

Micromanagement

“If you want people to think for themselves, you have to stop thinking for them.”
– Simon Sinek



Warm up

- Have you ever had a boss, team leader, or a teacher who wanted to control everything? How did it make you feel?
- Why do you think some managers find it so hard to trust others?
- What happens to creativity when people feel watched all the time?
- What's worse — a boss who tells you exactly what to do or one who gives no direction at all?
- In your studies or job, when have you been trusted to take responsibility? How did you perform?
- What advice would you give to a new manager about trusting their team?
- What would a perfect boss look like to you?



1. Management Styles: Look at the six styles below. Read their short descriptions and discuss the questions that follow.

Style	Description
Micromanaging	Controls every detail and double-checks everyone's work.
Hands off (Laissez-faire)	Gives freedom but little feedback or structure.
Democratic	Involves the team in decisions and values their ideas.
Authoritative	Gives clear direction and expects full compliance.
Coaching	Focuses on developing people and giving long-term feedback.
Transformational	Inspires others with a shared vision and energy.

- Do you think there are both pros and cons to each style?
- Which management style would motivate you most — and which would frustrate you?
- Can a good leader switch between different styles? When might that be necessary?
- Which style do you think is most common in your country or industry?



2. Read the list below and check ✓ everything you've experienced. Then compare with a partner.

- Your boss checks your work several times a day.
 - You must copy your manager on every email.
 - You're told exactly *how* to do tasks, not just *what* to do.
 - You're afraid to make even small decisions on your own.
 - You feel like you're "performing" rather than working.
 - Every idea needs approval before you act on it.
 - Meetings often focus on tiny details instead of goals.
 - You get "feedback" that's mostly about format, tone, or style.
 - You notice your creativity dropping because you want to play it safe.
 - Your manager redoes your work instead of suggesting changes.
 - You rarely get asked, "What do you think?"
 - You sense your boss is stressed when things are out of their control.
 - You've caught yourself *micromanaging someone else* after being micromanaged.
 - You don't feel trusted, or you've stopped trusting others.
- How many did you check?
 - What are some possible reasons a manager might behave this way?
 - Which of these signs do you think happens most often in real life?
 - How could a manager avoid micromanaging without losing control?



3. Match the words/phrases with their meanings.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1. to lose control <i>f</i> | a. To stop going as planned or become chaotic |
| 2. Output <i>d</i> | b. To give tasks or decisions to others |
| 3. to delegate <i>b</i> | c. To give people confidence and authority to act |
| 4. to empower <i>c</i> | d. The total results or work produced |
| 5. to go off the rails <i>a</i> | e. To rely on someone's ability or honesty |
| 6. to trust <i>e</i> | f. To no longer have power or influence |



4. Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the words or phrases from exercise 3.

- a) When managers refuse *to trust* their teams to do their jobs properly, they end up spending all day checking tiny details instead of leading.
- b) After the new policy was introduced, the whole project started *to go off the rails* and nobody knew what to do next.
- c) Good leaders don't just give orders; they *empower* people to make their own decisions and grow.
- d) During the crisis, the CEO completely *lost control* of the situation and began calling every employee personally to ask for updates.
- e) If you try to do everything yourself, your team's overall *output* will suffer because no one learns to take responsibility.
- f) The best managers know how *to delegate* tasks effectively so they can focus on strategy instead of routine work.

Conditionals for Decision-Making

We often use if-sentences in professional English to talk about possible situations, decisions, or imagined outcomes. We can use if + will for real future situations, but we also often use modal verbs (*might, could, should, would*) to sound more diplomatic.

1. Real / Likely Situations (Present or Future) *Used for real possibilities or advice.*

If + present → modal / imperative / future

- If you trust your team, you **might** see better output.
- If you delegate more tasks, your team **will** grow faster.
- If the project goes off the rails, **stay** calm and focus on solutions.

2. Unreal or Hypothetical Situations (Imagined) *Used for advice, criticism, or reflection.*

If + past → would / could / might + verb

- If I empowered my staff more, they **would feel** more confident.
- If the CEO didn't lose control, the team **could stay** more motivated.
- If managers trusted employees fully, creativity **might increase**.

💡 Note: You can put if at the start or end of a sentence. Don't use a comma when it's at the end.

- ✓ *If you trust your team, they'll perform better.*
- ✓ *Your team will perform better if you trust them.*



5. Complete the sentences using the 1st or 2nd conditional, depending on the meaning.

- a) If the manager *delegate* (delegate) more tasks instead of trying to do everything alone, the team *would feel* (feel) more motivated.
- b) Productivity *will drop* (drop) fast if leaders *lose* (lose) control during the next crisis.
- c) If employees *had* (have) more freedom in this company, they *would come* (come) up with creative solutions.
- d) People *will trust* (trust) their boss more if feedback *is* (be) clear and consistent in the performance reviews next quarter.
- e) If a project *goes* (go) off the rails halfway through, the team *will need* (need) strong direction, not blame.
- f) If your boss *asked* (ask) for updates every hour like that, you *would start* (start) to feel watched.



6. Role-play: Work in pairs - one manager, one employee. Read your role card and have a short meeting to discuss and solve the problem. Try to use conditional sentences to suggest ideas and compromises.

Student A – The manager

You manage a small legal support team. One of your employees, Sophie, has recently made several small but important mistakes such as sending the wrong version of a contract, missing a client deadline, sending follow-ups late, and misfiling documents. You know she's talented and well liked by clients, but she tends to say yes to everything and take on too much at once. She seems disorganised under pressure, and lately her attention to detail has slipped.

