

Losing Control

Recognize the differences between managing and micromanaging

I ONCE HAD AN EMPLOYEE WHO KNEW absolutely everything. He was bright and had tremendous initiative, but he consistently overestimated his capabilities. I found it exhausting, so when we took a trip together to a conference across the country, I was quickly overwhelmed with his know-everythingness. I was well-traveled, and he was not, but he kept insisting on telling me how to navigate the airport. Eventually I thought, why fight it? Let him lead. I stopped redirecting and simply followed, which caused us to miss our flight. After it was clear to him that he had screwed up royally, he asked me why I had let him do it. I told him that the cost of ticket changes and a delay was a small price to pay for an important lesson.

The urge to micromanage is rarely about knowing more than the people you are managing. It's about the need for control.

During a recent visit to a manufacturing plant, I witnessed a supervisor in the polishing and finishing area constantly correcting two jewelers who—to my eyes—were doing an excellent job. After observing for a while, I realized the correction was more about style than substance: The supervisor would have approached the job in a different—but not superior—way. His correction added no value to the work, and potentially slowed it considerably, but he was more

focused on controlling the employees than on fostering the work.

We have a client who recently hired us to produce a website for him. Though he

knows little about online marketing, he insists on micromanaging every aspect of the effort. We must “prove” every recommendation with outside facts before he will accept them, making it difficult to produce a site that will perform as desired, and making the project miserable in the process. He is aware that he does not know anything about online marketing, but his need for control supersedes his judgment.

IDENTIFYING MICROMANAGEMENT

So how do we know if we're managing or micromanaging? For starters, managing is about setting direction, providing clear expectations, and supporting with training and resources. Managing is strategic in nature. Micromanaging is about the tasks; it replaces the workers' initiative and performance with your own. Micromanaging is tactical.

For example, imagine you have a new employee, and her job is to enter orders in your system, then prepare the orders for invoicing and shipping once the goods are produced. She will need training to learn the system and to understand your order process. Someone must sit with her, show her how to do the tasks, and then observe while she practices. Once she has demonstrated that she can perform the work correctly, she should be allowed to do it on her own.

If you cannot leave her alone to do



Your job, as a manager, is to control the expectations and the environment—not the worker.

her work at this point, ask yourself why.

- Is she doing the tasks incorrectly? Then provide additional training.

- Is she not completing them on time? Then provide guidelines regarding how quickly things must get done.

- Is she being sloppy? Then provide graphic examples and demonstrate the proper presentation.

As you can see, the correct response for each insufficiency is to provide guidance and resources. In each case, after you have rendered assistance, it is important to step away. What do you do if the deficiencies continue? You evaluate if the employee will become effective with additional training and support.

What you don't do is hover. You don't take the work back and do it yourself. You don't provide a constant stream of narrative about how the work should be done. Your job, as a manager, is to control the expectations and the environment—not the worker. In my experience, this is how most micromanagement starts; an employee doesn't perform as expected, and the fear of mistakes sets in.

There is another type of micromanagement that occurs more because of the manager's personality than as a result of employee insufficiency. This type of micromanagement is due to a manager's need to control. One interview question I like to ask when interviewing management candidates is, "Tell me how you feel about this statement: 'If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.'" Even though most people know intellectually that a good manager doesn't really believe that to be true, many people still believe it. Asking them to describe

