

The Power of Empowerment in Leadership

By Dr. Kimberly Alyn

Developing effective leaders is a growing issue for every organization across the United States. People are starving for great leaders. Employees are in desperate need of better role model examples. Senior managers are wondering why middle managers are not stepping up to real leadership and creating an inspirational work environment. New employees are wondering why no one is mentoring them in how to become an effective leader, whether formal or informal.

When I conduct training classes or do keynotes at conferences, I preach empowerment. I can see some people in the room lean forward with the “tell me more about this” look on their face. I see others lean back, arms crossed, with the “you have no clue about my organization” look on their face. Some people are convinced that empowering people in their particular organization doesn’t work because it’s a unique organization. Let me dispel that myth.

The effectiveness of empowerment shows no partiality to organizational establishment. It doesn’t matter if you’re a government agency, a corporation, or a family: empowerment works! Empowering people to think and make decisions wherever possible accomplishes many things including:

- Building better teams
- Improving morale
- An increased level of ownership in the organization
- A feeling of trust
- Higher productivity
- Better customer service
- A stronger public image
- A more efficient organization
- Better succession planning

Command and control or barking orders at people does not work in the postmodern society we live in today. That style of leadership hurts morale. People want to feel like they are part of the process and they want the ability to give input and make suggestions. That is a good thing! That’s what inspires people to take ownership in their organizations.

Many managers suffer from what I call “power hoarding.” They think if they allow others to think and make decisions it will dilute their own power and render them useless. The exact opposite is true. When you empower others, you increase your level of effectiveness and usefulness. You multiply productivity and increase responsibility. You show others that you trust their best judgment and when you do that, most people will rise to the expectation.

Yum! Brands Inc, the world’s largest restaurant company, is a conglomeration that took over KFC, Pizza Hut, Long John Silvers, Taco Bell, and A&W. After acquiring all of these food chains, Yum! Brands set down a new corporate policy. They required that every employee be empowered all the way down to the front line to make any decision that did not cost more than \$15.00. That seems like a pretty negligible amount, but not

to Pizza Hut. They freaked out. They said the price of a large pizza was \$15.00 and their minimum-wage employees would be giving them away right and left. Profits would fall. Employees would abuse it. All hell would break loose.

Well Yum! Brands felt otherwise. They said employees would take ownership when given responsibility. They said sure, one in a hundred employees would abuse it and each location should use progressive discipline to correct that one employee's behavior and not deny everyone else the benefit of the doubt. It doesn't make sense to initiate or prohibit policy because one ignoramus can't follow the rules (hmmmm... I don't suppose you ever see THAT in your organization, huh?).

So Pizza Hut went kicking and screaming while implementing the new policy. Guess what happened? Profits soared. Employee morale went up. Customers started coming back more often and bringing their friends. Employees were now able to say "I am so sorry we messed up your order, let me knock \$10 off for you." Or "I am giving you a free soda and salad with your order for the inconvenience of the extra wait time." They didn't have to stand there with the deer in the headlights look wishing a manager who could actually make a decision was close by.

Too many organizations won't empower employees because they are afraid they might make the wrong decision, use bad judgment, or cost the organization money. If more supervisors would step up and actually administer some progressive discipline on people who abuse their newfound power, this problem would go away. Instead, most organizations make everyone else suffer when one person blows it. It's called reactive management and it's rampant in organizations all over the United States.

Organizations who *have* made the decision to empower their employees have watched morale climb and have witnessed for themselves the amount of ownership employees will take when you show you trust them. Empower people and then hold them accountable for those very decisions. The price of empowerment is responsibility and people need to be responsible for the choices they are empowered to make.

When you empower people to make decisions, stand by them as a manager and show them you trust their best judgment. If they make mistakes, help them learn from those mistakes so a better decision is made next time. Stop micromanaging people to death. It's killing morale and causing people to leave organizations.

I hear a lot of managers say they trust their employees, but when the rubber meets the road, their actions speak louder than their words. A tight rope walker was making a dangerous walk across the tight rope over the Niagara Falls. The wind and rain were whipping against his body as he deftly made his way to the other side. When he finally touched his feet on the ground, the crowd erupted below him in applause. Before he could even finish his first bow, his manager was at his side. "Bravo! Well done! Now listen, I want you to do it again, but this time pushing a wheelbarrow in front of you. I brought one with me." With that, he pushed the wheelbarrow in front of tight rope walker who looked back at him astonished.

"Are you kidding me? Have you seen the wind and rain? That is a crazy idea!"

His manager pressed him. "No, it's not that bad. You can do this! I believe in you."

"Really? You believe I can do this?"

"Absolutely. 100%. Without a doubt! I know you can!"

"Ok, then I'll do it. And if you really believe in me, get in the wheelbarrow!"

A lot of managers pay lip service to trusting and believing in their employees, but they are not willing to get in that wheelbarrow with them. My encouragement to you today is to empower your firefighters, communicate to them that you really trust them and believe in them, and then get in that wheelbarrow!

Empowerment will increase morale. It will facilitate more productivity. It will improve the service you provide to the public. Employees who feel they are trusted to make decisions take ownership in the organization. When they take ownership, they have a higher job satisfaction rate. When they love their jobs more, they inspire and influence others in a positive way. When you empower people, everyone wins.

Dr. Kimberly Alyn is a best-selling author and an international professional speaker. She is the author of 11 books including *How to Inspire People to Achieve More*, *How to Deal With Annoying People* (with Bob Phillips, Ph.D.), *Discover your Inner Strength* (with contributors Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, and Brian Tracy), and *Men are Slobs, Women are Neat... and other Gender Lies that Damage Relationships* (with Bob Phillips, Ph.D.). She has also developed and produced numerous CD/DVD productions on a variety of topics.

Dr. Alyn has been a contributing author to a variety of magazines and has been quoted in prominent books and publications like *Cosmopolitan*. An advocate of life long learning, Dr. Alyn has her bachelor's degree in business management, her master's degree in organizational management, and her doctorate degree in organizational management with a specialty in leadership. Dr. Alyn has over 20 years of experience with speaking, training, educating, and entertaining audiences.

To find out how to have Dr. Kimberly Alyn come speak at your event or to get more information about Kim, log on to KimberlyAlyn.com.