You've started checking her work closely through daily updates, reviewing her emails, and joining her client calls. You believe you're protecting the team's reputation, but she's become defensive and distant.

Senior partners are putting you under pressure for flawless accuracy, faster results, and no client complaints. You're worried that if another mistake happens, it will reflect badly on you as a manager.



👉 Your goals: Explain the pressure you're under • Show you value Sophie but need accuracy • Ask how she feels about your approach • Find a new balance between trust and control

Student B – The Employee

You've worked for Alex for eight months. You like your job and your clients, but recently you've been overloaded with admin work and supporting several senior lawyers at once. It's hard for you to say no when people ask for help.

Because of this, you've made a few small mistakes such as attaching the wrong document for a client, missing a deadline, and sending a follow up late.

You apologised to the clients involved, but one situation in particular stood out. You called the client, explained the mistake, and sent the correct contract once everything was clarified. They were fine about it, but it made you realise how stretched you've been lately.

Since then, Alex has started checking everything you do, joining your calls, rewriting your drafts, and asking for constant updates.

You can tell he's stressed, but you don't really understand why he's reacting this way. His close supervision makes you more anxious and less productive, and you've started second guessing simple tasks.

You'd like to feel trusted again, but you also need clearer priorities and communication so you don't make mistakes under stress.



👉 Your goals: Explain what's causing your mistakes • Describe how micromanagement affects your confidence • Suggest changes to rebuild trust • Negotiate realistic solutions



7. Reflect on your role-play. Discuss with your partner or in small groups.

How well did you manage to find a balance between trust and control?

What conditional sentences did you use to make suggestions or compromises?

What helped you express disagreement politely?

What was the most difficult part: explaining, listening, or negotiating? Why?

If you were really in this situation, what would you do differently?

What advice would you give to both managers and employees to build trust?



8. Read and discuss.

When Great Workers Become Bad Managers

In many companies, the only way to earn a higher salary or recognition is to move into management.

The problem? Not everyone who's great at their job is great at leading people. Talented professionals often get promoted for their technical skills, not their leadership abilities. Suddenly, they're managing others, buried in meetings and deadlines, and under pressure to control every detail.

Some turn into anxious micromanagers; others miss the hands-on work that made them successful. In the process, organizations risk losing what made these people valuable in the first place — expertise, creativity, and motivation.

Forward-thinking companies are starting to change this.

- Google created a *dual-track career system*. One path for *people managers* and another for *individual contributors*. Senior engineers can earn the same pay and status as directors without managing anyone.
- Microsoft and Intel reward deep expertise through *Principal Engineer* and *Technical Fellow* roles that value innovation and mentoring rather than supervision.
- Spotify introduced "*expert career ladders*," where designers or data scientists can grow by leading through influence, not authority.

The trend is clear: companies are realising that career growth doesn't have to mean becoming a boss.

Discuss:

- Do you agree that companies are starting to recognise that not everyone wants, or should, be a manager? Why or why not?
- In your experience, how often do people become managers *because they're ambitious* rather than *because they're good at leading*?
- Have you ever seen someone move up the career ladder and become *less happy or less effective*? Why might that happen?
- Do you think a "dual track" system like Google's would work in your country or industry? Why or why not?
- Should management be considered a *specialisation*, something you study and train for, rather than a "promotion"?
- If you had to choose, would you rather be known as a great *leader* or a great *expert*? Why?



9. Watch the [video](#)¹ *Confessions of a Recovering Micromanager* by Chieh Huang (TED Talk). If your class time is limited, watch Part 1 (0:00–6:25) in class and Part 2 (6:26–end) for homework.

Part 1 – Watch and discuss (0:00 – 6:25)

- What does the speaker say is the *real definition* of micromanagement? *Taking great, imaginative people and then crushing their souls by controlling every small detail (like telling them what font to use).*
- How does he describe how it feels to be micromanaged? *It's exhausting and frustrating, you feel tired and controlled, as if someone is constantly watching over your shoulder.*
- Why do many managers end up micromanaging even when they don't want to? *Because as they get promoted, they stop doing the actual work and start managing others, they lose control over the output, which makes them anxious.*
- What example does he give about trying to control the way employees wrote customer notes? *He told people exactly how to write the notes (what pen, what font, what margins, what to say), which turned something fun into micromanagement.*
- How did his behaviour affect the team? *It killed creativity and motivation, employees complained to HR because they didn't want to be told how to write simple thank-you notes.*
- What do you think he'll realise about trust and control in the second half of the talk? *He'll realise that managers need to trust their employees more and accept that giving people freedom might lead to better results – even if it means some mistakes happen.*

Prediction: How do you think his ideas about control and failure will change in the second half of the talk?

Part 2 – Watch and choose (6:26 – end)

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| <p>1) What changed when the speaker stopped micromanaging?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People waited for instructions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People lost focus and made mistakes</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> People became more creative/independent</p> | <p>2) What does he say about failure?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It's a normal step toward success</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It shows poor planning</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's acceptable only if results are perfect</p> |
| <p>3) What does the engineers' project show about trust?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Teams need strict rules</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trusted teams can innovate on their own</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Freedom often wastes time</p> | <p>4) What does the "Pink Tax" example show about company culture?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Marketing focused only on selling</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employees acted on their own ideas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Managers approved every detail</p> |


¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AT5klu_yAQ

5) What is the main message of the talk?

- Managers reduce risk by checking details
- Trust is the real solution to micromanagement
- Leaders should ignore small problems

6) What attitude does the speaker show at the end?

- Indifference to his team's work
- Regret about being less strict
- Pride in his team's creativity

 **Follow-up:** Do you think managers in your company or industry would agree with Chieh Huang's approach? Why or why not?