

EMBOLDENING AN EMPOWERED TEAM

“Lead, follow, or get out of the way.”
– Lee Iacocca

LEAD

Former Ford Motor Company president Lee Iacocca took over Chrysler when it was tipping toward bankruptcy. Iacocca asked Congress for a loan, arguing that if Chrysler failed, the government would spend more on unemployment than on keeping the company alive. A year after the loan was granted, Iacocca announced Chrysler's first profit in many years.

Few remember that while turning Chrysler around, Iacocca brought the convertible back into fashion and introduced the minivan. His leadership inspired his people with the boldness to succeed. By letting them know that they would face no opposition within the company, he emboldened them to begin learning how they could help the company turn around, make a profit, pay off its debts, and become an empowered team.

In 1983, Chrysler paid back the full \$1.5 billion in federal loans, and the following year the company posted profits of \$2.4 billion – higher than the previous 60 years combined! What was Lee Iacocca's big secret? He emboldened his people to be empowered.

Wherever I travel, I'm astonished at the lack of empowerment. It's surpassed only by the false images executives have of their employees' empowerment. The leaders talk a great game, insisting that empowerment is important to them. But in fact they don't trust their employees to follow through and take the steps to make good, creative, empowered decisions.

ATTRACT FOLLOWERS

"Become the kind of leader that people would follow voluntarily, even if you had no title or position. Conduct a personal assessment and ask yourself, 'Would I follow me?'" – Brian Tracy

If your goal is to be an effective, empowering leader, you must start by hiring people who aren't afraid to stand out, and aren't afraid to embrace your vision. Unfortunately, most companies are dead set on hiring those who will simply fit in.

Empowering leaders recognize the need to attract followers. A leader's followers are key to understanding his/her leadership style. Before people will follow you, they must feel confident in the directions you're taking. To win their confidence, you must clearly communicate the directions and the key outcomes along the way.

“Empower” means to give power or authority to. Empowered employees know that they have the power and authority to make informed, on-the-spot decisions to help customers, move projects ahead, and solve problems. When you embolden your employees to do their part, you're giving them a framework to know what's expected, even as you're empowering them make creative decisions based on the immediate needs.

GET OUT OF THE WAY – AND EMBOLDEN EMPOWERMENT

Good leaders help their followers understand the big picture. They understand that their job is to remove any barriers standing in the employees' way. They know not to micromanage but to communicate the overall directions and details their teams need to carry out their assignments.

Empowered employees need to know why you're pursuing the current strategies. Mostly, they need to be reassured that you're confident in their ability to perform and produce.

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." – General Dwight Eisenhower

Leaders who know how to embolden empowered employees understand that motivating others goes a long way beyond monetary incentives – that it has to include praise, recognition, rewards, thank-you's, and honoring individual contributions. Verbally recognizing the value of an employee's work is a priceless key to inspiring them. You may not be able to offer a raise during the tough times, but you absolutely must share the rewards when you're doing well, and praise good performance at all times.

The small positive, empowering actions you take every day will be effective beyond your wildest dreams. Just make sure your vision is inspirational and calls out the best in your employees.

Embolden your employees to be empowered and...get out of the way.

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