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**What's Behind the "E" Word:  
Myths About Empowerment and  
Why You Need It**

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## **What's Behind the "E" Word: Myths About Empowerment and Why You Need It**

### *Are you as confused as I am?*

The word "empowerment" has been kicked around a lot lately in business circles, and just about all of us have become confused by it. The dictionary defines empowerment as giving authority or power to others. Our focus as leaders is on quality, productivity, and cost effectiveness, so why are we suddenly talking about handing power over to employees? There are countless strategic, political, and technical issues that drive our decisions and influence those who work with us. It's hard to focus on something as "soft" as empowering people.

Quality in organizations means delivering the right services to our clients efficiently and responsively. In fact, most of us already know we must have involved, motivated people in the picture. We're already working on participative management. What does that have to do with empowerment? Lately it seems that people spend more time quibbling about who should be empowered and what that means than they spend getting their work done.

### *Disempowerment: The unintended consequences*

Many employees feel powerless to accomplish the jobs we're asking them to do. This is documented by data from surveys, training programs, and managers' reports at many corporations struggling with the empowerment issue. Low commitment and low self-esteem are having a negative financial impact on the business. So there is a clear link between empowerment and profitability.

### *So what's the problem?*

Block's original idea--that each person should take responsibility for his or her own well-being--is a call for self-empowerment vs. the old view of leaders as caretakers. This shift is one that most of us find easy to agree with: speak up for your own needs and for what you think is best for the organization, be accountable for your own behavior, hold others accountable for theirs, and break out of the paternalistic cycle. It surely makes sense when confronting the big and sudden changes organizations are forced to make these days. The "parent" or "caretaker" role no longer works in a world where long-term employees may lack critical skills that the organization needs to be responsive. Managers and employees at all levels are quite right to assume ultimate responsibility for their own skills and performance.

### ***Desperately seeking efficiency***

Between the time that Block's original book was first published and when it was reprinted as a paperback in 1991, there was an explosion of books, articles, and corporate training on the topic of empowerment. The idea of empowerment has now evolved as "the" answer for how to do more with less. Block himself called attention to this new emphasis in his preface to the 1991 edition:

Since this book was written, the concept of empowerment has exploded into the national consciousness, and concern about negative politics (my original focus) has faded into an interesting sidelight. [Now,] the promise of empowerment is that it will dramatically increase the sense of responsibility and ownership at every level of the organization, especially at the bottom, where products and services are delivered to customers.  
(Block, p. xiii)

In the nineties, every responsive American organization is learning how to live with leaner staffing and flatter structures. The "answer" represented by empowerment is one most leaders are desperately seeking. Some companies started their restructuring a decade or more earlier and are well into an empowerment strategy for getting the efficiency they were originally looking for. The most conspicuous of the big ones is General Electric, which sold off businesses and reduced the payroll by 100,000 employees between 1980 and 1990 while doubling profits during the same period.

### ***Empowerment as a critical route to efficiency***

Most of us looked for and found some new efficiencies with technology and the improvements that first surfaced with total quality management. However, if we look at who's done best over the last decade--in measurable quality, growth, and stock valuation--it's been companies like GE, Merck, Xerox, Japanese superstars, and the many others who've become fixated on speedy delivery of service and product innovations. Upon further examination, it turns out that these corporations are places where the specific focus of leaders has been on the creative use of employees' energies to drive the technologies and quality methods so necessary for being able to compete.

Their "secret" to success is that employees have been provided the goals, the training, and the "freedom" they need to "own" their new demands and become fully accountable. Employees gain the decision-making authority they need either to do the job better and faster than it had been done before, or to learn from their mistakes and make improvements. A two-way "contract" demands from employees and their work teams a direct contribution to the corporation's profitability. The employer kicks in the trust, delegated authority, and resources needed.

### ***A new definition of empowerment***

This two-way "deal" between management and the workforce brings us to a definition of empowerment that inextricably links their needs. The success of the organization is now in the hands of employees equipped to deliver it. To summarize the connection, some new definitions are included below:

**Empowerment is:**

A shared understanding between managers and employees that employees are trusted and valued partners. Because they are in the best position to assume responsibility for individual and team results, employees take action and make decisions that support the organization's goals. Managers acting as coaches align goals, measures, and resources in a climate of trust and open feedback.

