

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



294 Bridging the Empowerment Gap – Part 1

If you ask 100 CEOs, business owners, and human resource managers if empowering workers is a good idea, I don't think you'll find anyone who disagrees. I'm Jerry Roberts and I want to know, if nobody disagrees then why don't more workers feel or act empowered? That's coming next, on The Extra Point.

Empowering employees has been a hot topic in HR and management circles for about as long as another term — engagement. We've mentioned that the Gallup Organization reports annually on engagement and in general, two out of three workers are not actively engaged with their work. They show up and put in their time but — for whatever reasons — don't give their best efforts.

Does empowerment have anything to do with engagement? Yes, it does. According to research by The Aberdeen Group, a company that collects and analyzes data across 200+ business sectors, when workers feel empowered at their job they're more likely to want to succeed and take on tasks with confidence. This averages out to a 26 percent annual increase in revenue. When your employees feel important, quality results follow.

Empowerment, at its most basic form, can be divided into two types: what I call “real” and “realized.”

Real empowerment is conferred upon a worker by someone who has the power to do so. We're dealing with issues of authority here. If you're my boss you can delegate authority to me on a job by job basis, or I inherit authority through my position.

“Realized” empowerment is when the worker accepts that authority, along with whatever responsibilities accompany it, and they step up their game accordingly. If he/she doesn't, what might be the issue?

I'd ask if the worker is comfortable using their authority. Not everybody is. Do they feel safe in making decisions because they know their boss gives them freedom to fail, or are they timid because they know they'll probably get criticized for making a mistake?

People won't step out and make decisions if they fear what might happen. Therefore, we should hand out authority carefully and thoughtfully, and judge its effectiveness the same way. If we're harsh in our assessment the individual may pull back and decide there's too much risk involved. On the other hand, if you, the giver of authority, don't help me through the tough spots and grow my authority, then my success will likely be slower than it should be.

If you're the person giving authority to others, you've got a definite interest in the outcome. If workers don't take up the responsibility, your job is tougher. The goal of every manager should be to grow talent and have their roles increase, freeing that manager up for more important roles — such as solving problems or building the department, division, or enterprise.

Managers must keep their eyes and ears open, to be able to judge how individuals are handling the situation, then make adjustments as needed.

Tomorrow, more on empowerment and a plan on how to make it work.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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