



ESL Podcast 320 – Micromanaging the Staff

GLOSSARY

to check up on (someone) – to review someone’s progress; to see how someone is doing

* Miranda asked another supervisor to check up on her employees while she was away working in another office last week.

task – a small project; something that one needs to do and finish, especially at work

* Becky has to finish three tasks today: call the lawyer, finish the report, and send the invitations.

to micromanage – to control all the details of how someone does his or her work

* Sue is always micromanaging her employees, even telling them the color of pen they should use.

to observe – to watch something without interfering; to see how something is happening, but not doing anything to change it

* The researchers are observing the children as they play with each other to study human behavior.

to look over (someone’s) shoulders – to closely watch someone while they’re doing something

* I know that we need to finish this proposal as soon as possible, but it doesn’t help me work any faster if you look over my shoulders all the time.

trust – a belief that another person is good or reliable; a belief that another person will not do anything to hurt oneself

* Alice lost her trust in her doctor when he shared her private medical information with another patient.

meticulous – very detail-oriented; very careful; paying attention to all the details

* Qian’s handwriting is meticulous, with all the letters being the same size.

to monitor – to observe; to watch something closely; to see how something changes over time

* The nurse is monitoring the patient’s blood pressure.

resentful – feeling unhappy about something that is not fair or right

* Terry became resentful when his mother told him he couldn’t use her car anymore.



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to have more faith in (something) – to trust in something; to believe that something is real or possible

* Your boss would have more faith in you if you finished all your reports on time.

incompetent – unable to do something; incapable of doing something; without the ability to do what one is supposed to do

* The new cashier is incompetent. She can't even count money!

control freak – a person who wants to be in control of everything all the time; a person who cannot let other people lead a project; a person who wants to control every detail of something

* Polly is such a control freak that she won't even let her husband put the dishes away, because she's worried he might put them in the wrong places.

tactic – strategy; a way of doing something

* What is your company's tactic for increasing sales this year?

disgruntled – unhappy, disappointed, and annoyed about something that has happened

* The factory workers are disgruntled because they've been asked to work an extra hour each day without more pay.

to butt in – to become involved in something that one shouldn't be a part of

* Harold butted into our private conversation, even though no one was talking to him.

fine by me – a phrase meaning that one has no objections to something; a phrase meaning "okay," "it's alright," or "that's fine."

* I asked Katie if we could come to her party, and she said, "Fine by me."



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Jane checking up on Rudy?
 - a) Because he is sick and needs a medical exam.
 - b) Because she wants to learn how to do his task.
 - c) Because she wants to see how he's doing the task.

2. How do Rudy and Jena feel about Jane?
 - a) They think she's a wonderful boss.
 - b) They think she's resentful of them.
 - c) They think she doesn't trust them.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

trust

The word “trust,” in this podcast, means a belief that another person is good or reliable: “It’s difficult to have a good relationship without trust.” The verb “to trust” has the same meaning: “Shane lied to me once, and now I can’t trust him anymore.” A “trust” is also a legal arrangement that gives one person or organization control of money until someone reaches a certain age: “When Kira’s grandfather died, his money went into a trust for her, and she’ll be able to spend the money when she turns 18.” A “charitable trust” is an organization that receives money from many people, invests that money, and then gives it to other organizations that help other people: “This organization helps the poor, and receives most of its money from a charitable trust.”

to butt in

In this podcast, the phrase “to butt in” means to become involved in something that one shouldn’t be a part of: “Renee had to ask her mother-in-law to stop butting in every time she argued with her husband.” The phrase “to butt in” also means to interrupt, or to speak when someone else is speaking: “Vance was explaining his opinion, but another student butted in and started telling him he was wrong.” The rude phrase “to butt out” is used to tell someone to stop being involved in a situation, or to go away: “What I do with my life is my business, so please butt out and stop telling me what to do!” Finally, the phrase “to butt heads” means to argue, or to not agree on something: “The two men are always butting heads at the office, arguing about whose ideas are better.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, people have many different “management styles,” or ways of leading people at work. Here are descriptions of four common management styles.

