

Episode 120: My boss micro-manages me, what can I do?



One of the most un-empowering things you can do is micro-manage people. It not only tells them you don't really trust them, but it takes away their initiative. So what do you do when you are being micro-managed? Here are some ideas.

1. Assessing the situation

Micro-management is often in the eye of the managed - one person's 'management' is another's 'direction.' I guess if you asked your boss, they would say they were not micro-managing you. Given that, you need to understand if it's the whole team and not just you. If it's the whole team then this may be something about their style. If it's you, then there is a different problem. Obviously, most people draw the conclusion that they don't trust you. The question behind that is, are you performing poorly or did you do something? Maybe they are getting feedback from other teams and want to see if they agree. Given the importance of a project, they may be paranoid about their own failure. Sometimes they may even want to ensure your success and want to help you.

2. Ask Why.

With so many reasons for the behavior, at some point you have to ask - the trick is to find the right way. One approach is to ask for an interim review of progress and your objectives. Don't start your monthly meeting with this, but work up to it. With plenty of time left, request to discuss your objectives and review progress. Do not be defensive but walk through what you have achieved and what is open. Then ask open questions that let your boss talk: What else could I be doing? How else might I be more effective? You need to probe at their perception of how you are performing. If they ask why you are asking, they are giving you an opening. Frame your question carefully but ask if they are worried about your performance. You may just have to express the feeling you are being micro-managed. Just don't start there!

3. Living with the feedback.

Most important with all feedback is to listen and be open to what you hear. A good manager will give clear feedback and a chance to fix any problem you have. A bad manager will not give you clear feedback and may leave you more confused. Either way, they are giving you feedback and you need to understand and act on it. Rarely it's that they are a 'jerk' and you are misunderstood but that might be true here. Mostly, you are failing and need to overcome bad perceptions and prove yourself.

Bottom line: Whether you get clear feedback or not, you have to live with that feedback and act on it. If you don't, then you only have yourself to blame.