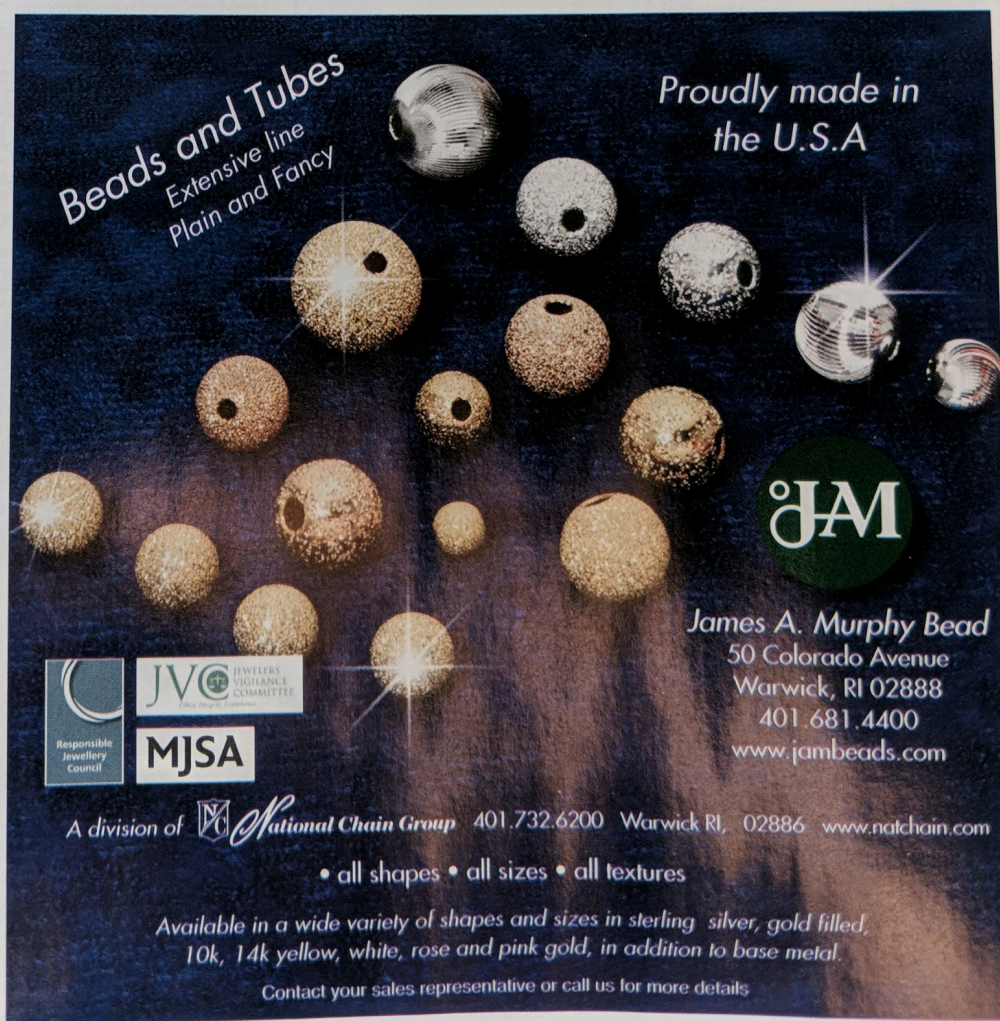
how they *feel* about the statement creates a conversation that can provide insight into how that person will behave as a manager.

So, ask yourself the question: How do *you* feel about the statement, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself?"

If you believe it to be true, you may be micromanaging. This belief is often at the heart of remaining a one-person operation long past the time when you needed to hire. If you have employees, and they aren't turning into the assets you hoped for when you hired them, your own behavior may be the reason. When employees are micromanaged, they

tend to surrender their initiative and creativity, the very things you need most from them.

Micromanagement limits your business. Employees are too expensive to only get half of what you are paying for. Micromanagement also means that you are doing the work or spending way too much attention on the work, while paying someone else to do it. By learning to focus on the strategic aspects of managing—and resisting the tactical—you will cultivate more innovative, effective employees. You will also free yourself up to do the things that only you can do. Your bottom line—and your employees—will thank you. ♦



Beads and Tubes
Extensive line
Plain and Fancy

Proudly made in
the U.S.A

JAM

James A. Murphy Bead
50 Colorado Avenue
Warwick, RI 02888
401.681.4400
www.jambeads.com

Responsible Jewellery Council

JVC JEWELLERS
VIGILANCE
COMMITTEE

MJSA

A division of **National Chain Group** 401.732.6200 Warwick RI, 02886 www.natchain.com

• all shapes • all sizes • all textures

Available in a wide variety of shapes and sizes in sterling silver, gold filled,
10k, 14k yellow, white, rose and pink gold, in addition to base metal.

Contact your sales representative or call us for more details