In an “autocratic” management style, the manager has all the “power” (ability to make decisions and do things). The autocratic manager decides what needs to be done and tells his or her employees exactly how to do it. Most people do not like to work for autocratic managers, but sometimes the style is very “effective” (good at getting things finished quickly, well, and inexpensively). Most “military officers” (people who work in the army, navy, etc.) are autocratic managers.

A “paternalistic” management style is one where the manager acts more like a parent. The paternalistic manager still has all the power, but he or she does what is best for the employees. Many employees like working in this environment, but it isn’t good for the business. Also, the employees “tend” (are likely to do something) to become dependent on the manager and are unable to make their own decisions.

A “democratic” management style is like a “democracy” (a system of government where everyone has the right to vote). Employees help the manager in making decisions. There is a lot of communication and employees feel that they are “valued” (that the company needs them). Unfortunately, it takes a long time to make decisions in this environment, and for that reason, it isn’t always a good “option” (choice) for businesses in fast-moving industries.

Finally, a manager with a “laissez-faire” management style gives his or her employees “independence” (the ability to make one’s own decisions) and tries not to control their work. This may be good for very “creative” (imaginative) employees who are designing products, but in other environments it can become “chaotic” (disorganized and confusing).

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 320:
Micromanaging the Staff.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 320. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Take a look at our new ESL Podcast Blog, where you can get the latest news from ESL Podcast on the things we're doing, as well as comments and ideas from Lucy and me. While you're on our homepage, you can also download a Learning Guide to this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions not talked about on the podcast, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is called "Micromanaging the Staff." It's a dialogue between Barry and Jane about how you should manage, or how you should supervise other people. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Barry: Where are you going?

Jane: I'm checking up on Rudy. I gave him a task an hour ago and I want to make sure he's doing it right.

Barry: You're not micromanaging again, are you?

Jane: Of course not. I'm only going to observe his work and make sure that he's following the detailed instructions I gave him.

Barry: That sounds like micromanaging. If you're always looking over their shoulders, how are you ever going to develop trust with your employees?

Jane: My employees will earn my trust by being meticulous with their work. Good employees don't mind me monitoring their progress.

Barry: That may be true, but I heard Rudy and Jena talking and they said they're feeling a little resentful that you don't have more faith in their ability. They feel like you're treating them as though they're incompetent.



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Jane: I am not. You're making me sound like a control freak.

Barry: I just call them like I see them. Micromanaging is a bad tactic and I can see why your employees are disgruntled.

Jane: I resent that. I have a very good working relationship with my employees.

Barry: I'm sure you do. I was just trying to help. I'm really not trying to butt in.

Jane: Fine. You manage your staff the way you think best and I'll manage mine.

Barry: Fine by me.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Barry asking Jane, "Where are you going?" Jane responds, "I'm checking up on Rudy." To "check up on someone" means to review someone's progress; to see how someone is doing, usually someone who works for you or someone that you are supervising. To "check up on" is a phrasal verb, and it is used here to talk about a boss who is supervising an employee. Jane says, "I gave him (Rudy) a task an hour ago and I want to make sure he's doing it right" – he's doing it correctly. A "task" is a small project, usually something at your work. Something that you need to do and finish – a "task."

Barry says, "You're not micromanaging again, are you?" To "micromanage" means to try to control all of the details of how someone does his or her work – trying to make sure that you are controlling every little step. This is often considered a bad idea, because your employee doesn't have a chance to develop their own skills, but some people, obviously, think this is necessary in some cases.

Jane says to Barry's question, "Of course not (I'm not micromanaging). I'm only going to observe his work and to make sure that he's following the detailed instructions I gave him." Jane is going to observe, or watch, his work. She's not going to interfere, she's not going to change anything; she's just going to look and see what he is doing.

