

Discussion Guide
Empowering Employees
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Chapter 1. The Empowering Manager Is ...

If you're like many managers, you're reading *Empowering Employees* because you're hungry for fresh ways of *being* a manager or of *doing* managerial tasks.

People know us by what we are and by what we do. So too empowerment. We recognize empowering behavior by what it *is* and by what it *does*. In the first chapter of *Empowering Employees*, we focus on what empowering behavior *is* (we move on to what it *does* in Chapter 2).

Empowering behavior *is*

- *Mutual influence*: When healthy, honest, nonjudgmental give-and-take takes hold in an organization, managers and employees both benefit from shared knowledge and experience, trust increases, and mutual respect grows.
- *Creative distribution of power*: When power is seen as the unlimited capacity for continuous improvement—in people and products—empowering behaviors such as sharing the search for solutions, flexing when demands fluctuate, and welcoming competitive challenges become the norm.
- *Shared responsibility*: Funny thing about responsibility. When it's yours alone, it's often a burden. When you share it with others, it's an opportunity for learning and improving, a chance for managers and employees to understand each other's capabilities and to become partners in finding answers.
- *Vital and energetic*: Feel better and think more clearly, expand your knowledge, revitalize your curiosity, extend the sphere of people who influence you. But be forewarned. These empowering behaviors have side effects—reduced stress, less conflict, and a break from mind-numbing routine.
- *Inclusive, democratic, and long-lasting*: Whether or not an organization calls itself *empowered*, such organizations foster a culture that includes all its members in decision-making and solution-finding and that promotes democratic approaches to power-sharing—all of which ensure the organization's health and longevity.

Learning, practicing, and implementing empowering behaviors takes time. There are no quick fixes. No declarations from on high that make it so.

So start now, and talk among yourselves about the **Discussion Questions**. Then **Take an Empowering Step**, and you're on your way.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some pitfalls of a change-me/fix-me approach to organizational development?
2. Name three ways in which you can inject vitality and energy into your workplace, and think about the possible impact of such change, both near-term and long-term.
3. List five things that empowering *is not*.

Take an Empowering Step

Pick one thing *empowering is* and one thing *empowering is not*, then write down one concrete step you will take this week to reinforce those notions. At the end of the week, write down the results.

Chapter 2. The Empowering Manager Does...

We're about to embark on another list-wise approach to empowerment (as in Chapter 1)...but that will last only long enough for you to get the gist of what an empowering manager *does*.

- *Enables talent*: Empowered managers and employees recognize and support each other's capabilities. They're open to unexplored experiences and opportunities...within the organization first, then outside the organization ... and they openly share knowledge, whether that knowledge fits their job description or not.
- *Fosters accomplishment*: Rather than relying on a lone leader, empowering organizations create an atmosphere in which all participants feel able—and supported by others—to achieve not only what's expected of them but also what's not expected.
- *Invests in learning*: The return on investment in learning is similar to the return you'd get from any other investment: “deposits” of new or enhanced skills, “earnings” both financial and otherwise, “security” that your organization is building a foundation that will endure.
- *Finds the spirit in an organization and builds effective relationships*: In an empowering organization, managers and employees realize that the heart of the group is not the product it produces or the deadline it meets, it's the way in which each group member thinks, feels, and acts when they communicate with each other, with suppliers, and with customers.
- *Informs, leads, coaches, serves, creates, and liberates*: The basic management competencies that ANY manager must have are informing, decision-making, evaluating, motivating, planning, and developing. But empowering managers grow beyond those competencies to enhanced “next generation” competencies ... and that's what you'll learn to do in the following chapters.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the concept of continuous improvement mean to you? Be specific. List the tasks, the behaviors, or the production steps that make up your continuous improvement model.
2. What two core values—stated or unstated—best characterize your company? Name two activities that you do that will reinforce those core values.

Take an Empowering Step

When you go to work tomorrow morning, think of your day as an investment in your organization. At the end of each hour, take 3 minutes to think about and *write down* what behaviors or tasks boost your returns on investment: a heightened bottom line, improved decision-making, uncovering the wealth of talent in a co-worker, for example. Use your list as a baseline for future re-investments.

