

Hands-on, hands-off: Two kinds of managers

Written by Julie Desmond
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My friend Jim Johnson heads up a successful staffing agency in Minneapolis. Over the past two years, he had to let three managers go. “The economy?” I ask, nodding like I know what I am talking about. “Not at all,” he replies. “Business is good, and they were good managers. They just weren’t the kind of managers we needed.”

Jim is perceptive. There are only two kinds of managers, and their categories are not Dumb and Dumber. Whether you are a manager now, aspiring to manage or being managed, you may know the types: Hands Off and Hands On. Knowing which manager you are or are reporting to will help you navigate through business’ ups and downs effectively.

Hands Off managers are reporting superheroes. They work by the numbers, create goals based on activity levels and measure effectiveness on time clocks and spreadsheets.

Hands Off managers are found down the hall, in a private office, behind a closed door. They schedule meetings in advance and, if you need a day off, a Hands Off manager will be quick to grant it, if you have time coming to you.

If your management style is Hands Off, you will be most effective when your team is well trained and experienced. You might have a natural leader in your department who lets you know about trouble brewing, but most days are business-as-usual. You see a manager’s role as parent, not friend, so to speak, and keep some distance between yourself and the company happy hour.

If your manager is Hands Off, be grateful. You know exactly what is expected of you and you can work independently, as long as you make your deadlines, attend meetings and achieve your goals. Don’t bring personal problems to a Hands Off manager; he or she has challenges of his/her own. Align yourself with your teammates and you will be able to help each other succeed.

Hands On managers, conversely, are in the middle of everything. They have a desk in the cube next door, and wheel over in a chair when they hear snippets of interesting conversation.

Hands On managers ride the ebb and flow of busy-ness in an organization. They keep an erratic schedule and expect you to ride along. Meetings happen on the fly, as needed. If you want a day off, no problem, as long as things are quiet around here.

If your management style is Hands On, you have an entrepreneurial spirit and adapt quickly to

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changes in customer demands. You know every process in your department and recognize the individuals best suited to each role. You are a key player; you lead from the front, and expect your team to follow your example.

If your manager is Hands On, be grateful. You will have the boss' ear on all things business and personal, and your successes – and failures – will be noticed. If you miss a goal, your manager will understand, because he or she knows firsthand the effort you put in to get there. Learn all you can from a Hands On manager; he or she will appreciate your interest and will help you succeed.

Julie Desmond has fifteen years' experience in recruiting and talent management. She currently leads job search and career planning workshops throughout the Twin Cities. Send your job search and career planning questions to julie@insightnews.com.