

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Monitor Others' Work**



GREAT LEADERS **MONITOR OTHERS' WORK**

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**We all need people who give us feedback.
That's how we improve.**

– Bill Gates

As a leader, your position requires you to ensure that your direct reports perform at a standard that aligns with broader organizational goals. This may mean making it a priority to schedule regular check-ins on your direct reports' progress towards goals, communicating transparently about expectations, and assisting them in acquiring the resources, knowledge, or skills needed to accomplish those goals. By monitoring and controlling your direct reports' performance, it will be easier for you to celebrate their strengths and help address their concerns/gaps in a timely manner.

Monitoring and controlling others' work involves checking on the performance of direct reports, giving them personalized feedback, and taking corrective action when necessary. Each of these actions can help contribute to positive behavior change.¹ By improving your skills on this competency your team can gain clarity about your expectations and act in ways that benefit the organization.²

In assessing your ability to monitor others' work, ask yourself the following questions:

- How often do I check in on my team members' performance?
- Do I tend to give more help to my team than they might need?
- What types of feedback do I usually give my team?
- Do I ask my employees for their perspective when discussing their performance?

Improve Your Ability to Monitor Others' Work

Trust your team: While monitoring your team's work is important, try to avoid micromanaging; this means trusting that your team can work productively on their own. To demonstrate trust, avoid checking in too often and giving too many details or instructions on how to complete a task. Leaving ample space for independent work also helps to promote creativity and a sense of self-sufficiency. A second aspect of trust is considering situational factors that may have contributed to a mistake, rather than immediately blaming an individual.³

Monitor work effectively. Managers should aim to monitor their direct reports' work closely without veering into micromanagement. Clarify your role to your team by letting them know that you are available to support them as needed. Be mindful of when you offer your opinions. Monitor from the sidelines until an employee requests assistance or you observe that the team is progressing in the wrong direction. As a leader, stepping in can sometimes influence employees to use your ideas rather than their own, which can make them feel like they have less ownership over their work. However, managers also have a duty to intervene if a project is not proceeding smoothly, so you may need to step in sooner if things are going awry.

Understand physical and psychological distance: Physical distance describes how well you can observe someone's work and psychological distance has to do with how close your relationship is with a direct report.³ You can alter both to improve your ability to monitor others' work. For example, if you are a manager who finds it difficult to have progress conversations with your direct reports because you do not often observe their work, but are friendly or socially connected, it may be wise to close your physical distance by checking in more often on their progress and widen your psychological distance by setting boundaries. This may help you to feel more comfortable giving feedback to colleagues rather than friends.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Monitor Work More Effectively

The following steps can help you become better at monitoring others' work:

- 1. Get their perspective.** In situations where you must discipline or give feedback to an employee, it's useful to ask for the employees' own account of the situation (e.g., asking *"What are your thoughts?"* or *"Does that sound right to you?"*). It's possible that you missed some key details and didn't fully understand their reasons for behaving a certain way. Your employees will appreciate the opportunity to share their point of view, and you can gain greater insight into how a challenging situation unfolded.
- 2. Give standards-based rather than comparative feedback.** Two common approaches to giving feedback involve comparing an employees' performance to a standard (e.g., meeting a benchmark sales target) or comparing employees against each other (e.g., sales made compared to other members of the team). Leaders should avoid making comparisons between employees because comparative feedback can show favoritism and doesn't give direct reports a clear idea of what behaviors they need to change. Instead, aim to provide standards-based feedback, which is fair and makes a clear link to specific behavior change.³
- 3. Focus on development.** When preparing to have a feedback or disciplinary conversation, keep the focus on improvement rather than criticizing past mistakes. During the discussion, provide corrective feedback, clearly identify the behavior that should change, its negative impact, and the preferred alternative behavior (e.g., *"When you __, what typically happens is __. Instead, we'd like to see __"*). You can also ask the employee what they think they can change for the future and affirm your belief in their ability to change (e.g., *"I know you're smart and driven and I believe you can do this"*).

Resources



[The Secret to Giving Great Feedback](#)



[How to Manage a Stubborn, Defiant, or Defensive Employee](#)



Develop your ability to monitor your direct reports' performance by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: support@SigmaHR.com

Call: 800-265-1285

References

¹ Gnepp, J., Klayman, J., Williamson, I. O., & Barlas, S. (2020). The future of feedback: Motivating performance improvement through future-focused feedback. *PLoS One*, 15(6), e0234444.

² Tagliabue, M., Sigurjonsdottir, S. S., & Sandaker, I. (2020). The effects of performance feedback on organizational citizenship behaviour: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 29(6), 841-861.

³ Moss, S. E., & Sanchez, J. I. (2004). Are your employees avoiding you? Managerial strategies for closing the feedback gap. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18(1), 32-46.