

# When to Help and When Not to Help



*Managers who tend and feed "monkeys" are like parents who pamper and spoil their kids. In both instances, the subordinates suffer because they never learn how to sweat out a problem and solve it for themselves.*

**A** QUESTION I AM OFTEN asked is, "As a manager, can you help your people too much?" My answer is, "Yes, if you are caring for and feeding all their monkeys."

William Oncken, Jr., and I are doing a series of one-day public seminars around the country entitled "The One-Minute Manager Meets the Monkey." Bill is the originator of the "monkey on the back" analogy. Our seminars combine the concepts Bill presents in his popular new book, *Managing Management Time*, and the concepts in my new book, *Leadership and the One-Minute Manager*.

Whenever a subordinate comes to you and says, "Boss, we have a problem," watch out! The monkey on the back of your subordinate is about to leap onto your back. According to Oncken, a monkey is defined as, "Who has the next move?" The reason you often get the next move is that you know enough about the problem to know it exists, but not enough to solve it right then. So you say something like, "I know what you're talking about. Let me check with Harry (your boss) and I'll get back to you."

Now your subordinate walks out of your office 30 pounds lighter. Why? Because you've got the monkey. The next move is yours. When your subordinate approached you a few minutes ago, on whose back was the monkey astride? His or hers. After your helpful intervention, where is the little critter now? On your back.

According to Oncken, monkeys have to be shot or fed. If you decide not to

shoot the monkey, you are into care and feeding. If you are caring for and feeding a subordinate's monkey, who is working for whom? You're working for your subordinate. And like any good supervisor, your former subordinate will closely supervise you. The next morning he or she will be waiting at your office to say, "How's it going?" (the words of a true supervisor). "Have you called Harry yet?" Not having had time to do that, in a flustered voice you say, "No, I haven't, but I'll get on it." Now your subordinate-turned-supervisor is putting pressure on you to do his or her job.

## When to Take on the Monkey

How can you determine whether you should take on the subordinate's monkey or give it back to its proper owner? The question is whether taking on the monkey—the next move—is a rescue or not. A rescue is when you do something for someone that they can do for themselves. In other words, he has the ability to care for and feed the monkey. If that is the case, when a subordinate brings a monkey your way, you should use a supportive leadership style—pat the monkey on the head and tell the subordinate how pretty it is—but make sure you end up with a delegating leadership style that results in the subordinate taking the monkey with him.

You can say something to your subordinate like, "That's a difficult problem. Why don't you meet me in my office tomorrow at 9 A.M. and tell me how it's going." With that statement you are maintaining your role as *supervisor* and your subordinate's role as *supervisee*.

If, on the other hand, you know your subordinate does not have the ability to care for and feed the monkey himself, you need to use a directing or coaching leadership style. Explain what the next move should be, and then supervise his doing it. Remember: your boss will be giving you monkeys that you need to care for and feed, so try to return as many of your subordinate's monkeys as possible to the proper owner. If your people don't need your help, stop helping!

Why is it so hard to stop helping, even when people don't need it? I think the main reason is that we have institutionalized helping in our society ever since the New Deal.

Rather than people pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps when things go wrong, we sit around waiting for the helping hand. This philosophy has pervaded every aspect of our society. One of the worst examples of institutionalized rescuing that I know of is Little League. To me, this is an organization that should be stomped out because it takes away responsibility and leadership from youth in a systematic



LORI ANDERSON

**"Who gets the monkey?" is the key question to ask.**

way. The result will be the creation of rescuing managers of the future.

## Rescuers Anonymous

Let me give you an example from a book I am writing with James Ballard called *Rescuers Anonymous*. There were actually three problems we faced when I was a kid if we wanted to play baseball. The first was finding a place to play. I grew up out in the country about 16 miles from New York City, in the days before suburbs. We had to find a farmer in the area who'd let us use a corner of his field. But we knew everyone for miles around, so it didn't take long. What took time was clearing the field of rocks—all except five. These we'd use for home plate, the three bases, and the pitcher's mound. If you lived downtown in the city, the problem was different. You had to find a street



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away from traffic where you knew the people and could get them to park their cars somewhere else so you could set up the diamond with the different stoops for bases. But they always did.

