

**Bullying, Micromanagement, and
Totalitarianism**

UnQuintessential Leadership Traits

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Micromanagement – An Unquintessential Leadership
Trait 2

Chapter 2: What is Micromanagement?..... 4

Chapter 3: Bullying – An Unquintessential Leadership Trait 7

Chapter 4: Totalitarianism – An Unquintessential Leadership Trait10

Chapter 1: Micromanagement - An Unquintessential Leadership Trait

In this book, we will examine several unquintessential leader traits juxtaposed with the quintessential leader traits that are the opposite.

This chapter will discuss why micromanagement is an unquintessential leader trait and how it negatively



affects everyone in the organization, either directly or indirectly, and is one of the fastest ways to stifle creativity, derail projects, demoralize teams, and lose valuable resources to competing organizations.

If you go to [Wikipedia's entry on Micromanagement](#), it is interesting to see very early a list of symptoms. Symptoms are usually associated with medical illnesses and medical conditions, all of which affect the human body adversely - you never, for example,

see *symptoms of good health*; instead, you see *benefits of good health*, so immediately it's evident that micromanagement is not a good thing from the global perspective down to the individual perspective.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary says to [micromanage](#) is "to manage especially with excessive control or attention to details." But it's really not managing. Instead it is imposing with force one's will in every aspect and detail onto others.

The first effect of this unquintessential leadership trait is that creativity is stifled. When one person forces all the people he or she is responsible for to do things exactly the way he or she would do it, any innovation, any creativity, any new - and better - way to do things is extinguished.

Additionally, more often than not, when a person imposes his or her way of doing things on others, it leads to disastrous results because unless the person has exactly the same personality, experience, temperament, and learning style as the micromanager, what emerges is a [square-peg-in-a-round-hole](#) scenario where the results are never what is expected and everyone ends up unhappy and frustrated.

This leads to project derailment and team and individual demoralization. If a team cannot deliver its micromanager's results, then the project ends up with overruns in time and resources and even at

whatever passes for completion is still not compatible with the specifications or the expected results. Part of this comes from team and individual demoralization. At some point, after extended micromanaging, the team and individuals “stay and quit.”

They do “whatever” and they’ve lost any interest, any investment, any concern about the outcome of the project. They just want to get it done and they don’t care how as long as it’s behind them. They capitulate.

And the demoralization continues after the faulty project is released and the problems and issues start pouring in, because the micromanager gets flack from executive management and he or she uses one standard excuse - which blames the team and specific individuals on the team - “if they/he/she had done it the way I told them to, it wouldn’t be like this. I can’t do anything with them/him/her!”

And once a team and individuals are demoralized, they start - and probably started during the project - looking for another organization to take their skills to, where some quintessential leadership is in place, and they’ll be able to contribute and to flourish and to bring great value to the organization.

It’s a win for whatever organization hires them, but a real loss to the one losing them.

A tell-tale symptom of micromanagement in organizations is a high-turnover rate and an inability to keep highly-qualified employees for very long.

If this is the case in the organization you work for, look at the unquintessential leader of that business unit or department or division because he or she is the problem, not the employees he or she is pointing the finger at.

So why do people micromanage anyway? In my experience, it is because they are essential insecure.

They see everyone as a potential threat to their authority. They don’t trust anyone and assume their team members will show them up if given the chance. They are irrationally suspicious of everyone and everything.

Micromanagers will destroy an organization and they must either be moved to a non-leadership position or removed from the organization if the organization is to be healthy, successful, growing and attracting the kind of talented team members that can ensure that path.

Chapter 2: What is Micromanagement?

In Chapter 1, we looked at a brief summary of the big-picture effects of micromanagement and how it is detrimental to success wherever its reach extends to.

Now I want to define, in detail, what micromanagement is.

It's a buzzword we hear a lot, but probably really don't understand well enough to truly understand how devastatingly negative its effects are.

Additionally, there are some micromanagers who don't realize they are micromanagers because they don't really understand what micromanaging is and they consider "micromanagement" to be just as negative as everyone else.