Chapter 3. Getting to Knowledge: The Route to Meaningful Information

The 80/20 Principle (Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More with Less*, New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1998) proposes that “80 percent of what you achieve in your job comes from 20 percent of the time spent.” Could it be that this principle applies as well to the mountains of information that you process? We think so, and we think—if you want to be an empowering manager—it’s imperative that you

**begin to identify where and how
you receive the percentage of information that’s actually valuable.**

As a first step toward that end, consider what makes information valuable: its source (trustworthy), its processing (relevant, accurate), and its application (shared, facts and feelings). Once you understand where, how, and what information is valuable to you and your employees, you’ll be able to

**empower yourself and others
by embracing the informing–educating–learning triad.**

Building an empowering relationship with your employees means *informing* them of facts when and where they need it. *Educating* means helping them develop the know-how for handling such information. *Learning* is something you encourage by promoting high performance and continuous improvement—not just requiring X number of hours in a classroom. By doing so, you both

**develop and impart *wisdom*, the experience, effort, and reflection
that help you gain *insight* into facts and knowledge.**

If you don’t now have a regularly scheduled time dedicated only to sharing information with your employees, start now. Be sure that your written and spoken information-sharing is as clear, complete, and jargon-free as you can make it. If you’re accustomed to withholding information, you may want to reevaluate why. Last, if you want what you’ve learned about learning to last,

**make a concrete, workable plan to *use* the information you share,
and develop a *learning strategy* (see the box on page 54 for help).**

Discussion Questions

1. Do you regularly share information with your employees and others? If so, how and how often? List three ways in which you currently share information; then list three ways in which you could enhance information sharing.
2. Name one way in which you have contributed to your organization’s intelligence. Ask yourself whether you’re encouraging such contributions by your employees.

Take an Empowering Step

Select a document that you wrote at least a month ago (the time away from its inception will make it easier for you to analyze more objectively). Make two columns on another piece of

paper, one for “qualities that DO promote knowledge” and one for “qualities that DO NOT promote knowledge.” Re-read and evaluate your document, listing its attributes in each column (consider too much/too little information, accuracy/relevance/timeliness, shared vs. withheld, clarity). Use that list to make the next document you write better.

Chapter 4. Empowering Leadership: Knowing When and How

Forget the traditional view of leadership. In an empowering organization, leadership is a moving target, sometimes embodied in a formal leader, sometimes in a decision-maker designated for a specific task, and sometimes in an informal leader.

In an empowering organization, leadership doesn't necessarily attach to your position in the organization. Rather, it may be based on a role, a task, a particular skill, a relationship, or a knowledge requirement.

Instead of using only the basic management competency of *decision making*, the empowered manager applies first- and second-generation skills: *leading* and *transforming*. Instead of experiencing the isolation that comes from "owning" the responsibility for decisions, the empowered manager experiences the "sharing" that extends responsibility and boosts organizational and individual power.

Learning to follow is as important as learning to lead. The payback is that others learn to lead. If you're unaccustomed to following, try these tips (and review the bullets on page 68):

- Polish your listening skills (so others can polish their speaking skills).
- When others depend on you, offer your support (but don't take on the leadership role).
- Pay attention to what someone else can teach you (instead of the other way around).

Remember to model the leadership behavior you want to elicit from others: adhere to a code of ethics, respect the organization's culture, avoid preconceptions about individuals or outcomes, support the successes and failures of others who assume leadership, and realize that change takes time. Just as you can't achieve empowerment by announcing its existence, you can't make someone a leader by giving her or him the title.

Remember, too, that you do not *give* empowerment to your employees or organization. Recognize that, as a truly empowering leader, you help others *release* the power and abilities that they have inside.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a leader you admire. What qualities provoke your admiration? Compare these qualities to your own as a leader. Give you any ideas?
2. Imagine that you are forced by unexpected circumstances to be away from your office for one month. Who would or could lead in your place? How have you helped empower them to assume the leadership role? What more can you do?
3. Name two ways in which you model leadership qualities. (If you can't think of any, name two ways in which you COULD model leadership, and start tomorrow!)