Barry says, "That sounds like micromanaging. If you're always looking over their shoulders, how are you ever going to develop trust with your employees?" The expression "to look over someone's shoulder" means to watch someone very closely while they are doing something. So you could be literally – actually –



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standing behind the person and looking and seeing what they are doing. My wife does this sometimes when I'm washing the dishes; she wants to make sure I'm doing it right, so she's always "looking over my shoulder." Barry is saying if you're always checking up on your employees – always observing them – "how are you ever going to develop trust with your employees?" "Trust" is, in this case, a belief that someone else is good or reliable, a belief that someone else will do something correctly.

Jane says, "My employees will earn my trust by being meticulous with their work." Notice we use the expression "to earn (earn) someone's trust." To "earn" normally means to get money – to make money, but here you're saying that you have to do something in order to deserve it – in order to get that reward. So, her "employees will earn" her "trust by being meticulous." "Meticulous" (meticulous) means very careful, very detail oriented. Paying attention to all of the details, that's "meticulous."

Jane says, "Good employees don't mind me monitoring their progress." To "monitor" means to observe – to watch over closely. Barry says, "That may be true, but I've heard Rudy and Jena talking and they said they're feeling a little resentful that you don't have more faith in their ability." Rudy and Jena are Jane's employees; they've been talking and they feel resentful. To "feel resentful," or to "be resentful," means you're unhappy about something that isn't correct – that isn't fair. The noun is "resentment." So, the employees are feeling resentful that Jane doesn't "have more faith in their ability." To "have faith" in something means to trust in something – to believe that something is real or possible.

Barry says Rudy and Jena "feel like you're treating them as though they're incompetent." "Incompetent" means unable or incapable of doing something. Someone who doesn't have the ability to do something, someone who hasn't learned how to do something but tries to do it anyway – we would say they're "incompetent." It's a very negative word to describe an employee, or anyone.

Jane says, "I am not," meaning I am not treating them as though they're incompetent. "You're making me sound like a control freak." A "control freak" (freak – two words) is a person who wants to be in control of everything all the time, someone who always needs to be the boss – the person who is taking care of and controlling a situation. I am a control freak; my wife is a control freak – this often causes problems since we both want to be in control. That's a "control freak."



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Barry says, “I just call them like I see them (I just tell the truth). Micromanaging is a bad tactic and I can see why your employees are disgruntled.” A “tactic” is a way of doing something, similar to the word “strategy.” It’s a “tactic” – it’s the way I do something. Barry is saying that “Micromanaging is a bad tactic and I can see (I can understand) why your employees are disgruntled.” To be “disgruntled” means to be unhappy, to be disappointed, to be annoyed about something that has happened.

Jane says, “I resent that.” We had “resentful” before; “resent” is the verb. “I resent that” – this means I feel sad or disappointed by what you are saying. Jane says, “I have a very good working relationship with my employees.” Barry says, “I’m sure you do. I was just trying to help.” That’s an expression we use when the other person is upset by something that you’ve told him or her – some advice that you gave them that they didn’t want. “I was just trying to help. I’m really not trying to butt in.” To “butt (butt) in” is another phrasal verb meaning to become involved in something that you shouldn’t be a part of – to try to be part of a situation where you don’t have any right to be in.

Jane says to Barry, “Fine (meaning okay). You manage your staff the way you think is best and I’ll manage mine,” meaning stop trying to interfere with me – don’t butt in. Barry says, “Fine by me.” The expression “fine by me” means okay, it’s all right. It means I don’t have any objection to what you are saying – “fine by me.” Sometimes we say that after we have a disagreement with someone, it expresses a little bit of anger, a little bit of disappointment – at least it does in this dialogue

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Jane: Fine. You manage your staff the way you think best and I'll manage mine.

Barry: Fine by me.

[end of dialogue]

The script for this podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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