

The Empowering Leader

In my book, *Leaders Who Last*, I mention that leadership is all about Who the leader is, where the leader is headed and how the leader enlists others to join him on his visionary journey. When it comes to the people who have joined us, we have four main responsibilities with them:

1. Shepherding
2. Developing
3. Equipping
4. Empowering

I might decide not to personally perform all four of these essential tasks, but I am responsible, as a leader, to see that these four things take place for each person.

- People deserve to be shepherded—loved and accepted for who they are, not merely what they do.
- People deserve to be developed—in their walk with Jesus and in their personal character traits.
- People deserve to be equipped—for ministry on the team taking into account their gifts, passion, experience and capacity
- And, lastly, people deserve to be empowered.

It is the subject of empowerment we will deal with today.

It is my conviction that empowerment sets the stage for shepherding, developing and equipping to take place. If people are working in a situation where empowerment is lacking, efforts to shepherd, develop and equip will be severely hindered.

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What is Empowerment?

In leading, it is critical to create and maintain an environment that is conducive to high morale and enables followers to maximize who they are and make their best contribution to the fulfillment of the vision. This is empowerment!

Empowerment unleashes a person's talents, skills and experience that are already in place but are often underutilized or willfully held back due to a leader's insecurity. Creating an environment of empowerment frees people up to be who God designed them to be: to be their creative and productive best for the team in the workplace or in the ministry.

Just this past week, I was made aware of two situations where people were let go from their jobs without a reasonable explanation or any opportunity for dialogue. It never fails to amaze me how many ministry situations I come across where people are not enjoying what they do and where there is an incredible degree of mistrust, suspicion, gossip and slander that is accepted as routine and normal. These kinds of negative environments poison the possibility of empowerment.

As a leader, how do you create an empowering environment that unleashes people's best? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Make sure, when bringing people onboard, that they have the talent to do what the responsibility calls for. All the training and seminars in the world won't help if the person doesn't have the God-given talent to do what he/she is tasked with. Help your people find a match between talents and roles. You cannot teach talent. You can only select for talent. You cannot take out what God hasn't put in.
- Give people adequate clarity as to their role, responsibilities and expected outcomes
- When developing people, focus on their strengths not their weaknesses
- When people perform excellently and are now looking for the next step, help them find the right fit not just the next rung on the ladder
- Give people freedom to carry out their responsibilities emanating from their personal design without micromanaging them
- When it has been earned and deserved, be lavish with praise both in public and in private. Celebrate the little as well as the big achievements among the people you lead, and commemorate special dates such as: hiring anniversaries, wedding anniversaries and birthdays
- As a leader, take a little more than your share of the blame and a little less than your share of the credit
- Connect often and spontaneously with your people and couple this with formal quarterly reviews that are affirming and, at the same time, deal honestly with issues and less-than-desirable job performance
- Allow conflict on the team that is a result of dealing with real issues and challenging the status quo. Smooth is not always healthy. Any growing and healthy organization will have honest and energized debates over values, philosophy and strategy. Great teams don't play games with each other. They are not afraid to air their dirty laundry. Team members take ownership of mistakes, believe the best about each other and speak honestly without fear of reprisal
- Allow room for a reasonable amount of failure and experimentation

- Consult people affected by a problem or proposed change asking for their ideas- regardless of whether you think you need them or not
- Eliminate needless rules, regulations and policies and allow people as much freedom and mobility as possible as long as they produce excellent results and maintain healthy relationship with the rest of the team
- Enrich jobs by delegating decisions as far down the line as possible
- Give people the material and equipment they need to do their work
- Encourage, promote and spend money on people's professional development

Don't let this list overwhelm or discourage you. Pick one or two items and begin creating an atmosphere of empowerment where your people can become their best and enjoy their work.

“Moreover, when God gives any man, wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work-this is a gift from God.” Ecclesiastes. 5:19 NIV

Three books have been especially helpful to me in learning how to be an empowering leader:

1. *First Break All The Rules* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman
2. *The Five Dysfunctions of A Team* by Patrick Lencioni
3. *The 3 Keys to Empowerment* by Ken Blanchard, John P Carlos and Alan Randolph