

Micromanaging in the workplace: How to empower instead of control



In the landscape of modern leadership, micromanaging in the workplace is a common pitfall that many leaders unwittingly fall into. In this blog, I share a few thoughts from my own career and suggestions on how to stop micromanaging and start empowering to create better outcomes for the entire team and organization you're leading.

Getting to the root of micromanaging in the workplace

Leaders often find themselves at a career pinnacle, feeling compelled to showcase their competencies, sometimes stemming from a subconscious fear of inadequacy. This “worse-than” or “need-to-be-seen-as” mindset can inadvertently lead to micromanaging in the workplace, as leaders revert to tasks they excel at, aiming to demonstrate their value or avoid the risk of being perceived as a fraud.

At one point in my career, I found myself promoted into a role that spanned across all marketing functions for the first time. I didn't know much about marketing operations and tended

to lean toward the creative and demand generation side, where I felt more comfortable. I would spend countless hours 'finessing' campaigns, without interacting with the operations team. This ultimately hurt the team's success. It wasn't until I let go of what I knew and expanded my horizons to understand the data that the efforts of the demand generation team were truly successful.

Another way micromanaging in the workplace can arise is when leaders focus intensely on tasks and processes, scrutinizing every minor detail. This stems from when a person believes they are better than others and needs to show them exactly how to achieve the outcome they are looking for.

In some cases, I've worked for leaders who, for various reasons, believe they deserve to make all the decisions, and don't trust others to do what they would want them to do. They control every communication, every interaction, every outcome—from start to finish.

My first job out of college was for a small advertising agency. The owner had left the largest and most successful agency in town and brought the biggest account with him. I had to run everything I did through him. He, alone, interacted with the client. I thought he didn't like my ideas—or maybe I was too young to talk to important clients?




I later realized that this boss was so afraid of his employees making mistakes and making him look bad, or worse, losing the account, that he micromanaged everything. Ironically, his constant interference backfired. Frustrated with his lack of trust, his best employees left for another agency, taking their ideas—and eventually, the account—with them. Ultimately, he lost the account he feared losing the most, and his business went under anyway.

Regardless of the reason, an inward mindset blinds us to others' capabilities, fostering an environment of dependency

and ultimately stifling individuals' creativity. The fear of losing control or facing unexpected outcomes propels leaders to cling tighter, paradoxically undermining the very success they aim to secure.

Take a look at the graphic below. Do either of these biases drive your own actions as a micromanaging boss?

Which **type** of **bias** has been driving my actions in the workplace?

Better Than Bias	vs	Worse Than Bias
<p>View of Myself: Superior Important Virtuous</p> <hr/>		<p>View of Myself: Deficient Broken Powerless</p> <hr/>
<p>View of Others: Inferior Incapable Wrong</p> <hr/>		<p>View of Others: Advantaged Privileged Blessed</p> <hr/>
<p>Emotions: Impatient Indifferent Disdainful</p>		<p>Emotions: Helpless Jealous Resigned</p>

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The shift to empowerment: Embracing an outward mindset

Empowering leadership, however, requires a significant shift to an [outward mindset](#). This transformation involves recognizing and valuing each team member's aspirations, talents, and contributions. By stepping out of "the box," leaders can foster a culture of trust, and [psychological safety](#), where employees feel genuinely supported, valued, and comfortable trying new things—and even making mistakes! This environment leads to increased innovation, motivation, and job satisfaction.

So, how do you break free from micromanaging? To start, you must become aware of your micro-managing tendencies, understanding the underlying fears or beliefs driving these behaviors.

Strategies for overcoming micromanagement

If you're wondering how to stop micromanaging at start empowering your team, incorporating self-awareness and a genuine curiosity about team members' goals, objectives, and challenges is pivotal. This can include:

- **Cultivating curiosity:** Replace directions with questions. Learn about your team's ambitions and hurdles to discover how you can genuinely support their success. Consider using Arbinger's [Meet to Learn](#) tool!
- **Clarifying goals and roles:** Set explicit, shared objectives for the team, ensuring everyone understands the vision and their role in achieving it. A [Job Map](#)

helps with this.