**The purpose of empowerment is:**

To leverage our resources in a competitive environment where speed, efficiency, innovation, and commitment to service are required.

**Empowering leaders provide:**

Development, direction, and resources needed by employees in order to assume responsibility and accountability for achieving organizational goals with full commitment.

**Employees gain:**

Autonomy and fulfillment through their contribution to the organization and the continuous development of skills and knowledge.

### ***Not as easy as it sounds***

This seems good on paper, but many of us get stuck on the part about decision-making authority. Bosses, team members, consultants, and popular business gurus are all telling us to delegate the authority to match responsibility. That's where the tug of war over power seems to get us distracted. It's just not that simple. There are so many things flying by the executive levels every day--changing economic news, the regulatory environment, fiduciary requirements, competing technologies, plans for restructuring, politics, and a hundred other areas that affect what we require of our people and how they do their jobs. Our business need is for adaptability--as well as responsibility and accountability. Participation, yes, but full authority pushed to lowest levels is a much harder shift to make.

And yet this deeper definition of empowerment is what fast track organizations are using successfully:

- AT&T has shifted to self-managed work groups in a majority of regional functions, resulting in huge gains in profitability.
- Legendary Nordstrom is one of the few large department store retailers that has sustained healthy performance far surpassing all competitors. They do it by empowering front-line employees to make all decisions affecting customers they deal with.
- Merck's stunning stock market performance boils down to efficient innovations in new drugs--accomplished by cross-disciplinary research teams who manage billion-dollar budgets entrepreneurially and without a traditional hierarchy.
- GE's Industrial and Power Systems business, a \$6 billion, 35,000 person operation, increased their operating profits in 1990 and 1991 by 26% and 46% respectively, largely through the "Work-out" process of empowering cross-functional, cross-level teams to find solutions to business problems. CEO Jack Welch and his corporate cheerleaders told Power Systems executives they couldn't say "No" unless there were clear business reasons to nix an approach suggested by the employee team.
- Southern California Edison Electric last year adopted a Work-out process of their own based on the GE model and is beginning to see big financial gains from initial projects involving cross-functional teams.

***Can we really do it here? Do we really want to?***

Having smart people in place for setting strategies and dedicated employees for implementing them has worked well in many organizations. Managers have been involving employees in decisions all along, as participative management has been more and more a part of our everyday style of doing business. Those who work with and for us, however, are wanting more information and the full authority to carry out their newly delegated tasks. Employees may be asked in a meeting, "What do you suggest?" and then see the manager go away and make the decision elsewhere with access to information they've never seen. This isn't enough for people to feel empowered. Neither is it enough for organizations, aiming to match the stellar performance of others using employee involvement, to truly capitalize on the knowledge and talent in their workforces.

***Myths about empowerment***

It has become clearer and clearer, then, that "traditional" participative management is not the same thing as empowerment. If empowerment is more than getting team members'

input on decisions--but not exactly handing out full freedom to do whatever they want--then what is it? It's probably useful to look first at some of the misconceptions many managers share, and then to look at the dynamics of empowerment in currently successful organizations.

***Myth #1: With empowerment, managers no longer get credit for their unit's accomplishments***

Although it goes against common wisdom to raise the profile of their employees by putting them on center stage, it turns out that the leaders of high performance teams usually receive more rather than less credit. Why?

- They are known for developing talent in the organization.
- Employees who get public credit for their work become unstoppable and committed. This leads to even higher performance in areas the leader is being measured on.
- News travels fast about who people like working for, news that easily reaches upper levels.

***Myth #2: Employees aren't capable of handling decision-making authority***

It's true that leaders can't easily hand over major responsibilities without developing the people who'll carry them out. However, it's amazing how conscientious employees are when they are entrusted to handle something important for the organization, even when it's a stretch for them to master the necessary skills. "Turned on" workers who can barely read have been known to pore over financial data, blueprints, or other technical reports to extract crucial information they need to improve their processes. Leaders who readily delegate and develop people for new responsibilities find that their time and other resources are well spent, as their employees and teams learn to handle most things quickly, leaving only a small portion of the new work in need of transitional supervision.