Once you solved the problem of where to play, next was the matter of getting up the two teams. In our neighborhood, as in most, we had to go with who was around at the time and sometimes you couldn't be too choosy. We'd usually have kids anywhere from seven to 18 years old playing. But it worked out. These days, there are 12-year-olds playing Little League who've never met a 13-year-old, because 13-year-olds are not in their age category. When you were eight, you took anything they gave you. You never minded if they dumped you into right field and made you bat last. You didn't even get upset if a lefty batter came up on the other team and they moved you into left. Just so they let you play. You didn't run home and tell your parents they weren't playing you enough and could they please talk to the coach.

Then the third problem was the equipment. One thing that guaranteed you could play when I was a kid was if you owned a bat. You were in demand then, because bats were hard to come by. But if you broke your bat, did you run home to your parents and get them to buy you another one? Hell, no. If you did that, your parents would probably have hit you on the head with it. If we broke a bat, we'd hammer nails into it and tape it all up. I can remember the feeling of running down to first base with my hands all pins-and-needles, vibrating from just having hit the ball with some old, broken, taped-up bat.

We hardly ever had enough mitts. You had to share them between the teams. I can never remember a time when I ran in from the field that I didn't throw my mitt to an opponent to use. The only crucial positions for gloves were the catcher, the first baseman, the pitcher, and maybe the third baseman. The rest of the people were usually on their own.

I never even knew a baseball was white until I was nine and saw a game on TV. All the balls I ever saw were covered with black tape to keep them together. Sometimes there was so much tape on the ball you couldn't tell whether it had once been a hardball and had been taped to the size of a softball, or if it was just a new softball that had some tape on it.

After we got a place to play, equipment, and enough kids to play, we started having neighborhood games. Pretty soon we thought we were good. Then somebody said, "You know, Keith Dollar has a bunch playing in his neighborhood." We'd say, "He does? Why doesn't someone talk to him at school and challenge his team to a game?" So somebody would, and when we beat Dollar's team, somebody would say, "I hear Bill Bush has a group in his neighborhood." So we would challenge them. We had a four-team league when I was a kid, including the Berrian Bombers, the Seacord Sissies, and the Abofoil Asses.

### Who's Got the Monkey?

Who did all the planning? The kids did. Who did all the organizing? The kids did. Who did all the motivating and controlling? The kids did. Who does it all

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today? The parents do. Today all kids have to do is get dressed. And do they get dressed! They all come out looking like little versions of Reggie Jackson. Last year up in Canada I was working with a company president who said he had to quit at 2:00 to pick up his 12-year-old and take him to hockey practice. He asked me to come along. We drove over to his house and tooted the horn, and out came this kid. You wouldn't believe all the equipment he had on. He was obviously the goalie for his team. The kid started down the walk to come to the car, and he tripped and fell. If we hadn't gotten out of the car and helped, he would probably have died there. There was no way he could possibly have gotten up.

After we got him in the car, we drove over to the posh skating arena where the practice was, and I was thinking about how I used to play hockey as a boy. We usually had to shovel off the lake first. That might take us a whole afternoon, and God forbid that it snowed that night. If it did, we would have to repeat the process

the next day. We used two stones for goal, and if you played goalie and even suggested you were wearing a jockstrap, they would call you a sissy.

Once kids get dressed nowadays they, of course, get driven to the game. You wouldn't want the little dears to get any exercise, you know. These mothers should get awards for all the driving they do, to Little League and ballet and piano lessons. Either that, or put taxi meters in their cars and charge the kids. But that's just it: the parents are out there rescuing at every hand, proud to do it.