There are many symptoms of micromanagement, but here I will highlight the worst and most obvious.

The first is a micromanager has - and ensuring that he or she is - to be involved and the final authority of approval in every detail and decision in every part of a project/job. From a logical and objective standpoint, doing this is counterintuitive to common sense and practicality, but micromanagers aren't typically rational and practical.

What this looks like in practice is getting the way of successfully completing the project/job, becoming an obstacle and hinderance - which, as a consequence,

team members will spend their time, energy and focus that they should be dedicating to completing the project/job, in trying to figure out how to sidestep or get around -, and communicating to team members that they are neither trusted with *anything* nor are they needed.

Both of these messages are morale killers. Phrases that trigger a negative and highly-emotional response from the micromanager are team members using, usually, one of these phrases: "I decided," "I thought," "It seemed," and "I assumed."

The reasons behind this kind of behavior are quite interesting - even if dealing with it is a major pain.

One is that the micromanager believes he or she is the only one who knows how to do the project/job right. The fear of failure is behind this belief. It really is a lack of trust in anyone except himself or herself.

Another reason, which also demonstrates a lack of trust, is that if he or she isn't involved in every single detail, then the finished project/job won't be done right.

Ironically, because the micromanager is in the way of everyone and the process, the project/job usually doesn't end up being done right anyway.

Another symptom of micromanagement is forcing - and this is never gentle and actually is usually threatening, which gets into the realm of bullying,

another unquintessential leadership trait that will be discussed in the next chapter - everyone to do everything exactly the way the micromanager would.

This brings the expected failures - because no two people on the planet do everything exactly the same way and we each bring our personalities, temperaments, strengths and weaknesses, abilities (and lack of abilities), talents (and lack of talents), and perspectives to the table - because trying to be a carbon copy of someone else is impossible.

And the worst thing is that this unleashes unrelenting abusive behavior by the micromanager to try to force his or her team members to be carbon copies of him or her.

So the result is a never-ending cycle of force/failure that completely derails the project/job and completely destroys the relationships between the micromanager and his or her team members.

The reasons behind this symptom are also interesting. It is a combination of rigidity (micromanagers will call this “perfectionism” or “attention to detail”), ego and complete self-absorption - narcissism, in psychological terms - that stems from fear of failure.

The micromanager is convinced that the only right way to do everything is his or her way and cannot be convinced otherwise. Failure is not an option and in this very myopic and skewed way of thinking, any way but the micromanager’s way will lead to failure.

The reality, though the micromanager can’t see it as a direct result of his or her actions, is that failure is inevitable.

But here’s the rub.

Because the micromanager was in the middle of everything and doing everything in his or her power to get all the team members to do everything the “right way,” the micromanager can then - and always does - lay all the blame for failure on the team instead of himself or herself.

And, in the off chance that the project/job turns out to be moderately successful - glitches, mistakes, and errors notwithstanding - the micromanager’s excessive involvement will enable him or her to take full and complete credit for it.

Keeping score in detail is another symptom of micromanagement. When things go well, the micromanager will take all the credit and all the glory. When things go badly, he or she will immediately start pointing fingers at his or her team members.

Micromanagers actively look for negative traits or mistakes from their team members. They don’t care about positive traits or accomplishments - since they will take the credit for those anyway.

Micromanagers keep these lists of “deficiencies” at the ready and will use them frequently and

unexpectedly to remind team members of their “place.”

And the list never dies. If an employee stays long enough working for the same micromanager, he or she will hear about an early mistake - certainly corrected - years and years down the road. It is never forgotten.

Insecurity and fear are behind this trait. The micromanager keeps and uses at will a weapon that he or she believes gives him or her superiority and authority over other people.

It is a cruel and unprofessional way to keep the micromanager boosted up in his or her own eyes and in the eyes - or so they think - of their superiors.

This is another morale killer. More importantly, with time, this trait tends to be the one that undoes micromanagers with their superiors.

Here’s why.

Because turnover of employees is high under micromanagers, the “it’s their fault” wears thin with time.