In the case of irresponsible people, no amount of skill development can make up for immaturity or weak character. These folks are probably giving less than others even when closely supervised. However, the specific goals and measures needed for successful empowerment create the structure to bring poor work to light--or to motivate for better performance. Often, people who are given responsibilities that seem to be "over their heads" rise to the new level with enthusiasm and the diligence to learn challenging skills. When empowered with decision-making authority, these team members master the learning cycle with amazing thoroughness.

***Myth #3: People need regular supervision in order to sustain productivity***

People need a structure that is more powerful than a manager keeping them busy and productive every moment. They need specific goals and measures that they can track themselves. When measures are in place and really guiding actions and decisions, output

and efficiency can be observed and improved by the team as a whole. The manager's time and talents can be better used elsewhere.

***Myth #4: Decisions at lower levels slow down the process***

While the start-up time necessary for clarifying goals and training folks for optimal decision making may at first slow down the process, the increased resources freed up by delegation almost always speeds up decision making in the medium-to-long run. Taking the necessary steps to set things up correctly at the beginning (i.e., provide more background and allow for mistakes and corrections) pays off sooner than most of us imagine, and productivity can skyrocket.

***Myth #5: Managers will take the blame for the increase in serious mistakes***

Allowing people to take risks and sometimes fail is an important part of training them to assume responsibility. It's critical to avoid always stepping in and "rescuing" them before they make a mistake, so they don't become dependent on a boss-provided "safety net." The gains you make by having a committed, empowered workplace should far surpass the occasional glitches that occur in your department. The "risk" that no one will ever try anything difficult or innovative is far greater than the risk posed by a mistake that will permanently damage the reputation of the unit. Of course, as the leader of the team, you should determine the few times when it really is necessary to step in before dangerous or other serious mistakes are made. This is part of the good judgment required of an effective leader.

***Myth #6: Allowing personal freedom leads to chaos in the workplace***

It's true that empowering people to accomplish the stated goals in the ways that they think are best leads people into doing things differently than you, the manager, would do them. Rather than chaos, however, it often leads to the discovery of new and better approaches that everyone can use to his or her advantage.

***Myth #7: People want autonomy but they don't want responsibility***

Everyone has whiners in their midst. It's true that a small percentage of people in the organization will probably have excuses about why it's not their fault that their responsibilities aren't being fulfilled. Even when you give them total freedom to handle it their way, there are some who will shirk responsibility. This isn't a good reason, however, to hold everyone else back. The large majority of people will far surpass their previous performance when responsibilities are matched with the authority to make decisions affecting them.

***Myth #8: People really want the organization to take care of them***

All of us want a certain amount of security and comfort in our jobs. But it has been shown repeatedly that people are motivated far more by personal challenge and the opportunity to contribute something meaningful in their jobs than they are by being taken care of by a paternalistic organization. Several employee surveys ranking motivators have shown that, on average, items having to do with challenge, accomplishments, and developing skills were ranked among the top five motivators, while items related to close-knit family relationships and personal convenience ranked in the bottom five. People may be pushed out of their "comfort zone," but continuous improvement of skills in order to meet shared goals is a lot more stimulating than hanging around waiting to be told what to do next and to retire without ever having felt challenged.

***Myth #9: Empowerment only works in certain environments***

Empowered individuals and teams may look different in various industries and settings. However, in all settings there seem to be more possibilities for how to empower than we, as managers, recognize. Bank tellers, prison guards, teachers, nuclear power plant operators, and many others have all worked as decision-making teams. What's exciting about these kinds of environments is that it's possible to meet requirements of the organization while still gaining cost effectiveness and enhanced profitability.

***Myth #10: Management jobs become obsolete when team members are empowered***

In settings where self-managed teams have been implemented, the role of the supervisor has dramatically changed. However, with an empowered workforce, leaders at all levels shift into a more, rather than less, strategic role. Quenching daily fires in employee situations becomes almost obsolete; aligning goals, providing resources, training, and planning for future needs are the new priorities for how managers can best spend their time.

Because pushing down decision making through empowerment often occurs sometime **after** a restructuring takes place, the number of managers is usually not reduced. In fact, some organizations see a need to fill key professional and managerial roles that are essential to supporting the teams.