- **Practicing letting go:** Establish boundaries for your involvement. For instance, limit your presence to key meetings, allowing the team autonomy in the process.

Managers must also focus on their own [leadership development](#) to stop micromanaging. This means:

- **Seeking mentorship:** Find mentors who complement your skills and can guide you through uncharted territories, emphasizing the value of vulnerability and asking for help.
- **Consulting a trusted advisor:** Beyond having someone teach you new things, find someone you trust to have difficult conversations with, 'check your mindset', and even vent to!
- **Reflecting and recognizing:** Spend time understanding your personal tendencies or biases. Are you inclined to feel superior and need to prove it? Do you tend to underestimate yourself and rely solely on your strengths? Or do you feel the constant need to be recognized and validated? Recognizing these patterns is the first step in becoming a more authentic and effective leader.

Strategies for overcoming micromanagement at work

Cultivate
curiosity

Clarify goals
and roles

Practice
letting go

Seek
mentorship

Consult a
trusted advisor

Reflect and
recognize

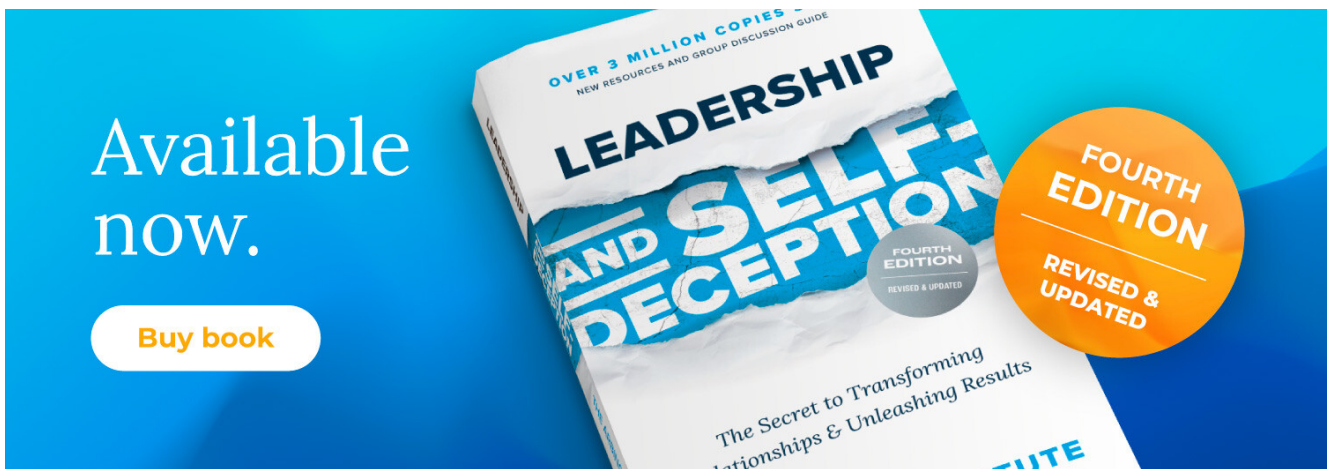
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By embracing these strategies, leaders can shift from a controlling to a collaborative leadership style, fostering an environment of trust, innovation, and shared success. Breaking free from micromanaging is not just about changing behaviors, but about evolving one's mindset to lead with confidence and humility. By [seeing the humanity in others](#) and leading from an outward mindset, we can achieve more and allow others to as well.

Bringing humanity to management and leadership

To bring humanity to the workplace, leaders must recognize and prioritize the needs, goals, and challenges of their team members. This perspective shifts leaders away from micromanaging in the workplace, as it means treating employees as equals, not just as vehicles to achieve personal objectives.

By valuing each individual's contributions and creating a respectful, understanding environment, leaders can empower their teams. This empowerment not only boosts productivity and creativity but also makes the workplace more enjoyable and fulfilling for everyone.



This blog is published as part of Argyris's Leadership Faux Pas series. Have you ever wondered what not to do as a leader? This series dives deep into the common missteps that can derail even the most promising leaders. Learn from these pitfalls and elevate your leadership game. New blogs released weekly!

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