Any intelligent person looking at a comprehensive track record where all the variables except one keep changing will eventually realize that the problem is the one variable that hasn’t changed: the micromanager.

Organizationally, the only practical and logical thing to do is to remove the micromanager - move to a non-leadership position if he or she has other skills the company needs and can use, strongly urge to retire or move to another organization, or terminate.

At any rate, once the cancer of micromanagement is removed, the organization will only then really be poised to be as successful as it can be.

Chapter 3: Bullying – An Unquintessential Leadership Trait

There is probably not a person of working age who has not worked for someone who was a bully.

While we may laugh and cringe at the same time at the bullying bosses portrayed in movies, like Meryl Streep’s character in [The Devil Wears Prada](#), bullying in real life work environments is demoralizing,



destructive, and will severely limit - and, in some cases prohibit - the efficiency, productivity, and success of

an organization.

Bullying, until recently, has been accepted as normal everywhere in life and something everyone just had to put up with and endure, including the workplace, and in many instances, people in supervisory roles (interestingly, it is typically “mid-level managers” who are most guilty of bullying) who bully are supported by executive management, while the employees are told to “deal or leave.”

Workplace bullying - the last of the social bastions where this kind of behavior can thrive and is routinely tolerated and ignored - can come in many forms, but generally has several defining characteristics.

First, the bullying supervisor actually does not bully everyone. He or she has a group of sychophants - and allies - who do not get bullied. These employees are above reproach, no matter what they do.

They are often deployed as snitches and ax-people for the bully. The bully can count on them to come to his or defense if employees not in the “inner circle” complain within the business unit or go to executive management.

Every bullying supervisor has two sides: the one most of his or her employees see, which is the bully, and the one that executive management sees, which is the deferential, get-things-done, strong and effective management person.

Executive management sees the bully this way because the bully always blames his or her employees when problems arise and is effective at deflecting any accusations of wrong-doing on his or her part.

Bullying supervisors flex their muscles all the time. They try to intimidate employees by constantly reminding them that they have control and that the employees will lose if push comes to shove. They threaten termination frequently. They nit-pick

constantly, trying to provoke employees into behaviors that can jeopardize the employees' jobs.

Once they find a really vulnerable target, they will stay on that employee, day and night, it seems, until they have won (the employee quits or is terminated).

Oddly, the bullying supervisor gets a great deal of satisfaction from "breaking" people and often points to these events like someone would a notch in his or her belt or a trophy.

Pervasive paranoia is another characteristic of bullying supervisors. They refuse to put anything in writing, preferring to do their yelling, screaming, cursing, and harassment verbally.

Even though they often blow up at the littlest things in front of all their employees, the intimidation factor, their allies who support them unconditionally, and the lack of concrete, documented evidence of the bullying leaves HR and executive management with the impression that complaints are just "disgruntled" employees.

Bullying supervisors tend to, if a meeting is how they decide to bully, surprise the employee - which doesn't give the employee adequate time to be able to get what he or she would need to document the meeting -, bring the employee into a private room with them and one or more of their sychophants, and demand that all electronics - cell phones, tablets, etc. - are turned off.

A lot of these bullies will actually ask, if the employee being bullied is a frequent victim, is the employee recording them.

Before the meeting is done, the bullying supervisor will threaten the employee with repercussions if he or she goes "over my head" to HR or executive management.

Bullying supervisors always blame their behavior on their employees. "If you did your job, I wouldn't have to scream and yell." "You make me angry because you don't listen to me." "If I didn't act like this, nothing would get done around here."

These are just a few of the phrases that bullying supervisors use to make their targets responsible for the bully's behavior.

Bullying supervisors cost a lot in organizational resources.

They are often the target of discrimination complaints within the organization, which interestingly, most HR departments and executive management in the organizations shrug off and ignore even when there is concrete evidence that the bullying supervisor is not following organizational policy and the mission statement of the organization.

This is usually what sends the bullied employees to employment attorneys and what eventually gets the

organization's attention and the bullying supervisor is either tamped down or terminated.