***From the paternalistic to the empowered organization***

Everyone who has been in or worked with organizations making the transition to empowerment knows that it's not an easy shift to make. Peter Block admits on the second page of his preface to the 1991 edition of *The Empowered Manager*:

The problem with empowerment is that it demands a radical realignment of the beliefs about control systems and the levels at which decisions are made. Every

sincere effort at empowerment entails pushing governance down to lower and lower levels of the organization. The payoff is greater levels of quality and customer response. The difficulty is that it seems to require that we sell revolution to the ruling class. (Block, p. xiv)

What does an empowered vs. a paternalistic organization look like? Cynthia Scott and Dennis Jaffe describe the two as a circle vs. a pyramid organization (1991). In the pyramid or traditional hierarchy:

- Decisions, feedback, and change are top-down
- Individuals are responsible only for their own jobs
- Communication is slow between divisions
- Job security and promotions follow if you do your job and the business expands
- Managers are responsible for results and directions for how to achieve them
- Tight control is needed with employees because they aren't expected to be motivated

In contrast, the circle organization looks very different:

- Shareholders and therefore customers are at the center
- Cooperative team members share responsibility, skills, authority, and measurement of their progress
- Communication and collaborative decision-making are key skills
- Individuals are expected to manage themselves and are accountable to the whole team for meeting customer needs profitably
- Managers inspire, train, and link up employees to needed resources inside and outside the company

These contrasting organizations represent very different assumptions about what drives profitability most effectively. Changing from a pyramid to a circle requires deep examination of those beliefs.

### ***What will happen if we hang back?***

Team members in pyramid-type organizations repeatedly admit in interview studies that they contribute only 25-35% of what they're capable of doing for the company. Clock watching, feeling too frustrated to do anything outside the expected, and placing attention on outside hobbies and other interests where efforts are more satisfactorily rewarded, eats away huge portions of time and energy not used on the job. Those who are empowered to contribute their fullest often report staying late to finish tasks, forgetting how long they had been concentrating on a task, willingness to use off-time to organize or cover for others, etc. The customer service literature is packed with stories of desk and phone clerks in visionary companies who have hopped planes, used their own cash for customer needs and performed other heroic feats to successfully represent their firms. Dedicated workers have spent countless hours and their own dollars in doing high-level projects

where they felt they had an influence on how it was accomplished. These contributions go straight into the profits column and yet rarely occur if people feel they can't contribute to changes they want to see.

A definite correlation exists between organizations' financial performance (as measured by average compounded return on investment and stock price increases) and their progressiveness in managing human resources. Richard Crawford outlined his findings about this relationship in his 1991 book, *In the Era of Human Capital: The Emergence of Talent, Intelligence, and Knowledge as the Worldwide Economic Force and What It Means to Managers and Investors*. Those who focus on an empowered workforce will continue to gain the competitive edge over those who ignore it as a powerful economic factor. Crawford describes this shift in his evaluation of companies:

Stock investment decisions in the emerging knowledge economy will be difficult because the factors that lead to corporate success are different than they have been historically. In the industry economy, the keys to success were physical and financial capital, and economies of scale gave companies distinct competitive advantages. In the knowledge economy, the keys to success are human capital and knowledge, and companies may suffer from diseconomies of scale as bureaucracy impedes knowledge and information flow and slows responsiveness. (Crawford, p. 152)

This flow of knowledge is an asset for the corporation of today. By this analysis, then, it would be shortsighted to ignore the empowerment factor as irrelevant to overall organizational performance and profitability.

Finally, the empowerment/profit connection shows up in unexpected indirect cost savings. There have been a raft of recent studies confirming the hypothesis that employees who feel unempowered and frustrated on the job get sick more, get hurt on the job more, file more worker's compensation and health insurance claims, sue the company for various reasons, and stay home more when they are sick than employees who feel that their company communicates well and values their contribution. This subjective factor is so pronounced that insurers providing worker's compensation are struggling to include the "employee involvement" factor in their underwriting analyses. Interestingly, employees in physically demanding and even high-risk situations report lower stress than those in low-key, "cushy" jobs when they feel a sense of control over how they do their jobs.