Take an Empowering Step

Consider beginning to share leadership with a "practice" session. Pose a real—or at least realistic—issue to one or more members of your staff. Give just the facts, not your opinion or projections of what you'd do. Ask your staff what they would do about this issue, encouraging

open brainstorming. Be careful not to judge the ideas they propose. Rather, make sure that you model careful listening and support. (You may find that, when the next issue comes up in “real life,” your staff may have gained confidence in presenting their ideas and may have taken another step toward leadership...and you may have taken a step toward sharing leadership.)

Chapter 5. Who's at Work Here: From Monologue to Dialogue

Think “human capital, first and foremost” if you want to become competent in the second building block of empowerment: *mentoring* and *coaching*. If you put other assets ahead of the human ones, you'll find yourself regressing instead of progressing on the empowerment continuum. Here's how to make sure you *progress*:

- **Know yourself.** Check out the Management Styles Survey that starts on page 165. Ask yourself questions like What is it I'd like to know more about so that I can be a better manager? What does being a leader mean to me? Am I capable of mentoring and coaching? Do I build on internal resources? Does my work energize me? Do I plan, or do things just happen to me? (See pages 76-78.)
- **Show 'em that you care.** Let others know how you value them by developing and nurturing closer relationships, sharing lessons learned, identifying and building leadership qualities, and supporting their growth beyond current job descriptions. Learn to value, not just to evaluate (review the box on page 79).
- **Make the sounds of empowerment.** Avoid language that stifles, fears rejection, reeks of failure or negativity (for example, should have, don't tell me, I trust you BUT). Do use language that supports creativity (try it), that builds confidence (I'm listening), and that engages others (Could you help? What if...?).
- **Understand how competition and collaboration build or stymie empowerment.** On the positive side, competition can raise the bar of performance, motivate us to strive for continuous improvement, and energize us to innovate. Collaboration promotes problem-solving, process improvement, and change management.
- **Think of good mentoring as good managing.** If you're a good mentor (see the box on page 86 for a description), you are a resource, a source of organizational knowledge, a provider of perspective, a skilled listener and dialogue-er, a relationship developer, a learning leader.

Discussion Questions

1. Just for a moment, think of your department's functions as pieces of equipment. In what ways can that “equipment” be maintained, strengthened, retooled, or upgraded?
2. Use the list in Figure 5-1, page 85, to evaluate your relationship with your employees. Do you weigh in more heavily on the competitive or the collaborative side? If you fall more heavily on the competitive side, what can you do to move toward collaboration?

Take an Empowering Step

The next time you find yourself on the defensive, stop. Examine why you feel that way: Must you win? Why? Must you prove that you're right? Why? Try to step away from the emotions and pinpoint what's important about the conversation. Let go of what's “right” or “wrong” and get back on the road to discovery. Pretend for the moment that the outcome doesn't matter, the discussion does. When the discussion's over, write down what you learned.

Chapter 6. What's at Work Here: Process vs. Results

While planning is a basic management competency, planning *for* someone instead of *with* them is not. The simple act of asking what employees want, think, and feel is an experience in mutual influence.

The way in which you ask is all-important. If you're going to ask loaded questions, you might as well not ask. If you use the answers to punish, cajole, or to try to mold someone's opinion to your own, you've wasted the time you spent asking. In fact, you've build distrust, not the trust you want to build in an empowering organization.

When you care enough to ask what employees want, you get

- increased employee satisfaction—and employees who don't wait for you to tell them what to do because you'll have already shared learning and decision-making.
- increased customer satisfaction—because of your targeted, meaningful support for employees, customers move to the top of the pyramid, where energy and resources flow from management to the workforce to the customer.
- leaders who serve employees and customers alike—and who realize that their own power increases when they support, supply, and uphold others.
- a more sustainable organization—with employees who support the organization's values and mission by their actions and words because you've involved them in establishing organizational goals.