If you wonder why, employment laws target HR and executive management, so if they've let a bullying supervisor run wild and done nothing about it, then they are suddenly in the hot seat and this gets the attention of the board of directors - who can terminate anyone for anything any time.

Employment attorneys are generally successful because bullying supervisors all tend to do the same things that eventually trip them up.

The first two are obvious: not following documented organization policies and rules and the lack of concern on the part of an organization's HR department and executive management.

Another is that supervising bullies tell on themselves through their employee reviews. The sycophants get glowing reviews and the rest of the employees get mediocre to horrible reviews over and over.

A fourth thing is that bullying supervisors always continually change their stories about discipline or termination, which destroys the organization's credibility in an employment harassment or discrimination lawsuit.

And the fifth is that bullying supervisors tend to want to bully anyone who is in their way, so the same behaviors that the employee is suing for tend to come

out as the investigation unfolds. The bullying supervisors end up being witnesses for the defense in the cases against them and the organizations they work for.

So why would an organization keep a bullying supervisor and take the risk of losing a lot of good talent along the way?

Part of the answer is the two-faced nature of a bully supervisor, but another part is what frequently happens with HR departments and executive management: they simply lose touch with why they work for the organization to begin with and the capacity and willingness to walk in their employees' shoes.

In other words, they live in glass houses where all the windows are mirrored so that the only thing they can see when they look into them are themselves and that's all they end up caring about.

To lose even one good and talented employee to a supervising bully is one too many. We've all got our battle scars from our experiences with the bullies who've lined the ways of our careers.

It is imperative to both get rid of bullies wherever they exist in an organization and to be self-checking as leaders to ensure we are not slipping to becoming bullies ourselves. That is what a quintessential leader does.

Chapter 4: Totalitarianism - An Unquintessential Leadership Trait

Totalitarianism is generally used to describe a political ideology, but in its wider meaning it refers to anyone or any system - educational, organizational, religious, social, etc. - that assumes to him, her, or itself unlimited and absolute power and uses that self-assumed power corruptly to create an atmosphere of fear that is characterized by strong-armed coercion and intolerance of opposing ideas, legitimate questions, and input from others by using threats of isolation, retribution, and destruction to try to control other people and to assert him or herself or itself as the sole source of everything that is right.

Anyone and anything that disagrees or questions is wrong and, therefore, must be eliminated.

At the heart of totalitarianism is insecurity, fear, and vanity. Anyone or any entity that cannot stand up to the testing of ideas, opening the door for input from the team, or disagreement based on perspective, personality, and experience is the antithesis of quintessential leadership.

Totalitarianism, at its core, involves imposed thought policing - internal and external - and its hallmark feature is worry about, threatening about, punishing, and eliminating - by requiring the people who are

under this system to give up original, critical, and, in fact, all thinking - thought crime.

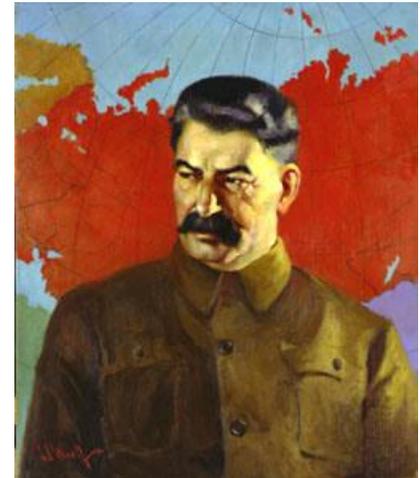
Both of these terms originated in [George Orwell's](#) seminal novel, [1984](#), which was based, in part, on what [Joseph Stalin](#) was doing with his purges and pogroms in the [Soviet Union](#) during the 1940's.

The problems with totalitarianism are manifold and extant. We see its results - and abject failure - in both Stalin's Soviet Union and [Adolf Hitler's Third Reich](#) in Germany during the 1930's and 1940's.

