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Micromanagement: Is it good or bad for staffers?

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

The motto of many managers and owners is, "I don't want to micromanage and I don't want to be a micromanager."

The word "micromanagement" also sends chills down the spines of most salespeople. They see the freedom and independence characteristic of the sales profession as strong benefits, as are the financial rewards. Even micromanagers dislike the term and prefer talking about "attention to detail" or being "detail-oriented." The term implies a lack of trust and excessive accountability.

Sales journals are full of articles about the importance of empowerment, keeping the focus on results and creating accountability by emphasizing lessons learned from failures instead of using reprimands.

So is micromanagement a bad thing? The answer is "yes" and "no." It's a powerful tool when used correctly. Used incorrectly, it can demotivate, increase turnover, and contribute to low morale and productivity.

Every salesperson agrees that if they do enough of the right things (behaviors) in the right way, they'll be successful. If the reason for low sales is flawed behavior or poor skills, micromanagement can be very effective.

If someone requires constant micromanagement to be successful, a replacement or reassignment would be appropriate. Here are three situations that call for an attention-to-detail management style.

- First, new hires are good candidates.

New hires typically approach a new position enthusiastically and with great optimism. They're also more receptive to direction when first starting. This is the period when they still have an open mind, and are free of negative experiences with managers, policies, failure, rejection or criticism.

Initially, there's a strong desire to please and to get started on the right foot. Seize this ideal time to program behavior and habits that will jump-start success. Leaving the implementation of successful habits to chance is a sure way to experience unnecessary failures.

It's easy to be overly confident when hiring talented new people. Optimism can fuel the temptation to get them started quickly in the field without a lot of direction.

Allowing new hires to start without a detailed plan is akin to letting them wander in the desert without a map. New environments and nuances in sales strategies, products, industries and markets can lengthen the time it takes new hires to implement successful behaviors by themselves.

Specific directions radically improve the odds of capturing success quickly. Lack of direction can create frustration and foster negative attitudes about the company, products or manager.

Attitude is always harder to fix than skills or behaviors. Add to this downward spiral the likelihood that the manager is also feeling frustrated and negative. Micromanaging by giving precise direction and feedback will generate a faster start, earlier success, less turnover and a happier employee.

- Second, previously successful people who are struggling also are ideal candidates for micromanagement.

All of us have experienced a lost edge or skill in something. The situation is no different than hiring a personal trainer or coach when we want to change and get better.

Underperforming salespeople usually agree they'll be more successful if they consistently make the right number of calls to the right people, and say and do the right things. Unfortunately, agreeing to the principles of success doesn't always translate into action. People may think they're doing the right things, even though they're not.

Like a good athletic coach, drills for skill, detailed action plans and other attention-to-detail methods can recapture the right habits and get them implemented on a consistent basis.

- Third, capable but unmotivated salespeople are another situation that qualifies.

They have the necessary skills but aren't applying or using them effectively.

This situation is common with new managers acquiring an existing sales team. It's easy to blame the staff and say you have the wrong people onboard. "They are not mine" is the common explanation.

The greatest motivator for salespeople is getting a sale. It's the goal, the touchdown, the basket, the hole-in-one. Holding them accountable and documenting the use of prescribed behaviors will bring back success. Once the habit is re-established, and success follows, you can discard the micromanagement.

Empowered employees will be happier and more productive in the end, so micromanaging is a jump-start method and a short-term tool.

Remember: If you hold your people accountable to tasks, then you're merely managing tasks.

It's better to micromanage the development of competencies, processes and activities so they can be empowered to run their business. Manage only details directly related to producing results.

Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or garry@leadershipconnections.com

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