Leadership Strategies for Change – Week 6 Assignment

Step 5: Empower Action

"That’s not my job!" "My boss won’t let me." "Let me go ask my supervisor." "That’s outside my authority." We’ve all heard reasons why we are unable to complete a task. Chances are, they are very real reasons that are impeding our progress toward change. To make our change efforts effective, we must be sure we are supporting and empowering the individuals in our group to actually do what we are asking them to do.

**Specific questions or items to address:**

Read Step 5 “Empower Action”. First, review the feedback from your instructor on Part 5. Use any new information you gained from the discussion and feedback from your instructor to revise and improve Part 5 of your project. Next, compile Part 6 of your project, explaining what actions you and your team will take to empower people to take action. How will you remove boss barriers, system barriers, information barriers, and barriers of the mind? How will you ‘retool’ the boss? You may find the content at the end of the chapter, entitled “What Works”, “What Does Not Work” and “Stories to Remember” helpful in reviewing the key points of what to do and not do when empowering action. Be sure your paper touches on the key elements of each as they pertain to your organization.

Be sure to include at least three scholarly references to support your assertions written in your own words. Do not copy word for word from the course text or any other sources. Your submission this week is Part 6 of the final project.

**The requirements below must be met for your paper to be accepted and graded:**

·         Write between 1,000 – 1,500 words (approximately 4 – 6 pages) using Microsoft Word in APA style.

·         Use font size 12 and 1” margins.

·         Include cover page and reference page.

·         At least 80% of your paper must be original content/writing.

·         No more than 20% of your content/information may come from references.

·         Use an appropriate number of references to support your position, and defend your arguments. The following are examples of primary and secondary sources that may be used, and non-credible and opinion based sources that may not be used.

·         Primary sources such as, government websites ([United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/), [United States Census Bureau](http://www.census.gov/), [The World Bank](http://www.worldbank.org/), etc.), peer reviewed and scholarly journals in EBSCOhost (Online Library) and [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/).

·         Secondary and credible sources such as, [CNN Money](http://money.cnn.com/), [The Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com/), trade journals, and publications in EBSCOhost (Online Library).

·         Non-credible and opinion based sources such as, Wikis, Yahoo Answers, eHow, blogs, etc. should not be used.

·         Cite all reference material (data, dates, graphs, quotes, paraphrased words, values, etc.) in the paper and list on a reference page in APA style.

**Step 5**

**Empower Action**

In highly successful change efforts, when people begin to understand and act on a change vision, you remove barriers in their paths. You take away the tattered sails and give them better ones. You take a wind in their faces and create a wind at their backs. You take away a pessimistic skipper and give the crew an optimistic boss.

The word empowerment comes with so much baggage, you might be tempted to abandon it. We won’t. As we use the term, empowerment is not about giving people new authority and new responsibilities and then walking away. It is all about removing barriers.

**Removing the “Boss” Barrier**

Often the single biggest obstacle is a boss—an immediate manager or someone higher in the hierarchy, a first-line supervisor or an executive vice president. Subordinates see the vision and want to help, but are effectively shut down. The supervisor’s words, actions, or even subtle vibrations say “This change is stupid.” The underlings, not being fools, either give up or spend an inordinate amount of time trying to maneuver around the barrier.

The “boss barrier” is typically handled in one of three ways. We ignore the issue, we send the obstacle to a short training course, or (rarely) we try to fire, demote, or transfer the person. None of these are great solutions, the first for obvious reasons, the second because it usually has little effect, and the third because, if not handled well, fear will escalate and become a disempowering force itself.

In cases of highly successful change, people begin by confronting the issue. In order to be fair, they explain the situation to the individual creating the problem. When explaining fails, as it often does, they try more creative solutions.

**Retooling the Boss**

**From Tim Wallace**

There was one superintendent in our company, Joe, who was considered so “old school” that people had warned me he would never change his ways. He had been with the company for over twenty years and he was very proud of our products. Whenever a customer would want a change in the product or how we made it, this man would get bent out of shape. He felt we were giving people a great product and that they were too picky. When someone would suggest something, he would respond in one of two ways: We tried it and it didn’t work, or we thought about it and decided not to try it. It seemed to me he was basically a good man, a talented man, and a man with a lot of valuable experience who was stuck in an old paradigm. He just couldn’t see anything from the customer’s point of view.

