

## “Management Time and Monkeys”

How do you manage your time at work?

Do you love solving problems or rescuing situations? Does this mean you're feeling constantly bogged down and overwhelmed by problems created by other people?

Are you working longer and longer hours but getting further behind (you're running out of time while your staff are running out of work)?

Are you frustrated, tired, and preoccupied with work to such an extent that it's affecting your home and/or family life? Have you been looking for alternatives, but not been able to see any? Then your problem may be *monkeys!*

A “monkey” is the next move – think about it, how many monkeys do you have on your shoulders or in your office this very moment that need feeding – that need *you* to do something, make a move, take an action, before anything else can happen?

A monkey needs two parties – one to work it and one to supervise it. How many monkeys have you willingly (albeit subconsciously) taken from your staff when they've approached you with a problem but you've not had sufficient time to discuss it?

In those instances you might've gleaned just enough information to know you'll *have* to be involved, but not quite enough to make a decision. When this happens you say something like “I can see this is important but I don't have time to discuss it right now. Let me think about it and get back to you.”

When this happens and you go your separate ways, your staff member will usually check back on a regular basis and ask how it's going, and you'll start feeling more and more pressure to do your bit, when in reality it may not even *be* yours to do! In these instances your staff become your boss (supervising the monkey) and you take on the worker role!

There will, of course, be certain things that *should* be your responsibility; where the monkey legitimately belongs to you.

For example, if emergencies arise, or if someone is off sick, or is untrained, then you may need to help out; or if someone has made a recommendation and you need to read or listen to it, ask questions, think about it or make a decision.

However, if you look closely at your monkeys you may find that the vast majority of them should never have been picked up by you in the first place!

Of course, when you think of it like this I'm sure you'll find it easy to recognise the vicious circle you're trapped in: the more monkeys you take, the more you get because people think you want them.

Once you get too many to handle during normal working hours you try to borrow time from other places. Once you reach the point where there's just no more time available (and the monkeys are still coming) then you start to procrastinate and your staff wait for information or decisions from you.

This leads to your staff making other people in other departments wait, and you start to get calls and complaints from your colleagues; if you promise to look into things and get back to them you've now also got "sideward leaping monkeys" which need feeding, and if your boss gets wind of possible problems you'll also have "downward leaping monkeys."

All of this would mean that you'd have even less time for your "upward leaping monkeys" from your own staff! Once this happens you're in a state of overwhelm, you're barely coping, just reacting. This is certainly not *managing* or being proactive.

So, if all of this has made you realise that your staff aren't working for you, but rather you're working for them, then you need to think about the knock on effects of this; the more you take care of everything for them, the more dependant they will become.

The more dependent they become, the lower their self esteem and self confidence will plummet, because in effect what you're saying to them when you take their monkey is "you can't handle it." Also, the less likely you'll be able to deal with your own monkeys.

So, what can you do? Read my next article to find out.....

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Julie Johnson, formerly a manager and development specialist, created The Leadership Coaching Company to help managers solve one of their biggest business problems: how to get the most from themselves and their staff. She is now a leadership success specialist and has attracted a loyal following who praise her down to earth yet inspiring approach.

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