### ***Impact of disempowerment on the employee***

As leaders, it's easy to underestimate the critical impact of our words and actions on employees. One careless phrase tossed off lightly can upset the trusting relationship built over a long period. Stephen R. Covey, who wrote the popular *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, describes this delicate relationship as an "emotional bank account." Each betrayal of trust or perception by the employee that the manager doesn't care, isn't

listening, or in some way devalues the person's contribution counts as a "withdrawal" from that bank account. For every withdrawal, Covey says, it takes at least ten "deposits"--positive and trusting experiences between employee and manager--to overcome the negative feelings. Therefore, it "pays" to avoid the disempowering behaviors that are so hard to erase. Some of the most common ways that leaders are perceived by employees as disempowering are:

***Negative Impact #1: Disrespect***

The number one human need in all job settings is for people to feel they are making a contribution and are appreciated for doing so. When managers scold them in front of others, show no respect for their time schedule, refuse to greet them in a civil manner, or in other ways show disrespect, employees are very likely to become dissatisfied with their jobs. Such feelings on the part of employees have been correlated with absenteeism and loss of productivity.

Leaders are often so distracted that they fail to notice that they are being disrespectful. It's a requirement of empowerment and quality improvement that managers look closely at the consequences of their disrespectful words and behavior.

Providing honest answers and feedback is one of the best ways to show respect to employees. A simple "I don't know the answer to that. Can you help with a solution?" is far more appreciated than skillful evasion or bluffing. Minimizing disruptions to employees' work schedules, respecting privacy, and demonstrating concern through actions rather than words all demonstrate the respect so essential to job satisfaction and performance.

***Negative Impact #2: Secrecy and withholding of information***

Leaders often consider it risky to prematurely discuss strategies or ideas that haven't been made "official" yet. From the employee's point of view, the manager is locked behind closed doors. People feel they can't get straight answers to questions about the future, so they feel like outsiders to the organization; worst of all, they feel they aren't trusted. Furthermore, the employee is denied information that may be critical to the job. When the "secret" is finally made public, people are at best unenthusiastic and, at worst, angry about not being involved a lot earlier.

What managers don't realize is that the negative attitudes created by this withholding behavior may pose an even bigger risk than the threat of information leaking out inappropriately to the wrong audience or the threat of a lawsuit. Legal, competitive, and securities regulations call for caution in disclosing sensitive information. But in the case of business planning and discussion of strategies that don't involve such legal caution, it's usually possible to include employees in the debating stages, when they can see how leaders work through tough issues and gain a better understanding of the problems and the possibilities being considered. Furthermore, it's likely that ideas and data from the

front lines will add substantively to creative solutions. A key factor to look at is that employees in organizations where they don't feel involved or trusted file grievances and lawsuits at a far higher rate than in organizations where they feel valued highly for their contributions. The fear that managers may appear indecisive or lacking in knowledge about business issues in front of employees is misplaced if you consider the *value* of developing employees to solve problems together.

***Negative Impact #3: Undelegating***

The damage done when managers "take back" or intervene in team member decisions is more far-reaching than most managers realize. The sense of ownership people have over their areas of delegated authority is very important to them. Most people take their responsibilities very seriously. That's why employees can be devastated when they feel that they or their team went to a lot of trouble only to be crushed by their boss's "whim," or because they were missing key information. It can't be emphasized enough that any future employee initiatives will be paralyzed if intervention by the manager is unjustified or mishandled.

When critical knowledge must be brought by the manager to a decision that has already been delegated, it is essential that the leader collaborate with the employee or team in reaching a new decision, if long-term cynicism and delegating back up to higher levels are to be avoided.

***Negative Impact #4: "Punishing" candor and risk-taking***

Perhaps the fastest way to develop cynicism and frustration about a culture change effort is to encourage and then "punish" people for honest discussion and other risky approaches to team improvement. In multiple studies, people report feeling far more negatively toward managers who behave "hypocritically" than they do toward managers who are consistently authoritarian without pretending otherwise. It's better to lead slowly and steadily into an empowered climate than to use the vocabulary of empowerment and none of the behaviors. After an incident where a risk taker is "publicly humiliated," no one is likely to speak up critically in the near future.

