

Being People Smart

Lesson 7-6: Empowerment

Discussion Guide – Confidentiality Reminder

One Word Check-in

Update – Personal, Business, Leadership

“Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

Empowerment means giving employees the autonomy, authority and resources to make decisions and take actions that benefit the organization and its customers. Empowerment moves people from being doers or task followers to becoming leaders responsible for their own ideas and results. American business has been moving toward empowerment for multiple decades and it has accelerated in recent times. Companies that are the best workplaces generally practice empowerment and servant leadership (see page two for a brief history). The people are the heartbeat of the organization; therefore, we must do our best to keep the heart healthy.

People want to make a difference. Today, the best people (maybe most people) have many options for where they invest their time and energy. They desire to believe that they are making a difference, that their work matters and that they are given the latitude to be the best version of themselves possible. They want to be led but not micromanaged. The truth is that the best people will leave for a company that will give them the empowerment they desire. Empowerment generates a feeling of respect for the people in the organization.

How do you create an empowering organization? While the information below sounds simple, it is difficult to create and sustain an empowering culture.

- 1) It must begin at the top of an organization. The CEO must develop and demonstrate empowerment to everyone. A common language should be developed of what and how to empower others. Also, understand the language not to use.⁽¹⁾
- 2) Trust must be established and nurtured, recognizing that it is fragile and can be destroyed in a few words and a few actions by the leadership.
- 3) Eliminate bureaucracy. Establishing a multitude of inflexible rules may make sense to some, but too many rules are an unhealthy way to maintain control.
- 4) Treat everything as a learning opportunity, even failures. An empowering organization makes room for people to take risks. Not every decision is perfect, even for the CEO.
- 5) Create a learning environment.
- 6) Promote teamwork and collaboration across organizational boundaries. In fact, boundaries should be eliminated as much as possible.

Shared Experiences:

- Can someone share how they were affected when they were empowered to accomplish something of significance?
- How would you describe the level of empowerment within your company, and how has it changed in the last few years?
- What are the benefits to the customer and organization if there is a sense of empowerment?
- What have you seen as the biggest barriers for an organization to adopt an empowering culture?

Bottom line: Jesus empowered twelve ordinary, uneducated people to go change the world and he promised he would be with them. They did and he did. This model can apply to us as we empower people to do something big. We should be there with them to encourage, offering help when needed.

One Word Check-out

Dig Deeper

Want to learn more?

- *Book:* [Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders](#) by David Marquet. Commander Marquet took control of a nuclear attack submarine that had been the worst performing boat in the Navy and turned it into the best performing boat in one year.
- ⁽¹⁾*Book:* [Leadership Is Language: The Hidden Power of What You Say – and What You Don't](#) by David Marquet. This book contains many examples and research about empowerment.
- *Video:* [What's the biggest impediment to empowerment?](#) Leadership Nudges with David Marquet. He has a wealth of short videos (one minute) under Leadership Nudges with David Marquet. These are worth exploring.
- *Article:* [9 Ways CEOs Can Become Chief Empowerment Officers](#) – As you look ahead into the future, the best leaders will be those who empower others.
- *Video:* [Rethinking Employee Empowerment and Loyalty](#) by Simon Sinek
- *Article:* [Employee Recognition: Low Cost, High Impact](#) by Annamarie Mann and Nate Dvorak published by Gallup
- *Book:* [Multipliers – How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter](#) by Liz Wiseman
- *Article:* [3 Ways Employee Empowerment Can Turn Into a Train Wreck](#) by Marcel Schwantes writing in Inc.com. When employee empowerment is overdone, you risk these potential train wrecks.

Famous quote by Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'”

Brief history of empowerment in American business

American business has operated with a top down, command and control management style beginning with the Industrial Revolution (and maybe even before). This was especially true after WWII when many Americans served in the military. This military thinking was reinforced as these people started leading organizations. That is all that they knew. This began to change under [W. Edward Deming's](#) theory of Total Quality Management (TQM). Under his management training, the Japanese car industry eventually produced more cars than the U.S. companies. Today, empowerment is practiced in many U.S. organizations and the companies that are the best workplaces generally practice empowerment and servant leadership.

What are barriers to creating an empowering culture?

- Command and control management
- Bureaucracy
- Micromanagement
- Being a faultfinder or nitpicker
- Anger
- Not committed to growth and development of people
- Leader insecurity
- Egos