

Changing the Way You Work

EMPOWERMENT IS CRITICAL

“Most people work just hard enough not to get fired and get paid just enough money not to quit.”

—George Carlin

While that statement might have been true a few years ago, in the face of the dismal economy and the loss of millions of jobs throughout the country, employees today are willing to use every tool available to them to ensure they keep their current jobs or find new ones, and smart managers are encouraging them to do so.

Workers must be more agile, multi-talented, and above all, empowered. Empowered employees take control; they make decisions quickly to help a customer, move a project forward, or solve a problem. Empowerment simplifies your job by putting you in charge of your own performance and giving you the responsibility to improve your work, your life, and the experiences of your customers. Those who reject empowerment—who fear risk and cling to the status quo—will lag behind and get left in the dust.

EMPOWERMENT RELIES ON THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

- **Knowledge**—The more you know about the company, your customers, and your position, the better equipped you will be when called upon to create and innovate. You will be able to take that information and repurpose it to meet your own needs and the needs of your customers.

- **Trust**—Your employer must trust you to do the job, to make good decisions, and you must trust that your company values your skills and put you in a position of authority for a reason. You also must trust yourself, have confidence in yourself.
- **Feedback**—It allows you to alter your strategy and reevaluate empowered decisions you have made in the past and allows you to know if you are working within your organization’s expectations. Ask for it, as that will demonstrate your desire to continuously improve, even for criticism, don’t get defensive; accept it and use it to improve your performance.
- **Delegation**—When you are empowered, you have the authority to delegate, to ask for help when you need it. Delegating is not a sign of weakness; it will help you build an empowered team, which ensures a smooth and efficient operation.
- **Recognition**—The more employees are recognized for making empowered decisions, the more likely they will be to use their creativity on every future project and problem. When employees are recognized, they are more likely to replicate their success and make empowered decisions.

ROADBLOCKS TO EMPOWERMENT:

There are roadblocks to empowerment, as well. Once they are removed, however, empowerment can become part of a company’s culture. Two of those roadblocks are:

- **Fear**—Employees who fear making the wrong decisions will never be empowered. They are afraid they will be fired, that they will have to pay for whatever they gave customers to retain their loyalty when they had a problem with the company, or will be yelled at. Being empowered means seeking out and embracing change without fear of retribution.
- **Micromanagement**—Nothing will kill empowerment more quickly than micromanaging, sending the message that you don’t trust your employees. Give them the tools and skills they need to do their jobs, then take off the training wheels and allow them to ride.

Empowered employees also earn the respect of their coworkers and managers and become invaluable to the company. The Ritz Carlton hotel chain makes empowerment a priority and recognizes five employees each quarter for their 5-star behavior, including rewarding each with \$500. Each year, one of those employees is presented a roundtrip ticket to any Ritz Carlton hotel in the world and given \$8,500 in cash. What are you doing for your employees? **RO**

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