

SOME RULES-OF-THUMB FOR EMPOWERING OTHERS

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For managers to get the job done in a fiercely competitive market, they must multiply themselves -- their experience and authority -- through many others in the organization by empowering others to act, on their own, with initiative and creativity.

Here are some "rules-of-thumb" that have been tested through experience by which to empower others and multiply your leadership on behalf of your company's business objectives.

1. BE POWERFUL YOURSELF.

You can't give away what you don't legitimately have yourself. Being clear in your own mind about these key aspects will help you be more powerful:

- Know what you're about; have a clear picture of the future you want
- Know what your customers and staff members need and want
- Know what your goals, strategies, and tactics are; be clear about what to do and how to proceed
- Know how you will get feedback to check your progress; hear constructive feedback clearly and non-defensively
- Know, in your own heart, that YOU are a primary source of energy, not just a conduit for others

2. CREATE A CLIMATE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION, DEPARTMENT, OR TEAM THAT IS CHARACTERIZED BY ACCEPTANCE AND TRUST.

Here are some ways to do it:

- Listening, more often than telling, develops openness and individual creativity
- Being non-judgmental of a person's worth creates trust; evaluate only performance, never the person
- Focusing on solving problems, rather than on who's in control, builds individual initiative
- Setting high standards develops high quality performance
- Rewarding, rather than punishing, builds confidence and willingness to risk
- Enabling with support, instead of pressuring with fear, develops self-directedness and maturity
- Sharing decision-making helps people to participate and implement actions in ways that create the intended outcome and not just to do what they are told to avoid punishment
- Being clear about expectations and difficulties that need to be overcome creates purposefulness
- Sharing information with others leads to their taking appropriate action especially when judgment is needed
- Emphasizing responsibility, rather than accountability, leads to innovation and develops leadership
- Being a person, more than an authority figure or boss, helps others to be more authentic themselves

3. USE YOUR TIME TO KEEP OTHERS FULLY INFORMED AND TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES THAT BLOCK THEIR PARTICIPATION.

It takes time to give others the information and context they need to know how to be powerful on behalf of the goals you need to accomplish together. They need to be given the personal respect that is granted when you explain to them what the big picture is, what the principal strategies are going to be for achieving the goals, and how they can help. Explicitly ask for their involvement, participation and support. If they have participated in creating the big picture, you don't have to worry about "buy-in." They are already "owners." If you need to get their "buy-in," be sure the process is genuine and not just a hard sell. If you "haven't time" to work at empowering others by genuinely involving and informing them, you probably need to change your priorities about how your time is being used. Information is still power, even in enlightened organizations. In empowering organizations, the power of information is much more widely shared. Be sure to keep people in the loop on important information even when they may not have a specific "need to know."

4. USE DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND DIFFERENT SITUATIONS.

Help people get what they need to know in ways that suit their different styles and that are appropriate for different situations. (e.g. Extraverts like meetings; introverts like one-on-one sessions. For people who want "just the facts," a brief informative announcement may be enough. Others may like to have the mission and values that lie behind a project explained so they can "get a feel" for the situation. A memo is good for simple transmission of data (schedules, etc.); telephone conferencing may be necessary for interaction and input.) Avoid painting everyone with the same brush when communicating with the organization. Take into account differences in their states of mind, information, personal styles, etc. Especially avoid criticizing the whole organization because of the attitude or performance of only a few. Instead, remind people repeatedly of the goals, encourage them to overcome difficulties, and be generous with news of achievements. One rule-of-thumb about communication, however, that does apply to all is that positive communication works better than negative communication in empowering others. Keep telling them how good they are.

5. USE YOUR AUTHORITY AND PERSONAL POWER TO AUTHORIZE OTHERS TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY ON BEHALF OF THE COMPANY'S GOALS.

Your authority may be needed to give permission to others to take the actions that they may already know are needed but don't feel powerful enough in themselves to act without specific permission. Organizations with a history of strong autocratic leadership, often need to give a lot of permission for others to act with power, especially when they are asked to use their own initiative and take risks. Your authority must also be used to protect them from adverse consequences when their actions were well intended and reasonable but didn't work out as planned. When others see you supporting a risk-taker, their own empowerment increases.

6. BEWARE OF "FALSE EMPOWERMENT"

It's glib and easy these days to fall into the buzz-word mentality of empowerment. Perhaps you've heard a manager say to a staff member, "If you don't like the way it is, don't complain, make it better." On the surface it sounds great. But the effect, many times, is that staff members with limits on their authority, access, resources, etc. can't "make it better." And when they bring the problem to the attention of someone who can make it better, the staff member risks being accused of complaining. It's a no-win – all in the name of empowerment. Of course, it's not really empowerment -- it just sounds like it. It's "false empowerment" and it's a set-up for frustration and failure. The best way to avoid the pain of it, either giving the pain or receiving it, is to recognize false empowerment for what it is.

7. SHARE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PERSONAL EXAMPLE

The best way to be sure your staff is truly empowered, is to empower them by your own example. The key to this rule-of-thumb is the old saw, "Power is as power does." Take action. Search for improvements that you are able to put into effect and do it. Focus especially on actions that will open up opportunities for members of your staff to take action. Tell them what you've done and encourage them to do the same -- search and take action. Foster creativity. Recognize accomplishment. But first, set a great example as an empowered person.

6. WORK AS A TEAM LEADER.

Speak and act from the attitude that, to get the whole job done well, everybody in the organization needs everybody else. No individual, just because of rank or salary level, is any "better" or "worse" than anyone else on the team. Be open to others' ideas. Facilitate others sharing information as much as possible rather than concentrating all information "at the top" then disseminating it downwards. Call forth the best that others have to offer for the team. Praise and reward people for their contributions as team players as well as for their individual accomplishments. Accept praise and rewards given to you for the organization's achievements only as a team leader rather than as an individual. Help sub-groups see themselves as teams within a team, each helping the overall effort.

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