

THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY
SIX LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT
BY
PHILIP VAN HOOSER
Viewed on 11/26/2008

This was a very clearly stated message about the true definition of “Empowerment”. He began with describing the root of empowerment which is power. He defined power as the ability to grant or withdraw something someone else needs or wants. Empowerment, he then explained, is having the ability to grant *your* power to someone else.

There are different levels of empowerment and different ways to approach it.

Level One: This is the most basic level. This level is used in a mostly instructional way. In this level, you would give a directive to someone else to do research and report on their findings, but then *you* take the decision making step. This level is commonly used for training and evaluation of employees. This can be a powerful tool in building rapport with new employees.

Level Two: In this level you will empower someone to do research and report findings, and additionally suggest alternatives to the situation, but you still ultimately decide on the action. The major difference here is that you are allowing your employee to weigh in on the subject with their own opinion and point of view.

Level Three: At this level you might tell an employee, “You research; report what you intend to do; but wait for my approval”. This is a slight but significant change. The question for your employee should now be “how long do I wait?” As a boss, you need to have a time-line in mind. If *you* are the one empowering an employee *you* should give them an idea about when to expect your approval. If you are the employee, and the boss does not indicate when you should expect approval, then *you need to ask*.

Level Four: “You research; report what you intend to do: do it, *unless I say no.*” Be prepared to explain why you might say no. This level has the employee actively participating in the decision process and not just being a “go-fer”

Level Five: “You research; take action; and report what *you* did”. This level puts the responsibility directly on the employee to act, but still keeps you in the loop.

Level Six: “You research; take action. No further report/communication needed”. This takes you out of the loop and puts all the responsibility on the employee. If the employee is uncomfortable being at this level alone, they should feel like it is ok to voluntarily step back to a level 5. This still allows them to act alone, but keep you in the loop. Perhaps have them submit a monthly activity report which outlines their activities for the previous month. Some people function better at this level.

Whatever level of empowerment you choose to grant another person, you need to be certain they are capable of and comfortable handling it. Empowerment is an important commitment that all leaders should be comfortable using.

Submitted by Peggy Hayes