Remember the three R's of empowerment: *respect* (which you show by asking what employees need and want in order to do their best), *resources* (the ones they ask for, not the ones you think they need), and *reinvestment* (in the talent, knowledge, and power of the workforce).

Discussion Questions

1. What does your organization's pyramid look like? Who fits where in terms of importance? Whose position needs adjusting? How can the adjustment be accomplished?
2. As a supportive and empowering manager, what skills do you have that sustain your organization's foundation?

Take an Empowering Step

Survey your employees, asking what things, people, or experiences would help them perform better. Ask one question or half a dozen (but no more); ask in person, by email, or on paper—but ask!

Chapter 7. No More Reengineering: Make More with What You've Got

Structuring your work environment, both your workspace and your work relationships, brings you closer to the realization that the *power* in *empowerment* doesn't come from controlling others but from creating, sharing, and transforming the workplace *with* them. The *structuring* building block of empowerment employs *we-engineering* in place of *re-engineering* when change is necessary (as it so often seems to be).

The concept of *we-engineering* follows the premise that people aren't necessarily as resistant to change as we might think. They are resistant to change that's done *to* them but less resistant to change that *involves* them. The key is to think *transaction*, *transition*, and *transformation*.

- **Transaction:** the typical workforce–management relationship, in which one bit of power, one level of performance, or one piece of knowledge is exchanged for another.
- **Transformation:** an empowering workforce–management relationship, in which power is created, responsibilities are shared, and performance continuously improves.
- **Transition:** the process of moving from individual goals, concerns and changes to organizational goals, concerns, and changes.

Empowering managers know that structuring such transition requires *participative management*, which means developing these five qualities:

1. Leadership that entrusts employees with significant responsibility.
2. Teamwork and valuing skills (see Chapter 6) that accept individual differences, build trust, and foster leadership in others.
3. Strategic vision that emanates from the all the stakeholders.
4. Congruent behavior and words, including employee surveys, fair reward systems, and growth-oriented performance evaluation processes.
5. Inclusive planning, budgeting, and resourcing.

The next time something in your office needs *re-engineering*, don't forget to put the *we* in it. It's likely that the change will occur more smoothly than you expected.

Discussion Questions

1. Using the list on page 109, evaluate how participative your management style is. What you can do to make it more so?
2. What physical features of your office give you pleasure? Which ones turn you off? Make a list of each, and then write an action step that will make you more comfortable and satisfied with your surroundings.
3. What's one thing you can do to "we-engineer" your office environment? (See the box on page 116 for an example.)

Take an Empowering Step

Pick one item that you know will be changing soon in your office (the composition of a work group, for example, or bringing a new product on line, or changing health care providers, or

_____). Use the bulleted list on page 110 to plan how you will overcome common obstacles to change.

Chapter 8. Empowering Employees: The Magic of Response-Ability

Actualizing, taken literally, means to make something real by turning it into action. Taken in terms of empowerment, actualizing means bringing together all the building blocks of empowerment as individuals perform at high levels at work they're well prepared to do.

How does an empowering manager effect actualizing organizational experiences? Here are some suggestions:

- Tell people what to expect: the most satisfied employees (this means you too) know what's really expected of them.
- Respect coworkers, recognize their accomplishments, care enough to know them.
- Support them with resources, both job-related and family-related.
- Surround them with others who are high performers.
- Offer opportunities for growth and genuine encouragement (not false praise).
- Help them make the connection between their own goals and those of the organization.

If you match talent to tasks, model a balance between work ethic and commitment to family and community, and build actualizing experiences in the workplace, you'll be well on your way to developing an empowering workplace.

If, in addition, you value employees instead of simply evaluating them, you will promote *response-ability*: the ability to respond to both internal and external customers in ways that contribute to personal and organizational missions, to create and innovate in ways that add value to products and services, to be responsible for their own contributions, and to take initiative for their own growth. How do you do this?

