

The ACTIV²E Leadership Model, Part 4

Involvement

A common thread throughout our discussions on ACTIV²E Leadership thus far has been the need for the leader to participate in the running of the organization, or championing a cause.

Your role as a leader necessarily makes you a role model; and people will follow your example. Knowing how to be effectively involved in the world around you keeps you informed, helps you make better decisions, and makes you the role model your members need and expect.

As a leader, you are the point person, the one the members go to, and the one they look to for guidance. You are expected to make the tough decisions – you wanted to or you wouldn't have accepted the title of commander or manager. Your followers also expect you to know when to allow them to make decisions, complete the task, and to exercise initiative.

Successful involvement entails knowing when to step in and knowing when to stand back; knowing when to offer help and knowing when to allow others the challenge of working on their own. It follows then, that two of the most common mistakes leaders make in trying to master involvement are the twin obstacles of micromanagement and laissez faire leadership.

Micromanagement

An easy definition of micromanagement is: trying to control every aspect of the operation – being too involved. Micromanagement can be perceived as the boss' ego by a follower, and sometimes that may be true; it can also be caused by a higher boss' downward pressure and the inability of the lower-level boss to respond. At its heart though, micromanagement is a lack of trust: either in the leader's own judgment about how much to delegate (poor confidence), or a lack of trust in subordinates. This lack of trust can result in death rattle for the organization.

Effect On The Members

Micromanagers hurt the members in many ways. As a practical matter, micromanagement leaves little room for members to master their own jobs, because the decisions are taken out of their hands. The micromanager makes (or approves of) all the decisions for them. It's difficult for people to truly learn cause and effect without the freedom to experiment.

Micromanagement also drains the initiative from the organization. Members are leery of taking the initiative when they know what they do will be intensely questioned or rejected. This isn't necessarily a result of the questioning itself but rather a result of the managerial bottleneck that takes place when one person has such intimate and complete control over several activities and processes.

As an emotional matter, followers feel the lack of trust exhibited by the micromanager. They will read the leader's lack of confidence and either rebel, leave, or allow the leader to have full control over decision and action. It's true that some followers like to be micromanaged, as it allows them to never feel the consequences of decision making. New members are less likely to rebel in the beginning, as they are just learning the political and managerial ways of the new boss. But it does not help them to learn their jobs.

Effect On The Boss And The Operation

Micromanagement is also destructive to the boss and to the operation they are trying to preserve. The leader cannot control all things, cannot process all the data necessary, and does not have the time to stay competitive. Poor decisions will be made, decisions won't be carried out, the mission will fail and the leader will burn out.

Because all this is happening, the leader will lose the confidence of their people and their own boss. Micromanagement leaves a trail behind.

Laissez Faire Leadership

Laissez faire leadership another obstacle to effective leader involvement. It manifests itself with symptoms that are opposite of micromanagement when improperly used. It may be caused by overconfidence in the organization's members' ability to operate independently. It can also be due to the boss' lack of self-confidence in their own ability or lack of interest.

Many people who are laissez faire leaders make the mistake of trying to be liked more than wanting to be respected. They may equate the organization's success with how the members "feel" about them. When this happens, mission focus is lost.

One can be friendly without giving the store away. Leaders are expected to know when and how to provide guidance. Followers want to know you trust them to do their jobs well; yet they also want to know that you'll catch them when they fall.

Where Are You On The Involvement Scale?

Good question. Where do you view yourself on the involvement scale? To get an accurate evaluation, ask yourself some questions about how you work with your members. Observe your own behavior and the behavior of your followers; ask yourself:

- Do I ask questions (speaks to laissez faire leadership)?
- What kind of questions do I ask?
- What kind of questions do my members ask me?
- Do my members come to me for all decisions? If so, why?

- Do I ask them to come to me for everything?
- Do I change their decisions often? Why?
- Is it because their decisions won't work, or simply because it's not the decision I would have made?
- How important are the differences in these decisions?
- Do my meetings involve input from all?
- Do I ask questions in meetings (speaks to laissez faire leadership)?
- Do I have too many decisions to make?

Next, ask the members of your team to tell you how they view your level of involvement. Do they feel you are too involved, not enough, or spot-on? And how does this compare with your self assessment?

Some of you aren't surprised by your answers, some are very surprised. Whatever the outcome of the assessment, it's useful to look at when determining how to become more effective at involvement.

Effective Involvement

So where is the happy medium where effective involvement lies? What are some ways to become more involved and provide more value to your involvement? The first way is to simply get out from behind your desk and walk around. Talk to people, not with an agenda, but just to show you're interested.

The second way to be involved is to hold quality staff meetings. Planned, well-orchestrated, short staff meetings can give you a lot of information: formal and informal. It can also be a great team-building activity.

Don't be afraid to issue guidance, but don't feel you "have" to; and, while it's important that you follow-up on tasks or actions, be sure you're not perceived as "checking up."

A great way to show involvement is to participate in activities that are *important*. Show that you are active in the organization. Participate in your organization's professional development programs, go to activities team members go to, and be there for the major social functions.

Involvement is more than merely being active. It's being active with a purpose. It's keeping "in the loop." It's allowing your members to try (maybe they succeed, maybe not) while you stay informed about their activities.

It's being active with trust.