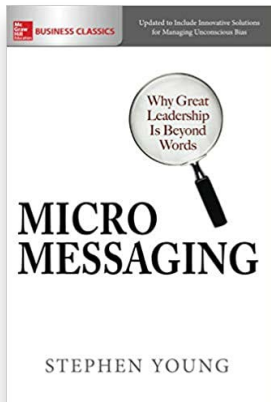


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Micro Messaging THE NUTSHELL

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It's not so much what we say that matters, but what the other person ends up hearing or inferring. We may think we're sending the exact same message to two team members, but the message they receive may be very different and is affected by the nature of the relationship. Personal feelings (their likes and dislikes) about each team member influence how we shape words, gestures, tone, inflection, and so many other aspects of the ways messages are transmitted. Even if we were able to send a message in an identical manner to two people, the filter of the receiver uniquely influences the interpretation.

These messages are called "micro" not because you can't easily see them but because they seem insignificant; their impact, however, is nothing short of monumental. On the surface, they are the sort of thing that would leave you appearing to be hypersensitive and overemotional should you raise them as an issue. At its core, the blind spot of leadership crops up when we say one thing, but telegraph something quite different. Our blindness is not linked to intelligence or level. We forget that intellect and performance are not inextricably linked. Some of the smartest people I have known are the worst perpetrators of microinequities.

Each of us has attended meeting after meeting with a team member we like and admire. Without ever saying a word, she gets the message you unconsciously but repeatedly send: "Pat, you are so smart. You always cut through all the garbage and get right to the heart of the issue every time. People look up to you. You're a role model." In that same meeting,

Micro Messaging

to someone else on the team you may have sent very different messages. Still void of a single word, he hears: "You really are a jerk. How did you get this job in the first place anyway? This team would be so much better off without you."

If the sender of the message has the "stripes" of power or authority, the message will have a powerful effect on participation and performance at meetings. Neither party will likely make the connection between those micromessages and the performance. These messages will affect participation, the expression of new ideas, the willingness to challenge the boss and even others in the room. Your action when these messages are observed become the accelerator of leadership effectiveness.

We establish ways of interpreting behaviors from a very early age. We watch the way those around us behave, react, and speak and, regardless of their words, figure out the true meaning. We develop an ethno-centric bias we are hardly aware of, driving how we filter the behaviors of everyone we encounter. Simply stated, most of us believe our way is "right," and we tend to judge others by how they measure up to our standards. We often disregard reality and see what we want.

Many leaders are too narrow about their flex range, even when minor adjustments could have a major impact on the performance of their teams and the business. When they sense a particular employee doesn't conform to their own style, that employee gets sent microinequities that can make the staffer feel alienated and probably less willing to perform up to his or her potential. The true leader takes the time to observe, ask questions, learn, and operate through the filter of "where the other guy is coming from." When we perceive an action that is interpreted as offensive, we have a responsibility to verbalize and validate.

The receiver has the primary responsibility for resolving a potential misinterpretation. The receiver must take the initiative and verbalize how a particular message was interpreted, facilitating a process that will validate the accuracy of the message. The receiver of the message passes the baton. The sender of the message becomes responsible for confirming or modifying the message to make clear what was intended. It is a process that gets to the core meaning of a message and allows us all to speak the same workplace and social language.

None of the concepts or practices in the mastery of micromessage management requires you to be anything less than genuine about your true feelings and values. You don't need to be disingenuous in an inappropriate way in order to effectively use micromessages. Teachers who use micromessaging effectively provide balanced attention and interaction with every child in the class, regardless of how he or she may feel about the student personally. The teacher's job is to fill students' minds with knowledge, build self-esteem, and encourage them to live up to their potential. The job of the leader is much the same, but the leader also needs commitment and loyalty in order to develop a team that will outpace others.

Micro Messaging

The following microadvantages top-ten list can be a pivotal catalyst for turning around problem relationships. Use these ten steps to improve your use of micromessages for a positive impact:

1. Actively solicit opinions
2. Connect on a personal level
3. Constantly ask questions
4. Attribute/credit ideas
5. Monitor your facial expressions
6. Actively listen to all
7. Draw in participation
8. Monitor personal greetings
9. Respond constructively to disagreements
10. Limit interruptions

All ten microadvantages can be applied to any relationship without violating your values or misrepresenting your opinions of others. You will, however, fertilize and unlock participation, creativity, and innovation.

Harness the micromessages that are the seeds of great leadership. Your continued subtle pruning will bring them to their greatest heights and yield the best possible fruit for your nourishment, advancement, and enjoyment.