

## MONKEY BUSINESS

**CLASSIC:** Perhaps the best-ever article on the subject of delegation is also about time management and the politics of power. "Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?" by William Oncken Jr. and Donald L. Wass, debuted in *Harvard Business Review* in 1974 and was reprinted in the November-December 1999 issue with new commentary by Stephen R. Covey. Swapping metaphors (the contemporary cliché regarding 800-pound gorillas makes that monkey sound a tad trite), the article explains with clarity and wit how managers can avoid becoming walking lint collectors for their subordinates' problems. "Are you carrying a load you shouldn't be?" asks InfoPosse member Klein. "Read this and unburden yourself."

Many managers feel overwhelmed. They have too many problems--too many monkeys--on their backs. All too often, they say, they find themselves running out of time while their subordinates are running out of work. Such is the common phenomenon described by the late William Oncken, Jr., and Donald L. Wass in this 1974 HBR classic. They tell the engaging story of an overburdened manager who has unwittingly taken on all of his subordinates' problems. If, for example, an employee has a problem and the manager says, "Let me think about that and get back to you," the monkey has just leaped from the subordinate's back to the manager's. This article describes how the manager can delegate effectively to keep most monkeys on the subordinate's back. It offers suggestions on the care and feeding of monkeys and on how managers can transfer initiative. In his accompanying commentary, Stephen R. Covey discusses both the enduring power of this message and how theories of time management have progressed beyond these ideas. Management thinkers and executives alike now realize that bosses cannot just give a monkey back to their subordinates. Subordinates must first be empowered, and that's hard and complicated work. It means bosses have to develop their subordinates and establish trust. Perhaps even more important and relevant than it was 25 years ago, Covey says, this article is a powerful wake-up call for managers at risk for carrying too many monkeys.

### One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey

*One Minute Managers are wise to use the four rules of Monkey Management to avoid doing other people's work for them.*

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Do you ever go home feeling you spent the whole day working off of other people's "To Do" list rather than you own? Do you feel you are doing more but accomplishing less? Do you constantly remind your family you are doing it all for them?

If you identify with these questions, welcome to the nineties! Your life may seem out of control, but it doesn't have to be if you learn the art of Monkey Management, described in our book *The One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey*.

#### **What are Monkeys?**

A monkey is the "next move," as is illustrated in the following scenario:

You are walking down the hall, when you encounter one of your people, who says, "Good morning, Boss. Can I see your for a minute? We have a problem." You need to be aware of your people's problems so you stand there in the hallway listening while he explains the

problem in some detail. Because problem solving is your cup of tea, time flies. When you finally glance at your watch, what seemed like 5 minutes has been 30 and the discussion has made you late for where you were headed.

You know just enough about the problem to know you will have to be involved, but not yet enough to make a decision. So you say, "This is a very important problem, but I don't have any more time to discuss it now. Let me think about it and I'll get back to you." With that the two of you part company.

As a detached observer, you easily see what happened in that scenario. But you will find it much harder to see the picture when you are in the middle of it.

Before you met one of your people in the hall, the monkey was on your staff member's back. While you were talking, the matter was under joint consideration, so the monkey had one leg on each of your backs. But when you said, "Let me think it over and get back to you," the monkey moved its leg from your subordinate's back onto your back, and your subordinate walked away 30 pounds lighter. Why? Because the monkey then had both of its legs firmly planted on only your back.

Now, if the matter under consideration was part of your staff member's job and if he was perfectly capable of bringing along some proposed solutions to the problem, when you allowed that monkey to leap onto your back, you volunteered to do two things a person working for you is generally expected to do: 1) you accepted the responsibility for the problem from the person, and 2) you promised him a progress report.

Just to make sure that you know who's the new boss, the next day your staff member stops by your office several times to say, "Hi Boss. How's it coming?" If you haven't resolved the matter to your staff's satisfaction, he will suddenly be pressuring you to do what is actually his job.

Managers have to be careful not to pick up other people's monkeys because when they do, they are often telling their employees they do not have the skills to care for and feed the monkeys themselves. Managers who grab monkeys off their people's back often kill initiative, and everyone is left waiting for the boss to "make the next move."

Nobody wins when you care for and feed other people's monkeys. You become a hassled manager and do not feel very good about yourself; and you have workers or staff who are looking to satisfy their needs elsewhere because they are feeling impotent. They can't move. They feel dependent on the boss. The care and feeding of other people's monkeys is the ultimate lose-lose deal.

#### **Four Rules for Managing Monkeys**

Bill Oncken developed four rules of monkey management to help managers give back monkeys without being accused of buck passing or abdication. These are the rules:

**Rule #1 - Describe the monkey:** The dialogue between a manager and a staff member must not end until appropriate next moves have been identified and clearly specified.

