

Employee Empowerment

Supercharging your people for high performance – Start with star performers with potential. Then empower your employees.

Case Study - Many years ago an engineer was working in a jet engine engineering unit that was a leading edge factor in the market.

They were developing advanced technology and transforming it into products that would attract attention worldwide. As was common in the company, he was assigned a bright new person, who had just finished his masters research. The protégé had a computer program ready for application in fracture mechanics, which was relatively new in engineering work. [This technology assumes a crack or internal defect in material, and predicts failure after so many cycles of stress.]

The engineer found a good application in welded assemblies. On many occasions in the past he had been called to the x-ray lab to review films showing internal defects. The usual recommendation was to grind out the defect and re-weld, a laborious process. Using the new method introduced by his protégé, they were able to justify proceeding without laborious rework of welds, a great cost savings. The engineer encouraged making this part of the analytical package; the boss agreed. The protégé was also instrumental in translating complicated mission profiles into usable simplifications that were valid.

This got the attention of an important customer, The US Air Force. They started applying it to aerodynamic structures. This advancement would not have been possible if the employees had not been empowered to make an improvement.

Levels of Empowerment – Employee empowerment starts with encouragement. Employees are coached to play a more active role in their work. Employees should develop into active rather than passive players, showing more initiative. Next, employees are involved in taking responsibility for improving the way things are done. Process improvements can be introduced to streamline the product or services. Then employees are enabled to make more and bigger decisions without seeking approval from the manager. Start with small steps and encourage bigger steps as experience grows.

In time benefits will accrue: getting closer to the customer; improving service delivery; innovating continually; increasing productivity; and gaining the competitive edge.

Encourage stepping out into new areas – World class companies are characterized by managers who cheer their talented workers into higher levels of performance and inspire them to great achievements, which can't be accomplished without employee empowerment. If empowering the employee requires procuring new hardware and software, then the manager should facilitate the change. In this way dreams are transformed to reality, and progress can

be made towards high performance products produced at lower cost. One example is inertia welding, which has been applied to metal and plastic parts, too. Fasteners are eliminated, and parts take on a smooth modern appearance. This material development was made possible by a creative employee who was the recipient of good employee empowerment.

An empowered work force is an informed work force – Your team must be informed of company goals and plans on a regular basis. ‘Keeping in the dark’ is not in the empowered employee vocabulary. In like manner, the individual will continually inform his team mates and management what he is doing and what he is expecting from certain developments. This may trigger helpful suggestions from team mates. Someone struggling with a certain detail may have the potential answer spelled out by a team mate. There are several project tools that can be used to inform others and indicate where problems lie. Even more basic is a dated progress narrative that shows accomplishments, problem areas, and tentative means of solving the problems.

e-Coach has expressed the employee empowerment system aptly: [1000ventures.com]

1. Provide an inspiring vision and launch a crusade.
2. Help people connect their personal goals to business goals.
3. Make relentless innovation a religion.
4. Encourage entrepreneurial creativity and experimentation.
5. Involve everyone, empower and trust employees.
6. Coach and train your people to greatness.
7. Build teams and encourage teamwork, leverage diversity.
8. Motivate, inspire, energize people, and recognize achievements.
9. Encourage risk taking.
10. Make business fun.