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Empowerment ~ Are You a Micro Manager?

By Dr. Rick Johnson, CEO Strategist, LLC

Saturday, 5th July 2008

I deal with a lot of leaders that confuse delegation with empowerment. I am often told, "I don't micro manage, I empower my employees." However, when we start digging into specific situations, we often uncover the difference between delegation and empowerment. It is really not that difficult to ascertain the difference. Delegation is simply getting someone else to perform a specific task for you.

"Tom, can you move these for pallets for me to make some room for a new shipment coming in tomorrow?"

Empowerment sets a little higher expectation that encourages the employee to use their own creativity and innovation.

“Tom, our warehouse is getting pretty full and we have a new shipment coming in. Can you figure a way to solve this problem for me?”

In other words, just telling an employee what to do is not empowerment because it doesn't allow him to use his own creativity. In fact, many times delegation can be construed as micro managing simply because the employee feels offended that he is given directions that are too specific. So... If you even have the slightest thought that your employees may consider you a micro manager, try these tips and see if your empowerment skills improve.

- **Analyze your leadership model. Do you hold things close to the vest? Are you reluctant to share information? Are you afraid of giving up control? If you answered yes to any of these questions you have a challenge on your hands. Your answers may be very telling with regard to your skills as a leader. Remember, a leader is only as good as the people they surround themselves with.**
- **Create a skills assessment inventory for every key employee. Supplement that exercise by creating a training and development matrix to improve the overall competency of the organization. Include yourself in the assessment. Communicate the purpose in a positive fashion to the employees.**
- **Consider doing a 360 review that includes you as a leader or create an anonymous survey for employees to rate the entire management team, including you, and the company culture itself.**
- **Utilize your skills assessment to make sure you have the right people in the right seats and identify future potential leadership.**
- **Stop answering questions and start asking them. When an employee asks you what they should do, ask them**

what they think they should do.

- Search for projects, issues or challenges that you would normally tackle and create a project team or empower an individual to solve the problem. Do this even if you think you have the answer.
- Let your employees fail. The hardest thing to do is watch an employee make a mistake. But, unless the mistake is life threatening or is going to cost the company thousands of dollars, it is a better learning process if the employee learns from his own mistake.
- Provide more than just skill training and product training. Create an employee development program for those employees that show potential for future stardom. This development program must be based on empowering these employees to make tough decisions. Intern programs are also effective as a platform for development.
- Results happen in various ways. Remember, you may have a specific way of doing things but it may not be the only way. As long as the employee is getting the results expected, give them praise. Your way may not be the best or only way.

Micro managing may make you feel in control but in reality you are only hurting yourself and the company. It only limits an employee's ability to be innovative and creative. This can cost the company thousands of dollars because it is the creativity and innovation of your employees that maximize the profitability of your company.

Leadership is About Trust

The easiest way to suppress discretionary energy, the energy given willingly – no matter what it takes, is a style of micro management that scrutinizes every decision an employee makes. It can kill their spirit. If any of your employees even joke about you being a micro manager... Back off. Where

there is smoke there is usually fire.

Micro Management is a Symptom

Micro Management is often just a symptom of ineffective planning, too much compassion and the inability to judge performance and develop bench strength. Developing a strategic plan for your company is a very effective way to address any or all of these challenges. I often tell my clients that the most valuable part of a strategic plan is the development process itself. Running a company with a shoot from the hip mentality often encourages micro management and does not allow employees to develop their skills and maximize their potential. One of the many warning signs is a high turnover rate. The reason is simple; good employees just won't tolerate micro management and they will leave to find employment that will challenge them and help them grow.

It's About Leadership

Simply put, effective leaders don't micro manage. In fact, they cringe at the thought of it. Why? Because they recognize that one of their primary responsibilities is the development of future leaders for the organization. You just can't develop future leaders by micro managing.

Micro managing can be an indication of the following:

- Lack of trust in your employees. This is not good because it often leads to a lack of trust in you as a leader
- Fear of lost control. This is often demonstrated by a parochial attitude about turf or position in the organization. This may also indicate a lack of self confidence and low self esteem.
- Panic response to emergency and crisis. The micro

manager often feels alone on an island and when a crisis hits they may panic and respond reactively without much thought, planning or discussion.

Employee development, succession planning and bench strength are just three of the key principles for success. These become obvious once you start developing a strategic plan. Sales growth, profit growth, operational and service excellence are factors we all recognize easily because they can be easily measured. However, I submit to you that you can have the best sales plan, an excellent service and operational plan and if you ignore employee development through effective leadership your success will be limited.

So, focus on the leadership skills of every manager in your company. Do an employee survey. Don't be afraid of the word "micromanagement". Discuss it with your managers, your employees and do an honest management self assessment. And..... if you don't have a strategic plan, start right now. Call or e-mail me if you want help in putting your plan together. I can help make your strategic plan really work and the value you get from it will be easily recognized by bottom line growth.

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