***Negative Impact #5: Failure to provide goals, priorities, or training***

Failure to clarify goals and priorities or to provide necessary training is like asking people to play a game and then refusing to tell them the rules. This common omission by managers is a prescription for disappointing results and decreased morale. Having unclear goals is often the number one complaint in attitude surveys and focus groups in organizations of all kinds. Team members want much more information about business goals and strategies than they are getting. It's virtually impossible to spend too much time discussing goals and priorities with people on the team. These are pre-requisites to the team's success. Hand in hand with goals are the important measures being used to

assess the team's progress. Frequent feedback and explanation about progress orients people to the journey still ahead and invites improvement ideas and actions.

***Negative Impact #6: Responsibility without authority***

Responsibility without the authority to make decisions is another top complaint from team members. Feeling hampered in being able to affect results on which they are being measured can lead to "learned helplessness," a psychological condition that creates inaction and withdrawal. It's easy for managers to underestimate the differences felt by employees whose responsibilities are matched with authority and those who must "check in" before taking action in their area. While providing the necessary training, information, and feedback needed by employees to handle authority equal to their responsibilities, managers can test out "full empowerment" in certain areas. It's often surprising how effectively the employee operates when provided with the needed authority for empowered delegation.

***Who makes the decisions around here, anyway?***

Managers often ask, "What decisions are left for me to make now that people in my team are supposedly empowered?" This way of asking the question will lead to even more confusion because it assumes that "getting to" make decisions is a goal in itself. It is far better to focus on how to get the team goals accomplished, than on whether employees, the manager, or the whole team ends up making any one decision. Who makes the decision may depend on expertise, how many people will implement the project, and who is closest to the situation requiring a decision. Leaders and employees working together optimize their time, talents, and learning curve as the team benefits from the empowered approach. Even though the leader's behavior may not "look" like the boss's of the old organization, the work may be getting done far more effectively and customers' needs being met more responsively. The employee's behavior may look more like leadership than the "subordinate" mind-set of the past. Even though it may at first feel uncomfortable, everyone stands to benefit from empowerment. GE's CEO, Jack Welch, summarized this excitement in 1989, as he described the importance of empowerment to being competitive:

Our transformation in the '80s was largely confined to upper management. In the '90s it has to engulf and galvanize, it has to be in the blood of every single person in the company.

We also found in the '80s that becoming faster is tied to becoming simpler. Our thousands of employees will not respond to visions that have subparagraphs and footnotes. If we're not simple, we can't be fast--and if we're not fast we can't win. The demand for simplicity applies to every one of us. To an engineer it's clean, functional designs with fewer parts. On an individual, interpersonal level, it takes the form of plain-speaking

directness--honesty. The leader's unending responsibility must be to remove every detour, every barrier to ensure that vision is first clear and then real. But just as surely as speed flows from simplicity, simplicity is grounded in self-confidence. It takes enormous self-confidence to be simple--particularly in large organizations. Those who are trapped in it are afraid to share, can't be passionate, and--in the '90s--won't win.

But people who are freed from the confines of their box on the organization chart, who have and have had a chance to dream, risk, and win, whose status truly rests on *real-world* achievement--those are the people who develop the self-confidence to be simple, to share every bit of information available to them, to listen to those above, below, and around them and then move swiftly.

Speed. Simplicity. Self-confidence. We can grow a work ethic that plays to our strengths, one that unleashes and liberates the awesome productive energy that we know resides in our work force. If we can let people see that what they do *counts*, means something; if you and I and the business leadership of this country can have the self-confidence to let people go--to create an environment where each man and woman who works in our companies can see a clear connection between what he or she does every day, all day and winning and losing in the real world--we *can* become productive beyond our wildest dreams... (Welch)

### ***How does an empowering manager do it?***

The ARCTIC model provides six critical focus areas for empowering leaders. If you concentrate on these competencies, the work will get done more productively than ever before. Here's a good way to sum up the leader's new role:

In the past, managers managed workers. Now, more and more, all of the players will manage themselves--and [leaders will] manage the environment in which they work. (Carr, p.97)

## **A**ALIGNMENT:

Spend a lot of time clarifying goals and strategies and integrating them horizontally with peers in other functions or divisions. Also coordinate vertically with executive plans and directions in order to give your employees maximum knowledge of business goals.

- Big Picture
- Goals
- Measures

## **R**ESOURCES:

Provide the tools and expertise needed for success.

- Budget
- Systems/Technical Support
- People

## **C**OACHING:

Guide the learning and improvement process with employees and teams.

