Why Leaders Love to Solve Problemsâ??and Why We Need to Stop

Description

Most leaders are really good at solving problems. In many cases, itâ??s why we got promoted in the first place. And what happens is that once we move into a leadership role, we keep on solving problems instead of teaching others how to do it. It just becomes an engrained behavior pattern.

Itâ??s easy to see why this happens. We may think itâ??s faster to find a solution ourselves than to teach others how to do it. We may think our direct reports are too busy to take on anything more. We may think they canâ??t do it as well as we can. Mostly, though, solving problems is what weâ??ve always doneâ??and it just feels good.

This is a double-edged sword. What happens is we create a sense of dependency where people come to us for everything. This is what I call â??Park Ranger Leadership.â?• Leaders get used to swooping in and saving the day every time employees are lost in the wilderness. At times, like during emergencies, we may need to be park rangers. But it shouldnâ??t be our full-time job.

Park Ranger Leadership creates a workplace environment thatâ??s frustrating for both sides. Leaders are frustrated because it seems employees canâ??t think for themselves. Theyâ??re so busy putting out fires that thereâ??s no time to do anything else. Itâ??s exhausting. Employees are frustrated because they feel micromanaged.

I just read a *Harvard Business Review* [article](#) titled â??How to Get Your Team to Stop Asking You Every Little Question.â?• The author says the first step is to figure out *why* people feel the need to interrupt us with one â??quick questionâ?• after another. Do they lack confidence? Do they fear the consequences of making a mistake? Do they need more training? Are they in the wrong position? Once we see what role our own behavior plays in these dynamics, we can start correcting it.

The truth is both parties, leaders and employees, do things to create a micromanaging environment. It takes effort on both sides to create a company of solution-carriers.

Leaders need to start by asking that small but powerful question: *What do you recommend?* Employees know a lot more than they realize they do. They are closer to the work, so quite often they are in a better position to know the best solutions to problems than leaders are.

We also need to get clear on the value of delegation. When we delegate, we move action to the best place inside the organization. Itâ??s smart resource management. When leaders delegate, it frees them up to work on other, more crucial items. Plus, it allows others in the organization to become more valuable and to get engaged on a deeper level.

Here is an exercise that I recommend to leaders. Begin by creating these three columns:

    A. Things Only I Should Do
    B. Things Others Could Do While I Delegate

    C. Things I Should Never Be Involved With (Because My Team Is Competent)

Zero-in on each item in the B and C columns and take steps to shift them to others. This transition wonâ??t happen overnight. Assign a person to take over these tasks and a date by which it should happen.

This simple process can help you assess how effective you are at delegation. It can help you create a plan to begin delegating more so you can spend more time working *on* the business rather than *in* the business.

Not only does this exercise help you see where you have opportunities to improve, it forces you to pay attention to whatâ??s really going on. You might realize you need to do more skill-building, or that you arenâ??t being clear enough on responsibilities or outcomes, or that employees truly donâ??t have time to do the job well. You might realize you need better SOPs.

It can also help you realize if youâ??ve created a culture of rentership versus one of ownership. Sometimes people act like renters because they truly donâ??t understand the big picture and how their role fits in.

When you delegate a task to someone, explain *why* you are asking them to do it. Knowing the *why* keeps people from jumping to the wrong conclusions or going down the wrong path as they work to find a solution. This helps them think like owners. It also keeps them connected to a sense of meaning and purpose, which in turn keeps them motivated.

So what if youâ??re an employee who feels micromanaged? Hold up the mirror and be honest about your own behavior patterns. Do you wait for the boss to tell you what to do? Are you constantly asking, â??What should I do next? Now what?â?• When we do these things, weâ??re asking to be micromanaged.

If youâ??re not clear on what the boss wants from you, find out. Donâ??t be afraid to ask your boss, â??What does right look like? If I exceed expectations, what will I have done?â?•

Get in the habit of looking for solutions without being asked. The next time you encounter a problem, before asking the boss to fix it, bring a possible solution (or two or three) with you. Youâ??ll need the official go-ahead to implement it, but if youâ??ve already got the details worked out, youâ??ll save the boss a lot of work and youâ??ll speed along the process.

When leaders free up employees to find their own solutions, and when employees willingly step up to the plate to do so, everyone wins. As leaders, weâ??re able to spend our own time on higher-impact tasks. Plus, to delegate is to trust. When we trust employees to solve problems, we not only strengthen our relationship, weâ??re actually gifting them with the experiences they need to grow and develop. Thatâ??s what great leadership looks like.

Date Created
June 14, 2021
Author
quint-studer