

# Memorandum

**From:**  
David A Gammon, Sixth Sense  
**Date:**  
July 2023

**To:**  
Directors, Managers, Supervisors  
**CC:**  
Employees

## **Subject: Micro Management ... Nah**

I want the very word micro-management banished from the lexicon of commercial language. It means nothing.

It is not a thing. It is a thought/feeling in the mind of the manager or the manager at a particular point.

I've seen examples at both ends of the spectrum. Some people complain about being micro-managed if their boss comes within 50 yards of them. Similarly, I've seen people subjected to horrendous reporting, endless meetings and bureaucracy without a single complaint.

On balance, I have experienced that most accusations of micro-management come from uncommunicative and low-performing employees<sup>i</sup>.

Conversely, managers who claim to 'not want to micro-manage people' are not getting the essential management right anywhere near enough. That includes me...

*I once engaged a contractor to do a consulting project around a regulatory challenge my employer faced. It was a £50k assignment. I didn't gel with him, and his personality was incompatible with mine<sup>ii</sup>. One of my managers encouraged me to go with him, and she was right. We were up against immense time pressure and hadn't found anyone else to help.*

*I spent an hour with him, discussing what we wanted and then sent him off on his way.*

*Three months later, he produced a report and emailed it to me. I sat down on a Monday morning and began to read it. As I did, a wave of panic swept over me. He had gone in the wrong direction and not delivered on the brief (or at least what I thought the brief was).*

*In fact, it couldn't have been further from what I wanted, and I knew at that minute...it was my fault.*

*We burned the midnight oil for a week trying to salvage something from the train wreck of a report we had and managed to turn it into something half reasonable. But I still got a well-deserved kicking from my boss when he saw it.*

I teach managers a simple truth.<sup>iii</sup>

It is not your job to motivate people. It is your job to provide a framework with which people can motivate themselves. Employees still have to step in and bring their A-game.

Part of this framework is ensuring that any delegation of authority or activity is grounded in

1. Clarity of the outcome in terms of what has to be done, why it is being done and what excellence looks like
2. An accurate assessment of the current position, including the resources, skills and knowledge available to execute
3. Instructions on how the activity is to proceed. This can be highly specified (like a work instruction) or a high-level brief/project plan. This will depend on the employee's skill, experience and track record.
4. Clearly understood boundaries of authority so that employees don't risk making decisions above their pay grade.
5. Support in the form of coaching and advice to identify and overcome actual or potential obstacles
6. A means by which progress and outcomes can be measured, allowing the individual to calibrate and adjust their approach.

In other words ... management!!!

The depth and breadth of management appropriate in any situation is a delicate balance of

- The degree of trust between manager and employee. This level of trust should be based on a realistic assessment<sup>iv</sup> of the experience, skills, knowledge and execution track record. In reality, it is often based on more profound personal beliefs about the nature of people.
- The desire for autonomy of the employee and the desire for the manager to feel in control of activities and outcomes for which they are ultimately responsible
- The need for consistency and the task being done correctly to optimise the outcomes and/or minimise the associated risks.

These are the considerations in designing a management framework that aims to enable people to perform at the highest standard with minimum scrutiny and intervention.

No More and No Less

My experience is that most managers are not great at designing these frameworks and lack the confidence to manage fully. They

- lack belief in their ability to extract optimum performance from others
- rely too much on the idea of 'common sense.' and don't delegate effectively<sup>v</sup>
- don't see management of others as a positive motivational tool
- tend to default to doing it themselves and staying on the hamster wheel (which feels familiar and comfortable)
- avoid 'difficult' conversations, notably those around how employees show up in the workplace

- are frightened of being accused of micro-managing

If anything, managers do not manage enough, resulting in a lack of motivation, engagement and performance. This impacts commercial results AND employee well-being.

So, let's stop with the micro-management nonsense and start training leaders to manage effectively and allow employees to step in fully to their roles.



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<sup>i</sup> High performers tend to seek out management

<sup>ii</sup> My fault as much as, if not more, than his

<sup>iii</sup> The same is true of wellbeing

<sup>iv</sup> By both the employee and the manager

<sup>v</sup> Delegation is, after all, in the setup