



How to Deal With the Over-dependent Employee

By Velsoft Courseware Inc., 2005

Problem or situation: You have an employee who takes a lot of your time in comparison to the other employees who report to you. She doesn't make decisions without clearing them with you, even when you have indicated it is within her powers to make them. She consults with you on every problem, even minor ones. She asks directions on what to do about what you believe to be routine work. You would of course prefer that she act more on her own, that she exercise more initiative and that she assumes more responsibility—so you can do your own work. What should you do?

Recommendations:

Assess your own contribution to the problem. What might you have been doing to cause this employee to feel she has to check everything with you? Ask yourself the following questions: Could I be looking over her shoulder too closely, out of worry about what is happening or is about to happen? If you ask too many questions about what is going on, employees may feel they don't have your confidence.

Am I sharing information often enough? People who are in the dark about budget constraints, specific goals for the future or day-to-day concerns may feel they don't know enough to act on their own.

Do I ever bypass this individual when I share information or pass out assignments?

Could I have been too critical about past mistakes? Stinging remarks about errors may have discouraged the employee from taking further risks.

Don't help automatically. The next time the employee comes to you with a question about a problem, don't provide an automatic solution. If you reply, "What do you think we should do?" you've begun to get the idea across that you don't see yourself as the ultimate source of all knowledge. The employee's first response to your unexpected question may be tentative and incomplete but it's a start.

Use questions instead of recommendations. If the employee comes to you with a plan or an idea that has several flaws, don't point them out immediately. Instead, ask questions that can lead her to spot them and decide on her own how to deal with them. For example, "Are you absolutely sure you've done enough research? Do you think this deadline is realistic? or What are some things that might go wrong?" may help the employee critique her own ideas/projects. If she is afraid to take risks, your questions can help her learn how to handle risks, by planning, preparation, and anticipation of problems.

Ask for comments. You can build on the employee's self-esteem by discussing some of your own problems and asking for suggestions. This may encourage further initiatives without you having to ask for them. Following through on the best of her suggestions will show her you have confidence in her judgement and bolster her self-confidence