears may not be totally unfounded; however, there are times when you do need to assign work and get feedback on a very frequent basis. This is usually the case if you have a major short-term crunch of work to complete. It is especially relevant if your project team is not providing the short-term feedback you need to understand exactly where the project is. It is fine just to tell your team that you need to be a micromanager for a short period to get through the crunch. As long as that is not your typical management style, your team will usually understand and put up with the additional scrutiny for the short duration.