



How do you work with a micromanager?

Glain Roberts-McCabe sat down with Roundtable member Jory Platt, a Principal at Black Swan Shopper Science, who shares his advice on what to do with a micromanager.

MENTORING MATTERS

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“Help! My boss is a micromanager. He rewrites everything I put in front of him and seems to need to be involved in every decision. It feels like he doesn’t trust me and it’s affecting my motivation. How can I manage my manager?”

This is a challenge that I faced early in my career and that, over the years, I have also coached several of my colleagues, mentees, friends, and family members through. There is much that I have learned from all of these experiences.

One of the most important things that I've learned is that every leader needs to earn their right to lead by demonstrating strong results and establishing trust. When these two things are in place, a manager is more readily willing to relinquish control to their direct reports. From this point of view, it is really you who must take the

lead in establishing a track record and in building that trusting relationship. Most micromanagers don't have the self-awareness to realize their impact.

Another key thing that I've learned is not to let the

micromanager impact your motivation. View this as a challenge, rise to it and celebrate your progress with the steps you take. Otherwise, your lack of motivation will inevitably become visible, and your micromanager will have more reason to be micromanaging.

I lived through a micromanager soon after my first promotion at Procter & Gamble. I was in finance at the time and it felt like every meeting was a thorough review of my excel workbooks. This was not my style but it was a fantastic learning experience. I discovered the need to clarify exactly what my manager was looking for. Knowing what your manager is looking for is important when you are working with a micromanager. Once I had clarified this, I came prepared to each one-with-one meeting with what we had agreed I would deliver, laid out clearly and concisely. This allowed me to demonstrate my ability to deliver on results as promised, or better than promised. It kept the focus away from work in progress that I

Leadership Tip

It's very important to clarify what, exactly, your micromanager is looking for.

did not need help with. It allowed me to guide her feedback by asking for help in the specific areas that I knew she wanted to discuss and that I knew I was well prepared in. This approach was integral to building trust and I continue to use it today.

Something else that helped me in the trust building department was to encourage my new manager to meet with my previous manager, as an opportunity to learn more about me in the context of our development discussions. I believe the endorsement that came through this was also a contributor in moving things along on the trust curve.

Decision-making scope is another area that can often be a point of frustration when working with micromanagers. I believe the best approach to this is an overt effort on your part to define the decision-making scope with your manager. It may not be an easy discussion, but I've only seen it result positively. My coaching is always to ask your manager what decisions they want to make, which ones they want to be consulted on and which ones that you are empowered to make on your own. This works best if you capture it on paper in three columns with your manager, inevitably leading to a visual where there are few decisions that you are empowered to make and many more in the other columns. This may encourage your manager to empower you with more decisions. Alternately, it's up to you to ask specifically what you need to demonstrate to be able to move more decision-making into your scope.

Another successful strategy I've learned through coaching others is to reach out to your colleagues who also report to your micromanager and explore how they manage the relationship. There are bound to be others on your team you can learn from. Obviously, this needs to be subtle to ensure there is no negative reflection.

There are many strategies and approaches to the challenge of working with a micromanager. Hopefully I've provided you with some ideas for a playbook you can succeed with.

Key takeaways...

1. You will earn the right to lead with strong results and trust. It's up to you to take the lead in establishing your track record and building trust, which will ultimately change your manager's behavior.
 2. View your micromanager as a personal challenge and don't let them impact your motivation.
 3. Take time to understand what the micromanager wants from you.
 4. Engage in a discussion on decision-making scope, with visual notes.
 5. Guide your manager to a previous manager who will endorse you and help establish the trust.
 6. Seek out tips and ideas from other members of your manager's team.
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Jory Platt is a Principal at Black Swan Shopper Science. He grows companies' sales and saves them money by applying data science to predict outcomes that the companies wouldn't otherwise see. He was previously a Director at PepsiCo and began his career at P&G.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created The Roundtable to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.