

Episode 66: What is empowerment?

This week we explore what empowerment is, what is its role, and why people don't do it.

1. What is empowerment?

In its simplest definition, it implies that you are giving power to someone else.

In business terms, when you give power, we call it delegating.

In social terms, empowerment is a process that helps people gain control over their own lives.

This implies you don't give the power, but they take it or empower themselves.

2. What is its role?

Many of us would like to think that we did the 'right thing', whatever it was.

We know that to do our jobs well we need to work well with others and complete tasks in time.

As senior leaders and executives, this becomes more complicated.

Our bosses don't tend to tell us what to do – they expect us to work it out.

They also don't expect to tell us how to do it – they expect us to work that out too.

If we need resources to complete a task, they expect us to work out what they are and get them.

We are not expected to go back and ask permission to do the right thing – we are expected to just do it.

They expect that we will empower ourselves.

3. So why don't people empower themselves?

I find people give one of the following reasons:

- ♦ They didn't know they could
- ♦ They didn't want to overstep their bounds (typical in functional organizations)
- ♦ They have tried it before and have been slapped down

Only the last of these makes any sense to me; the other two are not what true leaders say.

Mostly people are too scared or too weak to stand up and do what's right.

Bottom line: Real leaders don't blame the 'hole in the other end of the boat', but do what's necessary to get the job done.

