

The Tour

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“Chris, I’d like to really take a tour of the club, look under the hood, kick the tires. You know, really get to know what I’ve got here. Oh, you don’t need to walk around with me, just get me a set of keys and I can handle the rest. Oh, I’d like to speak individually with each of the direct reports. You know, so I can get to know them and really understand how they tick and what I can do to get them motivated. How’s tomorrow work for the tour? Just leave some keys with Amy, in the office.”

Chris had been the GM for several years and knew Bob fairly well through their work together on the Board of Directors. Bob was once the vice president and had recently assumed the role of president. As a recently retired owner of a small plumbing company, Bob was smart, energetic, and highly motivated to let his club friends know that he was in charge. With over twenty years of club membership, Bob was well-known to everyone.

Even though Bob had been a member for decades, the role of president was new to him and came with a different set of pressures. First and foremost was peer pressure: the desire to do a great job in the eyes of his friends. Secondarily—and most likely the cause of Bob’s sudden interest in the detailed workings of the club—there is the pressure that people place on themselves when their confidence level is lower than usual. On a scale of one to ten, Bob was a ten when it comes to the plumbing business. When it came to club management, however, Bob was a three. As a result, he naturally defaulted to what made him successful in the plumbing business – hard, detail-oriented work. Since he had only a year to become an expert, he needed to hurry.

Bob’s behavior is not unusual. When we are in an emotional state that causes us discomfort, we naturally gravitate towards whatever makes us feel more comfortable. Managers often find that first-time presidents like Bob tend to be very detail-oriented until their confidence increases. Once they have been in the position for a while and have become more comfortable with it, their interest in the details diminishes. In the meantime, however, Chris should be taking the pulse of the other directors to see how they feel about this new tone. If the fellow directors agree that Bob’s behavior is not generating a good environment, there are techniques to be used to bring Bob’s direction in line with the preferred governance.

As usual, a manager directly attacking a director is not a great strategy. Instead, it’s best to allow director allies to do some of the heavy lifting. Heavy lifting includes getting Bob to understand that micromanaging is not productive in the long run. In the *Harvard Business Review* article “How to Stop Micromanaging Your Team,” Rebecca Knight suggests that micromanaging hurts morale, establishes a tone of mistrust, and limits your team's growth. While micromanagers might like the idea of being “in the loop,” their behavior ultimately prove detrimental to the organization. Director allies who have Bob’s ear should encourage him to become aware of his behavior and take some simple steps to bring it under control:

CEO	21	10	32	33	28	35	20	23
Small Business Owner	32	12	22	30	24	33	22	25
Entrepreneur	32	6	27	33	25	36	17	25
Financial	24	12	31	34	21	32	23	21
Sales	20	11	32	26	26	37	22	26
Attorney	15	15	29	33	36	32	20	21

With this understanding, a GM may be able to predict the operational interest of a new president based on occupation alone. Such predictions are certainly not exact, but it might allow a GM to reasonably anticipate that a small business owner such as Bob would be interested in the details of the club.

Though Bob’s micromanaging has the potential to become problematic, denying Bob his tour might not be the best method for discouraging his intensity. Instead, Chris might make this an opportunity to give Bob the needed confidence he’s searching for by orchestrating the tour himself. Bob needs to get comfortable, and Chris can help Bob get comfortable by building his confidence in Chris, setting the stage for a solid managerial future. Deliberate time, patience, and respect at this juncture will pay dividends in the future, so Chris should see this as a career opportunity, rather than an excruciating day of hand-holding. Chris should also remember that communication between directors about their manager is swift, so controlling the frame of that communication is beneficial. Bob is perceptive, and any sign that Chris is being anything less than supportive will get immediately communicated to other directors, who are very unlikely to take Chris’s side.

Chris might want to start out with a breakfast or lunch to talk about the day’s goals. Chris can structure the tour so that all the club areas are thoroughly scrutinized. A meeting with direct reports should be held, with Chris present, so that they can show their level of collaboration and expertise. This is an opportunity to show how professional the organization actually is. While Bob means well, he’s taking both the directors and the management team down a difficult road, and it’s incumbent on the GM to alter the course. If not, the situation will become untenable, with unpleasant results for everyone. Many managers interviewed in our survey stressed the value of keeping leaders informed, guiding the directors towards generative and strategic issues, having standard decision making procedures as part of the Board Operations Manual, and being patient. Because Chris knows Bob and his history, Chris can avoid being caught flatfooted by preemptively asking Bob if he wanted a tour, and setting up discussions with the direct reports. This kind of deliberate openness allows GMs to stay ahead of the situation and keeps the relationship with the president productive and positive.

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