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**Control Is
Overrated**

RESEARCHING THE RUNWAY

A Discussion
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Control Is Overrated



While control has its place, learning to manage by delegating and letting go of control will help you to get more done with better quality, develop a stronger, happier team, and improve the quality of both your business and your business life.

By Siamak Farah

When it comes to management, “out of control” is a compliment. It may seem counterintuitive, but the more you control, the less you will succeed. In other words: Unless you let go, you won’t grow.

Especially in small business environments, there is a general feeling that if management does not keep it all in check, the business will fall apart. Assuming, for a moment, that this theory is true, then the more management controls, the better work gets done.

Expanding further, it then behoves us to give management control of everything, to ensure that it is done the best it can be done. Now we have bound the growth of the company to the availability of management. Since the hours in a day are limited, the growth of the company is limited. Therein lies the fundamental flaw in “control by management.”

If management liberates itself from control, it can then be free to think of larger plans. After all, the presumptive reason you are in a management position is that you have experience. Not only can experience create competitive advantages; it can also avoid costly mistakes. In business, as in sports, wins often come from not making mistakes. Yet when in the trenches, even the most experienced can make mistakes, since they are not sufficiently removed from the process to see the obstacles clearly. This is precisely why even the best players in the world have coaches.

Be a Coach, Not a Player

Throughout our business lives, we have all heard the advice, “Delegate, delegate, delegate.” But often this great advice is shrugged off with “I wish I could,” “We don’t have the

talent,” “We are underresourced,” “It’s too risky at our size,” and similar rationalizations. Yet the truth is that by delegation you will get more done with better quality, have a happier team, and improve at least tenfold the quality of your business and your business life.

Some are fortunate enough to afford great talent, and so delegation seems like a no-brainer. However, delegation is an acquired skill for most. Those who don’t have it will try

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to micromanage even the best talent, rendering it virtually ineffective.

On the other hand, some may overcompensate for previous micromanagement and completely wash their hands of the tasks at hand. That, in the words of my friend Allen Hargreaves, is abdication and not delegation.

Delegation is about letting the people closest to the problem solve it and you, as management, being there to support them, not to monitor them. You have to be there, side by side and close enough to share your experience, but be far enough away that the work is done by the delegates – who receive all the credit for it.

Developing Delegates

A great psychiatrist friend of mine once told me that counselling is ineffective: it amounts to giving advice – in one ear and out the other. In therapy, psychiatrists often know the answers, but they never share them with the patient. They just ask questions, leading patients to reach

the right conclusions by themselves. That experience will never be forgotten, and thereafter the patient will take the right steps.

Management coaching should be very similar to the approach of therapy. Using this model, you can empower the best talent to be even better. You can also take the least experienced and turn them into the most valuable team members. This approach allows you to hire right out of college and, in no time, compete very effectively with those who are paying much higher salaries.

Control Has Its Place

As you may have seen in my other posts, patience is running thin in today's work environment. Impatient people are often short with others, especially with those who are in the learning phase or who simply do not see a problem the way others view it. This is where control has its value. Regardless of how frustrated, outraged, or peeved you are, you need to be in control of your emotions. This is even more important for leaders who are coaching, teaching, and sharing their experience on a daily basis.


Remember the rule on controlling emotions: In any given exchange, regardless of the position a person holds, he who loses his temper has lost. The damage might seem temporary, but I can assure you it is not. People often don't remember details of events, but they do remember how they felt at the time. Therefore, an occasion on which you have shown frustration – or worse yet, anger – will forever be remembered in a negative light, diminishing your value as a leader or a team player.

Manage Processes, Not People

Talking about Black empowerment in the 1930s, the celebrated American singer Marian Anderson delivered words that truly apply to today's business environment: "As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means that you cannot soar as you otherwise might."

So let go of controlling people, today, and focus on creating processes, strategies, and competitive advantages. When you create processes, people can follow them with minimal guidance. As a result, you get controlled quality without having to control people.

This is the formula for growth. Let go so you can grow.

Siamak Farah is founder and CEO of InfoStreet Inc. based in Tarzana, California. Last October, Inc. magazine named InfoStreet one of America's entrepreneurial growth leaders. Founded in 1994, InfoStreet has grown 655 per cent in the past five years. The company website is at www.infostreet.com. 

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