- Modeling
- Feedback
- Facilitation
- Mentoring

## **T**RAINING:

Identify and find ways to develop knowledge and skills in these critical areas.

- Current Needs
- Future Needs
- Cross-Training
- Continuous Quality Improvement

## **I**NFORMATION:

Get all needed information--in user-friendly format--to the people at the front lines of service.

- More and Better
- Faster
- Customer/Supplier
- All Directions

## CLIMATE:

Showing respect and encouraging employee respect are the pillars of an empowered work setting.

- Trust and Respect
- Confidence
- Partnership

### *Starting with self-empowerment*

No matter what your role is, whether you're a newly hired individual contributor, CEO, or somewhere in between, it is impossible to empower anyone else if you do not feel empowered yourself. Therefore, it is important for each of us to distinguish between self-limiting and perhaps mistaken beliefs, and real restraints or barriers that may be imposed on us. We are often our own worst enemies when it comes to finding a reason for not being able to do what we need or want to do. However, it may be necessary to spend some preliminary time and effort with your boss and peers in order to reach agreement on empowerment issues that will impact the team you lead.

Ultimately, managers who effectively lead the empowerment effort realize a great deal of personal growth and satisfaction. Unlike nonrenewable energy resources, the power available to an empowering leader actually increases the more it is channeled to others.

**Self-Check on Disempowering Actions**

The following indicators represent ARCTIC leadership competencies at the individual and team levels. This may be helpful to you in examining your current behaviors.

	<i>With the Individual Employee, I...</i>	<i>With the Team, I...</i>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure goals are clear</li> <li>• Help the employee coordinate with others in order to avoid confusion or duplication</li> <li>• Delegate authority equal to responsibilities</li> <li>• Help the employee track progress using specific measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify and coordinate goals in the team setting</li> <li>• Ease and improve relations with other departments</li> <li>• Share information to and from executive leaders</li> <li>• Am candid</li> <li>• Encourage team progress reviews</li> </ul>
<b>R</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure the employee has needed tools and resources</li> <li>• Provide temporary help or contacts necessary for this role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to team needs</li> <li>• Provide resources to address team needs</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach the person supportively</li> <li>• Provide honest and frequent feedback</li> <li>• Model desired behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk my talk</li> <li>• Convene the team to plan and implement improvements</li> </ul>
<b>T</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and suggest appropriate training</li> <li>• Give timely access to training</li> <li>• Train for future career goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate time for team development</li> <li>• Encourage collaborative learning</li> </ul>
<b>I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make available all helpful information</li> <li>• Format information for maximum usefulness to person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share corporate information</li> <li>• Encourage information sharing among all members</li> <li>• Provide systems for efficient access</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show concern and respect for employee</li> <li>• Highlight their skills across the organization</li> <li>• Demonstrate trust and confidence</li> <li>• Encourage risk-taking and honesty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support team and all members outside department</li> <li>• Highlight team accomplishments to upper management</li> <li>• Show respect for and confidence in team</li> </ul>

**Empowerment Culture**

Use the following lists to identify areas in need of improvement for your department or organization.

<i>Characteristics of an Empowering Culture</i>	<i>Characteristics of a Disempowering Culture</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals and teams focused on organization goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People focused on time off and their own agendas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems and mistakes discussed openly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems and mistakes hidden or ignored</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candid problem solving focuses on customers and business issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political focus taking time and resources away from customer and shareholder issues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions based on all available information (vs. opinions of executives only)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions largely based on opinions of high-status leaders, and other input discounted</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and measures clear to all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and measures nonexistent or not discussed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-functional communication and collaboration occurring regularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turf wars and poor inter-team communication</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People pitch in readily to help one another in a crisis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaming and finger-pointing during a crisis</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicts are open and constructive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict is covert or destructive</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback and critique are routine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback is avoided</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are excited and involved in the work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are listless and seek their "fun" elsewhere</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk is considered a condition of growth and change; mistakes are positive lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People avoid risks for fear of making a mistake</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor performance is confronted on a timely basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor performance is ignored or handled inconsistently</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation plus valuing positive side of tradition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on tradition only</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High initiative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inaction and frustration in the face of problems</li> </ul>

## References

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