

## Empowering Your Team

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Empowering teams increases levels of responsibility and authority with the work that they do, giving them the autonomy to plan and manage their work, make their own decisions and solve their own problems. Recent 'Agile' success stories highlight the mantra of self-managed teams being more efficient, effective and successful.

If you're new to empowerment, you may feel that your job as a leader is on the line - nothing could be further from the truth. You are not redundant, quite the opposite - your team needs you more than ever. You're there to define the goals and boundaries, provide support and coaching, and deliver guidance and encouragement.

Things to do to encourage empowerment:

### **1. Encourage In-The-Moment Feedback**

High performance teams are notorious for instant and truthful feedback. On-the-spot feedback is one way for your team to communicate workflow issues to one another, so that proper action can be taken right away. The ground rules for this feedback need to be clear - it must be both constructive and respectful. Personal feedback is rare with emphasis on the job or process. Essentially, you want your team to trust you and each other to deliver honest and helpful praise and criticism.

### **2. Cultivate the Owner Position**

Most of your team aren't used to thinking as the owner of the business, since they're busy with their own tasks and processes. However, you don't want them to get so wrapped up in the small things that they can't see the big picture. How would I act if I owned the business? Would I do this if it was my money on the line?

Host regular meetings with your team, and share with them the large happenings within your organisation. Help your team understand the main goals that you're driving toward. Give them a rundown on how other groups are performing - the more pieces of the puzzle your team gains, the easier it will be for them to enter the "owner's mindset."

### **3. Present New Challenges and Opportunities**

Challenge your team members so that they can demonstrate and achieve their full potential. Get them to step into leadership roles, present them with exceptional people's achievements from other parts of the business; and if you run out of ideas, sit down with the team members and ask them what types of experiences would help them grow professionally.

### **4. Respect their Boundaries**

Team members don't want to feel that they have been abused or embarrassed when asked to do a task outside their normal range of skills. Check to make sure that they are comfortable with the stretch targets that you are asking of them. Building trust will ensure that your motives are not in doubt and that your intentions are to help them achieve more. Coaching may be necessary for the team member to 'give it a go'.

## **5. Instil the Right of Flexibility**

Examine your workflow, and identify key areas that would benefit from greater flexibility and creative input from your team. Often team members have innovative and capable solutions that have resulted from their proximity to the problem. They may already have developed a workaround, but not shared it with the team. Providing flexibility encourages responsibly-taking. Although, flexibility is not open-ended - there are still safety considerations, workflow imperatives, and management's prerogative to adjust the level of risk appetite. Deliver some parameters to work with so that they're not overwhelmed with options.

## **6. Don't micro-manage**

Baby-sitting is not well received by team members, and if you want a high performance team making them reliant on your every specification will slow the work, make them resentful, disempower them and demotivate. So:

- define team goals
- trust them to do their jobs (when trained)
- set boundaries
- ask for advice and feedback
- provide information
- coach for the empowerment outcomes you are after
- provide opportunities for them to control the delivery of their work
- encourage people and boost their confidence

Teams are, of course, made up of individuals, so an empowered team will only be successful if the individuals themselves are ready and willing to take on the extra responsibilities that empowerment brings.

## **Useful References**

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