



Micro-managers anonymous: A group you don't want to join!

By Julie Parker

My name is Julie and I am a recovering micro-manager! Who else is willing to put their hands up and admit they like everything to be done their way?

Now, keep your hands up if you see no reason to change this behaviour.

If you still have your hand up, read on. I will hopefully assist you to lower that hand by the end of this article.

There are numerous leadership and management styles adopted in the workplace, ranging from autocratic to laissez-faire and everything in between. It's important to choose your style carefully, as each one triggers a different response in your team members. And to be an excellent leader, the style that you adopt must also be in alignment with who you are and who you seek to become.

Whatever style you select, there is one management behaviour that must be eliminated if you want a happy team and that's *micro-management*. Of course, I concede that some leaders don't care if their teams are happy, but I consider such leaders to be innocently ignorant.

Micro-management is demanding or requiring excessive control over the details when team members are completing their tasks. It is exerting your power to control your team and monitoring every little thing.

As I stated, I was a micro-manager. It was many years ago at a dental practice where I was in the role of receptionist. There was a second receptionist with whom I worked and we got along very well. Let's say her name was Mary.

Because Mary joined the practice a little after me, I trained her in our practice processes. Mary had years of experience so came up to speed very quickly.

Mary and I worked in harmony for a couple of years, after which time I accepted a job offer in a slightly different industry.

My new boss was a kind person with good intentions. However, he was a micro-manager. Immediately, my every step was being scrutinised. I couldn't even address a parcel for postage without my boss verifying I had written the correct details. He would stand behind me during phonecalls, insist on reviewing my travel routes to every client and over-explain minor tasks such as taking a deposit to the bank.

After six months, I started to realise the damaging effect this micro-management was having on me. My self-confidence dropped, my memory started to fail me and my decision-making abilities suffered. I knew I had to get out of this environment that was slowly dumbing me down.

Wonderfully, my old boss called me and asked whether I would consider returning to my old receptionist position. I jumped at the opportunity and my boss got off the phone to tell the rest of the team the news. However, there was a problem. One team member did not want me back. I knew immediately it would be Mary. The past six months of scrutiny over my actions and performance made me realise that I had been exhibiting similar damaging micro-management behaviour towards Mary. I never stepped out of the "trainer" mindset and had continued to control even the smallest of Mary's behaviours. I admitted this to my old boss and asked to take Mary out for coffee so I could apologise.

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Luckily for me, Mary was a generous and supportive woman. She explained what impact I had on her and I shared my experiences of the past months. Mary agreed to bring me back to the team and help me shift my destructive micro-managing habit.

Mary and I developed a trigger-word that she would call out when I was becoming controlling. As promised, I would stop in my tracks, smile and thank her. Both Mary and I were surprised at how quickly this system worked. Our friendship strengthened and we enjoyed managing reception together for quite some time.

This was one of the greatest lessons I have learned in my dental industry career. It became one of the principles with which I led my team during my ten years of dental practice ownership. I hate to think how destructive I would have been during that time had I not adjusted my conduct!

Are you micro-managing?

Review the following list to discover whether you are exhibiting micro-management behaviours:

1. Do you immediately step in as the leader when a new process is needed?
2. Do you believe that only you know how best to manage a task?
3. Do you struggle with delegating tasks?
4. Do you monitor other's performance too closely?
5. Are some of your directions stating the obvious?
6. Do you disregard the knowledge and experience of others?

The reason why managers become so controlling is usually due to fear. Fear of losing control and power, fear that their contribution will become redundant and fear that once other's strong performance comes to the fore, theirs will be seen as ineffective.

The impact of micro-management

If you think that you may be a micro-manager, understanding the FOLLOWING RANGE OF negative impacts your behaviour is having is usually enough of an incentive to modify your managing style:

1. High employee turnover

As micro-management destroys the relationship between boss and employee, there seems little reason to stay. Resentment over minor events grows and soon a previously good team member is looking for another job.

2. De-motivated team

Team members who are constantly questioned and criticised will stop putting in any extra effort. Each team member just wants to be left alone to complete their own tasks and avoid scrutiny so will avoid helping each other out.

3. Increased sick days taken

Team members who are pecked at constantly need more breaks. Also, team members' stress levels will be increased and therefore they will be more susceptible to catching colds, suffer headaches and fatigue.

4. Drop in production

The team members who don't quit may stay, despite their unhappiness. The drop in energy, enthusiasm, optimism and actions have a direct impact on overall production.

5. Slowed progress

Happy and motivated teams are continually introducing better ways of doing things. Customer service, effi-

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ciency and productivity are all areas that require creative and innovative thought. Micro-management kills the level of team-engagement that would normally see the practice continue to improve.

Shifting your micro-managing behaviour

Ihope that anyone who continued to have their hands up at the start of this article have now lowered them and want to shift away from their controlling ways! So how do you do this?

The first step for you is to gain clarity. Open communication with your team will help you identify the areas you need to focus on. Provide an emotionally safe environment for your team to help and support you in becoming a recovering/recovered micro-manager like me!

Once you have determined what specific actions require modification, decide on what your desired response will be instead. For example, if the past has seen you remind a team member of an obvious task, such as mopping the surgery floor, promise yourself to resist temptation and instead acknowledge and thank them for completing the task next time it is done. Being an effective manager is about creating the environment for others to develop and shine. Be their cheerleader, supporter and guide.

Autonomy is one of our three intrinsic motivators of human beings. Taking this away from your team members will result in a damaging workplace culture. It is only when team members are given the space and authority to be autonomous in their actions that they will thrive and deliver their best performances for the overall benefit of your practice and your patients.

About the author

Julie Parker's whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.

Julie Parker Practice Success offers a subscription based program that educates all dental staff in the building and managing of their practices. Members receive monthly audio CD's and workbooks that lead them along the path to personal and team success. All team members, including the dentists, receive Certificates of Completion each month for submission for non-clinical CPD points and inclusion on resumes. Memberships are available for \$395 per month. For more info, see www.julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au.