

“Are You a Compulsive Monkey Picker Upper? The 4 Rules of Monkey Management”

In my previous article we explored how you manage your time at work, and introduced the idea of monkey management. A “monkey” is the next move; and many managers unwittingly take responsibility for upward leaping monkeys.

These are taken from your staff, often when they approach you with a problem but you don't have sufficient time to explore and 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.”

In the previous article we also explored how these upward leaping monkeys can very soon create sideways leaping and downward leaping monkeys as you procrastinate and put people off.

In this article I'd like to explore what you can do if you realise that you're working the monkeys rather than your staff!

The first step to overcoming these problems is to learn and apply the **4 rules of monkey management**.

This means having conversations with your staff about problems and issues which don't end until the following criteria are satisfied:

1. All monkeys have Descriptions i.e. the next moves are specified. For example you might say
 “Prepare a proposal” or
 “Get figures from Accounts” or
 “Give the matter more thought and come back to me with a recommendation.”

N.B. There may be some monkeys that don't deserve to live. If you're unsure, ask “Why are we doing this?” and if neither of you can come up with a viable answer, shoot the monkey – if it's not worth doing, it's not worth doing well!

2. All monkeys have owners i.e. each monkey is assigned to a person, at the lowest organisational level consistent with its welfare.

Try to ensure that you *only* retain monkeys that *only* you can handle.

3. All monkeys have insurance policies i.e. every monkey leaving on the back of one of your people has its risk covered by one of two policies (so that you can afford any mistakes that are made.) These are
 - Recommend, then act
 - Act, then advise
4. All monkeys have feeding and check up appointments scheduled i.e. the time and place for follow up is agreed.

This is to “catch people doing things right” and praise them; also to spot problems and take timely corrective action.

In my next article I’ll look more closely at how you manage your management time to deal with downward and sideward leaping monkeys, as well as your own monkeys.

For now though, a great place to start to manage your time more effectively is to address the issue of your upward leaping monkeys.

Note I said effectively rather than efficiently, because being able to do things more quickly will generally only mean that you free up a little time to work on even more upward leaping monkeys!

Look at all the notes and messages in your office, look in your briefcase; actively look for monkeys – once you start to look closely you’ll begin to see them everywhere. You need to determine the rightful owner of all your current monkeys and return them to your staff where necessary.

Follow the 4 rules above and take a decision now to “say no” to any more monkeys that should be someone else’s responsibility.

This doesn’t mean you refuse to help your people, but rather that responsibilities are specified and that if time is needed to discuss issues, problems and monkeys, then *they* must take personal responsibility for requesting sufficient time with you to discuss. This will avoid the frequent scenario of them stopping you on your way to a meeting, or as you enter or leave the building!

If you’re like many leaders and managers – a compulsive monkey-picker-upper, then stop looking on your people as problems and learn to see them as your solution. Take control and help others to take control for themselves.

The 4 Rules of Monkey Management are taken from the book “The One Minute Manager Meets The Monkey” by Ken Blanchard, William Oncken Jr & Hal Burrows.

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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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