The outrageous parks they play these Little League games at today even have hot-dog stands, with the mothers back there sweating and serving, because, you know, you wouldn't want the little darlings to get hungry! Other parents are in the stands filling out Major-League-type scorebooks. If somebody hits it to the little kid on third base and he throws it to first, you can hear the mothers in the stands going, "Oh, my, let me see, what is that? Third base is three and first base is one," and drawing in the play in a scorebook. I would have been ostracized by the other kids in my day if my mother had done that.

Then there are kids in the outfield getting heat prostration, changing the big scoreboard every time there is a run. We used to keep score by taking a stick and marking it on the ground. Then somebody would run over and push you and say, "You didn't get that run!" and he'd rub it out with his foot. So you'd push him back and mark it back in. We always had those natural ways of working such things out. The ultimate straw is that nowadays after losing a game, you can't go beat up the other team. You have to go to Baskin-Robbins for ice cream instead. Have you ever been in an ice cream shop on Saturday with a bunch of screaming kids dressed like Reggie Jackson?

I sense that what Little League has done is create a new concept called boredom. When I was a kid, if I told my mother I was bored, she'd give me a swift kick in the rear and say, "Try that for a little boredom."

As managers we have to recognize when to help and when not to help. The real joy in life comes from taking a problem, solving it, and getting credit for it. If we don't let people sweat and strain once in a while, they will never get that joy. So be helpful, but don't let your helping hand stifle people's growth. □



## ON STAYING POWER

by John Wooden

**L**ike most coaches, my program revolved around fundamentals, conditioning, and teamwork. But I differed radically in several respects. I never tried to get my team "up" for a game emotionally. I never worried about how our opponents would play us, and I never talked about winning.

### **Peaks Create Valleys**

I believe that for every artificial peak you create, you also create valleys. When you get too high for anything, emotion takes over, consistency of performance is lost, and you will be unduly affected when adversity comes. I emphasized constant improvement and steady performance.

I have often said, "The mark of a true champion is to always perform near your own level of competency." We were able to do that by never being satisfied with the past and always planning for what was to come. I believe that failure to prepare is preparing to fail. This constant focus on the future is one reason we continued staying near the top once we got there.

### **Develop Yourself, Don't Worry About Opponents**

I probably scouted opponents less than any coach in the country—less than most high school coaches. I don't need to know that this forward likes to drive the outside. You're not supposed to give the outside to any forward whenever he tries it. Sound offensive and defensive principles apply to any style of play.

Rather than having my teams prepare to play a certain team each week, I prepared to play anybody. I didn't want my players worrying about the other fellows. I wanted them executing the sound offensive and defensive principles we taught in practice.

### **There's no Pillow as Soft as a Clear Conscience**

To me, success isn't outscoring someone. It's the peace of mind that comes from self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best. That's something each individual must determine for

such, we won more than we would have if I'd stressed outscoring opponents.

There's no great fun, satisfaction, or joy derived from doing something that's easy. Failure is never fatal, but failure to change might be.

Your strength as an individual depends on, and will be in direct proportion to, how you react to both praise and criticism. If you become too concerned about either, the effect on you is certain to be adverse.

### **The Main Ingredient of Stardom**

I always taught players that the main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team. It's amazing how much can be accomplished if no one cares who gets the credit. That's why I was as concerned with a player's character as I was with his ability.

While it may be possible to reach the top of one's profession on sheer

ability, it is impossible to stay there without hard work and character. One's character may be quite different from one's reputation.

Your character is what you really are. Your reputation is only what others think you are. I made a determined effort to evaluate character. I looked for young men who would play the game hard, but clean, and who would always be trying to improve themselves to help the team. Then, if their ability warranted it, the championships would take care of themselves.▲

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himself. You can fool others, but you can't fool yourself.

Many people are surprised to learn that in 27 years at UCLA, I never once talked about winning. Instead, I would tell my players before games, "When it's over, I want your head up. And there's only one way your head can be up, that's for you to know, not me, that you gave the best effort of which you're capable. If you do that, then the score doesn't really matter, although I have a feeling that if you do that, the score will be to your liking." I honestly, deeply believe that in not stressing winning as