

Tim Mikkelsen
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Empowerment

This information is derived from the book “Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment” by William Byham with Jeff Cox. The book is done in a ‘cute’ style. This might turn some people off - but it does serve to make the concepts well understood and remembered. The book does talk about empowerment in concrete ways and shows how to apply to concepts - with common problems. (Thanks to Julie Wilson for loaning this to me.)

The book talks about Sapps and Zapps - behaviors of disempowering and empowering people in an organization.

Disempowerment happens when:

- there is confusion
- there is a lack of trust
- people are not listened to
- there is insufficient time
- there is a lack of clear measures of success
- people take credit when it isn't due
- people are treated interchangeably
- people are told what to do
- the organization has too many rules and regulations
- people have insufficient resources to do the job
- people believe that they cannot make a difference
- people feel the smartest action is to keep their mouth shut

Empowerment occurs when:

- the job belongs to the person doing the job (ownership)
- the person feels they are trusted to do it (trust)
- the person is responsible and feels that way (responsibility)
- the job is important and the person knows it (valued)
- the person knows how they are doing (feedback,recognition)
- the person has a say in the job (flexible,listen)
- the person sees how their job fits (context,direction)

Steps to empowering a person:

- 1 Maintain the person's self-esteem
- 2 Listen and respond with real empathy
- 3 Ask the person for help in solving problems
- 4 Offering help without taking responsibility

These steps need to be sincere and job-related (i.e. meaningful to the situation). Empowering is hard work (and conversely it is easy to disempower). It starts with these steps just mentioned that are the giving of responsibility to the people doing the work. This really translates into effective delegation.

Some of the key choices in delegating a task are:

- refer the task to the proper person
- delegate authority to perform the task and make decisions
- delegate the task without the decision-making authority
- keep the task yourself

An important point that is often overlooked in delegation is the concept of controls. Over-control is bad, abandoning is bad and both are disempowering. The key is that the level of control should be situational (dependent on BOTH the task and the person). The disempowering occurs when the controls are inappropriate for the situation.

Some of the aspects of controls that should be considered are:

- know what is going on (at what frequency?)
- make decisions they can't (are the boundaries clear?)
- ensure they are on track (did you tell them the direction?)
- offer help (but don't tell them how to proceed)
- assess performance (are the measures clear & understood?)

A key effect of empowerment is that a manager or leader's job will change because of the empowerment. So, what is the manager's job? Remember that empowerment does not guide the action, it excites the action. It is the manager's job to direct and channel the direction. This involves setting up measures and objectives for the directions. And, if this is all working properly, the directions will change. This feeds back into empowerment (or maybe meta-empowerment) in that the people doing the work should have a say in (and should be responsible for) the feedback system that changes the direction.

Some people have a tough time being empowered. It is hard and scary for them. These people need coaching - at various levels of detail.

Basic coaching approach:

The basic coaching approach is:

- 1 explain the purpose and importance of what you are teaching
- 2 explain the process to be used
- 3 show how it is done
- 4 observe while the person is doing the task
- 5 provide immediate feedback (coach again or reinforce)
- 6 express confidence in the person's ability to succeed
- 7 agree on follow-up actions

So, in empowering situations, the manager needs to provide:

Direction	(key result areas, goals, measures)
Knowledge	(skills, training, information, goals)
Resources	(tools, facilities, resources, money)
Support	(approval, coaching, feedback, encouragement)

There is also a lot of benefit from shifting from an empowered person to an empowered team. Again, the team needs direction, training and knowledge, resources and support from the manager. However, the empowered team should be involved in determining who is on the team and many of the other aspects (like feedback mechanisms).

The manager's role:

There is also discussion about a manager's role in spreading empowerment:

Protect	Protect people from disempowering effects.
Train	Make sure that managers have the right skills.
Walk the talk	You have to serve as an example and empower people.
Coach	Coach managers on how to improve.
Reward	Reward empowering behaviors.