

Empower People to Enhance Your Power

Yes, my boss had full confidence in me. In my manufacturing plant at Hosur, I was facing labor problems and as Unit Head, I found that not only the union leaders were quite unreasonable; but were also trying to adopt all kind of unfair means when they realized that I meant business and was not ready to budge from my principled stand.

In the midst of all this, my executive director, who was based in Chennai, had visited this location and during informal discussion reassured me, "Naresh, you have my full support. You have my blanket permission even to shoot some bastards if the situation so demands." I felt on top of the world with this kind of boss, who had so much confidence in me. Further, he continued, "Just ask me once before shooting!" In less than a moment, my enthusiasm came down from the seventh heaven straight to the ground. I struggled to hold it there lest it go down further.

This is a typical example of empowerment many of us give to our people. We also lose no opportunity to repeat - "The authority is never given. You need to snatch it." What is the reality? Does it really mean that it is the rule of the jungle which prevails all around? Is it not what smells of criminals' mentality? With this logic, you can justify extremism, dictatorship... and whatever our politicians say. In other words, might is right. There is a very thin line difference between 'Nothing succeeds like success', 'Result Orientation', 'Bullying' and 'Bossism'.

While it is true that authority is never given on a platter, snatching the same is also not correct. Empowerment has to be earned. It is neither a favor done to your dear ones, nor something taken away by the extra bold. Of course, there is an essential internal dimension to empowerment which can be defined as "a state in which a person operates by itself and with enthusiasm". Empowerment, in fact, brings with it a sense of responsibility and ownership. This gets lost if you have to cross check before acting every time. Reporting back or keeping the feedback loop active is different and is perfectly fine.

Empowerment does not give you the "license to kill". It is not about throwing out the rule book and bypassing everyone who does not agree with you. It rather encourages you to use your freedom to involve people while making decisions which impact them.

Power is not a zero-sum commodity. Empowering your employees does not mean a reduction in your power. In fact, by giving power you gain power.

Use the following guidelines to empower your people and for building a positive environment.

- Assign important tasks and transfer ownership for work to those who accomplish work.
- Make judicious assessments and provide autonomy and discretion accordingly.
- Create an environment in which everyone yearns to be responsible.
- Provide visibility and recognition to performers.
- Encourage and help subordinates develop their personal capabilities.
- Help them build strong relationships.

In this process, you not only rise above petty politics; but also earn a lot of respect. No wonder, self satisfaction is something reserved for king makers and not the kings. What Theodore Roosevelt (26th President of US) said a hundred years ago is no less relevant even today, "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

Author Tim Ferriss says, "Changing the world doesn't require much money. Again, think in terms of empowerment and not charity. How much were Gandhi's teachers paid? How much did it cost to give Dr. Martin Luther King the books that catalyzed his mind and actions?"

Yes, the investment made in people delivers the most profitable returns, undoubtedly!

This article comes to you from Ashok Grover, Director at Skillscape, with a vision of Value Creation by enhancing people and organizational competencies. Visit <http://www.skillscape.net> to read more articles by Ashok Grover and understand what Skillscape can do for you. Subscribe to the e-zine REDEFINING HORIZONS by sending a blank e-mail to skillscape@skillscape.net with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line.

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