- By allowing mistakes and encouraging learning from them.
- By equating success less with movement up a career ladder and more with learning and growing across career possibilities.
- By compensating workers fairly and intrinsically.

Discussion Questions

1. How do your current hiring practices ensure a good "match" between employees and their jobs? How could they be improved?
2. What evidence of job addiction do you find in your organization? Is such behavior rewarded, and how?

Take an Empowering Step

Create a "money can't buy loyalty" map for yourself. Starting with the For Example box on page 127, and considering the boxes on page 126 and 128, determine what characteristics of your organization (and perhaps yourself) promote loyalty and response-ability.

Chapter 9. Ask the Right Questions: From Problem Solving to High Performance

The journey to high performance—and to empowerment—requires change *and* some tactics for avoiding the potholes in the road. Here are a few travelers' tips:

- Consider *benchmarks*, or exemplary practices, that other similar companies exhibit. Be careful, though, not to assume that success elsewhere will mean success at home. Develop a realistic implementation plan (see the questions on pages 133 and 134 to get started).
- Analyze where the *energy* in your organization originates. If it derives from threats, from crises, from maintaining the status quo, or from striving for more, more, more...you may find that the energy is short-lived. Not what you're seeking in an empowering organization. See if you can't generate energy by thinking ahead, thinking quality instead of quantity, thinking opportunity instead of discontinuity.
- *Envision* achievement and anticipate success, and you (and your organization) will *thrive*.
- Challenge tradition by using *appreciative inquiry* to look for what works—so you can do more of it! Instead of finding and solving problems, find, repeat, and expand successes.
- *Value* high performance and change by evaluating the positive things a particular change can do for your organization, by getting solid information about what's already right with your organization (the things you *don't* need to change).

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the halo effect (page 137), and try to pinpoint at least one expectation that set the stage for higher achievement, in yourself or in someone else. What expectations do you have for the future? Will they set you up to succeed?
2. Select another organization that has at least one benchmark you'd like to reach. How does this organization compare to yours? (See the bulleted list on pages 133 and 134 for guidelines.) What does this comparison tell you about whether the other company's benchmark is realistic for your company?

Take an Empowering Step

Write down one thing you did right today. Then write down two other situations in which you can more of the same "right." You'll have taken a step toward appreciative inquiry.

Chapter 10. Empowering for the Future: The Manager's Challenge

Don't stifle your ideas of what the future might hold. Think ahead, plan ahead, be ready to move ahead! Remember *kaizen*, the concept of continuous improvement, and picture a future even more empowering than today's.

Here are just a few "visions" we had...but don't dare limit yourself. We're just here to get you started thinking:

Technology: How can you use technology to the advantage of your organization, your employees, and your customers? How can it work to personalize, customize, globalize your operations? How can you help people be comfortable about privacy? Safe about financial transactions? Capable of person-to-person communication?

Ethics: Does your organization have a code of ethics? Do people in the organization know it? Live it? Identify with it? Does it reinforce the core values of your company? How can such a code help build relationships, both internal and external to your organization?

Family and Community: No limits! Empowerment needn't be limited to the workplace. How can you extend what you've learned about empowering workplaces to your life outside the workplace, with family and community? Do you share your talents, capabilities, and knowledge with others?

Philanthropy: Does your organization invest some of its energy in making it possible for employees to contribute to philanthropic efforts? With time off, money, in-kind contributions, for example? Can you track ways in which the organization has benefited from such contributions? (Use these data to convince the skeptics that philanthropy has its own rewards and to celebrate successes with its supporters.)

Discussion Questions

1. Does your organization have a privacy policy? If not, should it? Generate a list of ways in which such a policy could reinforce empowerment.
2. How can your organization help others (in- or outside the organization) feel like a million bucks without spending a million bucks? (See pages 156 and 157 for inspiration.)

Take an Empowering Step

With others in your organization, brainstorm ways in which you can put your business savvy, your company's resources, or your employees' passions to work to benefit your community. Choose one from the list, and develop a plan that will put it into action.