**Rule #2 - Assign the monkey:** All monkeys shall be owned and handled at the lowest organization level consistent with their welfare.

**Rule #3 - Insure the monkey:** Every monkey leaving you on the back of one of your people must be covered by one of two insurance policies: 1) recommend, then act, and 2) act, then advise.

**Rule #4 - Check on the monkey:** Proper follow-ups mean healthier monkeys. Every monkey should have a check-up appointment.

If you follow Oncken's four rules of monkey management, you will stop viewing your people as a major source of your problems and will soon start seeing them as major solutions to your problems because each of their backs is a depository for several monkeys.

### **Managing Performance**

Managing monkeys is at the heart of managing and reviewing performance, which involves three parts: 1) performance planning, 2) day-to-day coaching, and 3) performance evaluation.

**Performance planning.** Make it clear what you are asking people to do and what good behavior looks like. In many ways Oncken's four rules of monkey management are a beautiful step-by-step process of performance planning. Depending on your level of confidence in the person's ability to handle the task, you would either provide close supervision (Insurance Level 1), or allow the person to take initiative and then report back (Insurance Level 2). In either case you then schedule a check-up appointment which sets up on-going supervision.

One Minute Goal Setting, the first secret of The One Minute Manager, comes into play when you make sure (before you part company) who has the next move, who owns it, how much authority the person has and when you are going to check up on him. In effect, you say to the person, "Since we've done our performance planning, why don't you do what we've agreed you're going to do." What you're really setting up with the check-up appointment is an on-going coaching process where you can obtain information, check on monkeys, monitor performance and prevent problems.

**Day-to-day coaching.** Through effective coaching, you help your people to care for and feed their own monkeys. In day-to-day coaching, you'll want to use the other two secrets of The One Minute Manager: praising and reprimanding.

- **Praising.** During a check-up appointment, you must determine how well somebody has cared for and fed a monkey and decide what you can praise about the performance. Praising progress reinforces the desired behavior and helps people to develop the skills to handle an entire project and be in charge of a series of next moves.

Remember the three rules of One Minute Praising. First, praise people as soon as possible after observing the desired behavior. Don't save praises for a holiday. If the person is inexperienced, schedule a check-up appointment soon after giving the assignment so you can praise progress. Second, be specific. Tell the person what you liked. Don't wait for the perfect performances; remember, if you punish a learner, you will immobilize him and cause him to avoid your check-ups. Always accent the positive, especially with new performers. Third, share how you feel about what the person did. That is, describe your emotions to add evidence to your message.

After you have praised progress, redirect the person by saying, "Okay, here's what you did. Now let's take a look at that in terms of what you might do next time." Redirect the

next move, making sure the person knows who owns the problem, and set up your insurance policy and your check-up appointment again.

Oncken's four rules are a way to monitor performance. As people get better and better and take more responsibility, you can loosen up your insurance policy and have fewer and fewer check-up appointments. Praising progress and redirecting really go together until you feel that the person you are supervising is to the point where he or she can handle more responsibility.

Now, if you find yourself constantly monitoring, checking behavior and redirecting a person who is making little progress, you might have to do some career planning with him because he might be in the wrong job.

□□ **Reprimanding.** What do you do if you feel one of your people is not performing up to her potential because of a poor attitude? Are you going to praise progress or redirect? Neither. If this person is doing sloppy work and you know the person can do better then you move to the third secret of the One Minute Manager: the One Minute Reprimand.

Reprimands are for people who have the skills to do the job. You don't reprimand people who don't have the skills.

When reprimanding someone, remember these four rules:

- 1) Do it as soon as possible - don't save reprimands in a gunnysack and dump them on your employee six months later;
- 2) Be as specific as possible - tell the person exactly what she did wrong;
- 3) Tell the person why you are disappointed and how you feel; and
- 4) Reaffirm the person. You might say: "The real reason I am upset is because you are better than this. I want to see you back here tomorrow morning at 9 a.m., and I want to see the kind of work that I know you can do." You're saying, "You're okay as a person, but the way you handled this monkey is inappropriate."

In managing the monkey this way, you improve the person's behavior while maintaining her self-esteem.

**Performance evaluation.** If you use Oncken's four rules of monkey management, your performance evaluations will fall in line because performance will be done well. Often managers spend all their time on setting up evaluations and little time on performance planning and day-to-day coaching. Oncken's rules of monkey management overcome that.

In summary, you can get the most value out of Monkey Management and One Minute Management by using these principles together. Who knows? With these techniques, maybe you'll have a chance to take care of your own work instead of everyone else's!

Source:

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*National Business News*

May 1990

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