The most obvious problem with this kind of system is that it has no built-in restraints, no checks and balances, and no stabilizing influences. Although there will be a minority of [Winston Smith's](#) in every

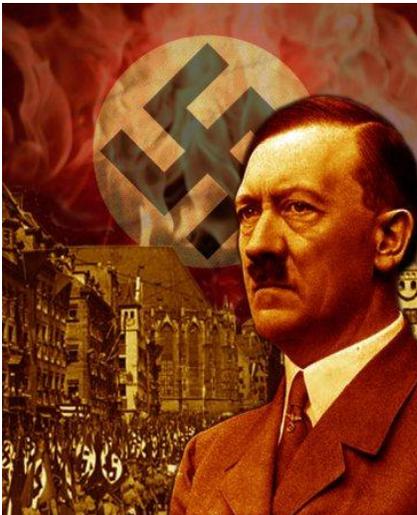
totalitarian system, most people will willingly - and, surprisingly, from my point of view - suspend and give up their own thinking and adopt the system thinking because it's the path of least resistance and it doesn't require any effort.

Solomon refers to the burdensome effort required of thinking people in [Ecclesiastes 1:18](#).



Without restraints, without checks and balances, without stabilizing influences, all of which come from external input, ideas, perspectives, and, at times, dissenting opinions, anything, no matter how bizarre, no matter how perverse, no matter how cruel, no matter how destructive, no matter how untrue, and no matter how wrong becomes sane, normal, humane, creative, true and right.

Everything logical, rational, and reasonable becomes illogical, irrational, and unreasonable.



The moral and intellectual underpinnings that govern humanity, at least in a lip-service way that most people adhere to, are completely destroyed.

Totalitarianism also breeds and encourages distrust and suspicion.

Everyone is a possible enemy, a possible traitor, a possible threat to the system. Revealing suspected enemies, traitors, and threats is rewarded by promotion and perks, while hiding or being suspected enemies, traitors, and threats is punished swiftly and mercilessly.

Brutality in the form of very public, highly-visible, and continual harassment, threats, humiliation, and, eventually, elimination and destruction is the energy that sustains totalitarianism.

An example of how badly things can go if a person bucks the system is all most people need to stay subservient and continue to blindly follow folly and willingly ignore egregious wrongs, errors, and dishonesty. Brutality is the enforcer when nothing else works.

As quintessential leaders, we need to make sure our systems of dealing with our teams are not totalitarian.

A quintessential leader will recognize that he or she doesn't know everything, doesn't have all the answers, doesn't have all the experience, doesn't have all the perspectives, and doesn't have all the talents and abilities to come up with a solitary right way of doing something.

If a totalitarian is insecure and lacks self-confidence, a quintessential leader, then, is not insecure and has confidence, not only in him or herself, but also in the team he or she is leading.

Not trusting our teams means we don't trust ourselves and our leadership abilities with that team.

Personally, I tell every team I lead two things up front: (1) I'd rather have you disagree with me and

give me concrete reasons why you disagree with me than have you agree with me without being able to tell me why you agree with me; and, (2) Don't come to me with a problem unless you're prepared to offer a solution to that problem.

Why?

Because everyone on that team has something unique to offer in the way they approach ideas, their experiences, their personalities, their work styles, and how they think.

I want them to think, because it's hard to think for yourself and everyone else!

If I don't encourage them to think, to step up to the plate and participate and contribute, then I'm letting them down.

And I realize I may be only one of a few, if not the only one, they work with who will encourage and allow them to grow personally and professionally toward their full potential. I have that responsibility to them.

Because I know in the course of their careers and their lives, they're going to have more totalitarians in charge than anything else.

And I want them to be able to fight that - to retain the essence of who they are in principle, in action, in thinking - no matter what the cost.

Because I know the cost of giving that up is higher than any other cost that is exacted of them.

Quintessential leaders don't have to try to control everyone and everything around them. They value the people on their teams - and in their lives - for what makes each of those people unique, valuable, and an integral part of the process, whatever the project, from start to finish.

We need to make sure we let the people we lead and the people in our lives know this.

Tell them frequently. Encourage them to contribute.

Thank them for being part of the process and the solution.

And show them you appreciate that they think, they can disagree without being disagreeable, and that they are growing into the potential you see in them.