



## **Key Principles of Empowerment**

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Empowerment is the delegation of tasks and accountabilities to someone who might not normally do this work. It is an appealing concept to managers — after all, isn't it a way to offload some of their work onto someone else? Anything that accomplishes this is worth a look.

Like many other principles, however, empowerment is more easily described than implemented. It requires that the manager behave in specific way and it assumes that the employee wants to be empowered. While many employees welcome the idea, many others want no part of it.

If the manager is willing to empower in a constructive way and if the employee is willing to try it out, here is what to do.

### **Steps**

#### **#1 Preparation**

Be prepared for the fact that people make honest mistakes. How you respond dictates future success of empowerment. If people are punished for trying to do the right thing, that will be the last time that they or anyone within earshot will accept empowerment.

#### **#2 Setting Expectations**

- Agree on the what — the desired outcomes, e.g., quantity, quality, schedule, budget. Don't be too specific about how.

- Make sure the person is capable of doing what you expect, i.e., has the know-how.
- Agree on guidelines.
  - What can/cannot be done, e.g., capital constraints, when to involve other people .
  - Where the pitfalls are.
- Identify resources, e.g., people, funding.
- Define accountability.

#### **#3 Doing The Work**

- Let people think.
- Monitor constructively — “How can I help?”, not “Why is the work late?”

#### **#4 Feedback**

- Recognize and reward success. Also recognize people who tried to do the right things and exhibit the right behaviors, even though the results may have fallen short.
- Treat non-success as the basis for learning, not retribution.
- Give public praise and private reprimand, not the other way around.

### **Outcomes**

Having gone through this cycle, employee self-confidence rises, and with it, the capacity to do a broader range of tasks.

The manager is better off, not just by spreading the work around, but by building a more capable team.