

Unleash Your Staff's Potential...Avoid Micromanagement

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Former President Theodore Roosevelt once stated that “the most effective executive is one who hires good people and then has the good sense to stand back and watch them do their work”.

It is easy to understand why many owners and office managers of small businesses, like podiatric practices, often fall into the trap of micromanaging their employees. Since most of these owners or managers were at one time the only employee of the business, they have usually performed every job within the business and know exactly what needs to be done and how to do it. It is also easy to understand (yet not to accept) the criticism that micromanagers often deliver to their employees in response to doing something in a slightly different manner. After all, their way has worked since the beginning of time...why should they let someone try something new?

Are you a micromanager?

Like any other business owner, physicians often micromanage their staff. If you find yourself, or your office manager, suffering from any of the following symptoms, you may have a micromanagement problem:

- You often look over your employee's shoulders and offer “advice.”
- You often listen to your employees discuss a problem and feel compelled to voice an opinion or suggest a solution, rather than ask them to propose solutions.
- You often succumb to the urge to finish a task that was started by an employee.
- You often delegate **some** tasks within the project but never the **whole** project.
- Your employees relate that they feel unfulfilled in their job.
- Your practice suffers from a high employee turnover rate.

Perhaps it is not only the doctor's act of interfering that concerns employees, but the inevitable criticism that micromanagement often leads to.

Micromanagement is certainly not taught within the core curriculum of any business schools. Practicing it will ultimately limit the growth of any business. Particularly in the challenging environment of medicine, constant innovation, thoughts, and new ideas must constantly be infused into your practice in order to thrive. These can only come from **people**. These critical innovations, thoughts and ideas will only be extracted from people who feel “empowered.”

Empowerment may be considered the polar opposite of micromanagement. It involves choosing your employees well, considering who is best for each task, setting goals and objectives and finally, giving them each the authority and the responsibility to make their own decisions that affect their work. Eventually, this will not only translate into complete employee fulfillment, but you may soon find yourself surrounded by a motivated team of creative self-thinkers who are helping you create significant business growth. Watch their full potential come alive!

As the leader of the team, you must provide feedback along the way so that the employee has the opportunity to change course or fine-tune their strategies. Feedback is NOT the same as criticism however. Feedback is merely up to date insight on how close the employee is to achieving mutually agreed upon goals and objectives. Positive reinforcement is a key ingredient of feedback.

If your boss is a micromanager...

If you find yourself working for a micromanager, consider your options. The easiest (but perhaps not the most practical) thing to do is to quit. I would certainly never recommend quitting anything as a first-line option. The second easiest thing to do (although not very easy) is to simply

change your response to micromanagement. Recognize and understand your boss's reason for micromanaging and separate out the good constructive feedback from the unrealistic criticism. Unfortunately, as your valuable input diminishes in response to your normal defense mechanisms, you may eventually feel a great deal of apathy toward the practice. Finally, the last option (and the most difficult) is to actually discuss the need to change their management style from micromanagement to empowerment with your boss. This option, while difficult, is the only one with real, long-term potential. It is also the only option in which the practice itself will benefit.

Changing the behavior of another individual is a slow and tedious process. Like all creatures, (I don't recommend calling your boss a creature to his or her face), we gravitate towards that which makes us feel good. Unfortunately, you will not change the behavior of your boss by simply providing him or her with information about empowerment, its rationale, scientific evidence of its effectiveness, or even this article. There is an old proverb that states "change a man against his will, he's of the same opinion still". You must make them **want** to change through slow and steady positive reinforcement and noting the positive impact the change of management style is having on the practice. Make your boss feel good about making change. Slowly, you will see that new behavior "stick" and you, your boss and the practice will all be the better for it.

Dr. John Guiliana is a nationally recognized speaker and author on topics pertaining to practice management. He holds a Master's Degree in Health Care Management and is a Trustee and Fellow of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. He practices in Hackettstown, New Jersey.