

... *Unleashing human potential*

Tapping the Power and Potential of People

Does empowerment work in the real world? We all know that only you can empower yourself and that will always remain so. What we, as leaders, fail to understand is that we *can* indeed *also* empower people. How you ask? Most leaders still define empowerment as 'giving people power.' Well, whether we like it or not – people already have power – power of knowledge, skill, experience and their intrinsic motivation.

Having said this, as leaders we often also misinterpret this statement. If we empower our leadership team reporting to us, our direct report, it does not necessarily mean that we give them free rein to do as they please and see fit. The price of 'freedom' or 'empowerment' means sharing risk and responsibilities. This kind of empowerment requires a greater deal of accountability from all direct reports and it is one that most accept with vigour. Being part of a team where everybody takes responsibility is far more rewarding than the incentives which can possibly be paid out. It gives people a sense of fulfilment – a sense of belonging and achievement!

How can we then tap the power and zone in on the potential of our staff members? Well, if we want different results, we need to do something differently.

In today's economic turmoil, what is it that we expect from our direct reports and our staff in general? Well, let me tell you what I want from them: a change in attitude and expectations which will result in different behaviour. I will

achieve this through changed language patterns and share more with them; create autonomy through boundaries and finally move towards self-directed teams and individuals. Allow me to explain each step individually.

Changed language patterns have a huge impact on how people respond to communication. By just changing a few words and maybe using different modalities i.e. Visually, auditory or kinaesthetically you can change the way staff members would respond to your requests. Here are a few examples:

Instead of *planning*, let's create a mutual *vision* – it sounds more inclusive and holistic; change *workflow processes* to *projects* – projects are participative and relies on people with different strengths to accomplish a certain goal; *managers* to *coaches* or leaders – a coach has interest in me as a person not only in what I can do for the company; and many more.

The best way I know to build a sense of trust in you as a leader and what you say and do, is to share information with them. Information about the company, the vision for the future, what they think should happen, how do they see things, etc. By sharing more about the organizational vision, strategies, financial data and so on, there will be more buy-in, commitment, understanding, loyalty and higher performance output from them. They will have the sense of belonging and 'proud-out-loudness' to want to belong to a winning team and they will do anything to make that happen.

Lastly, allowing people freedom of ideas within certain parameters is motivational for them and allows them the rare opportunity to brainstorm their ideas for improvement of output of own and group performance. It is amazing how creative people can become within their own parameters! Imagine a rugby field – all players must stay within the parameters on the field, not be off-sides, stick to the rules of the game within the 4 outer lines...well...this is where skill comes in. Ball handling, different strategies to beat the opponent etc all form part of

the game of winning in the end. Business is no different – we need to play our game within certain parameters such as ethical behaviour and corporate governance. The challenge today is to make your team as responsible and accountable as you are and to motivate them to excel within their own field of expertise.

We need to manage our talent wisely. We must allow people to assume not only responsibility but also accountability. As leaders we need to be bold and confident and lead – not manage - our staff with a steady hand.

Ultimately you need to surround yourself with people who are better than you are!

Should you need help with managing the talent in your organization, we can assist you. Please contact lydia@tmsgauteng.co.za for more information.

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