Once, it became so tense that one of our best customers said that we needed to replace Joe. I didn’t like the idea of terminating an employee who probably thought he was protecting the company. So I thought about it and then said to the customer, “Let’s do something different which might help both of us.”

We asked them if Joe could go to work for their company for six months at our expense. He would work at a different place and have a different boss. To help make this happen, we agreed to keep paying his salary. We further said that after six months we would bring him back into our company as a customer representative, inspecting our products specifically for that customer. This would be a different job than he had before, but an important job. The idea was to convert the guy from being an obstacle for others into someone who would actively help us.

Joe’s boss thought the plan wouldn’t work—may have even thought it was nuts—but he agreed to go along with it. Joe was at first also very reluctant to accept the idea. “I have my own job to do and I don’t want to do something else.” I told him we really needed his expertise so that he could tell us what was going on when our tankers arrived at the customer’s facility. But he was a real hard rock. He didn’t want any part of this plan. So we had his boss tell him that he couldn’t have his existing job anymore, that he could take our offer or leave.

Off he went into a different world. His new job was to be a quality inspector at the customer’s plant. I don’t know how difficult it was on him at first, but he had to change to survive. He had to learn a new job, a new company, and how to look at our products from that customer’s point of view. If he didn’t, he failed.

Well, he didn’t want to fail, so he tried to do the new job. And when he started really looking, he found that an old product of ours, which he thought was very good, didn’t meet the customer’s needs. He found that they bought this product because they didn’t have an alternative and switching would be costly. He found that another product, which he also thought was very high-quality, was not seen by the customer that way because of how they needed to use it. And he found that our delivery on another product created additional problems.

So then he came back to us saying “This is no good. You don’t understand that by doing this, you are hurting the customer. We’ve got to change or we risk losing their business.”

Joe ended up being the best inspector the customer had ever had. They loved him. When he came back to us he was a new man. The “old school” barrier, the change resistor, became one of our best managers.

I suppose there are many people that you can’t do much with, or people that you can’t afford the expense of doing much with. But I think you need to be very careful when you hear people saying that so-and-so is hopeless. It might be true, or it might not.

Our jobs determine a large part of what we see each and every day. The experience of changing a job can be powerful. False pride and a feeling that all’s well can be blown away. For a fragile and very insecure person, without lots of support, fear could escalate and the person could be immobilized. But for many people, the experience can be life changing—from being stuck in the past to leaping into the future. For the organization the experience can be most helpful—in this case, a disempowering manager became one who empowers.

For those on top, the entire middle management will occasionally seem like a barrier. They’re “the rock in the middle.” Senior management wants to get on with the change (sometimes an overstatement) and so do many employees, but the rock is in the way. The big question is: Why is the disempowering rock such a rock? Listen to the answers so often given: “They’re tied to the past.” “They can’t learn a new style.” “They are protecting their jobs.” Well, yes, but these answers are pessimistic and condescending. Look deeper, and more often than not, you’ll find a different or more fundamental reason for the existence of the rock. The reason: Steps 1 through 4 did not successfully address middle management, or the steps were not undertaken at all. So without the presence of sufficient urgency, sufficient faith in the people leading change, or in the change vision, what would you do, especially if most of your peers felt the same? Wouldn’t you join the Rock Club?

**Retooling the Boss**

**SEEING**

With a new temporary job working as a parts inspector for a customer, a man is confronted with the quality problems his group has been creating. He sees the problems hour after hour, day after day.

**FEELING**

Pushed into the job, the man is at first mad and perhaps scared. After a few days in his new position, he is surprised and shocked by what he finds.

**CHANGING**

He starts trying to identify and solve the quality problems. He sees the results and sees how the customer reacts. The positive reaction and results reduce anger and fear and induce more positive feelings in him. He tries harder to solve the problems, sees the results, and a useful see-feel-change cycle develops. When he returns to his regular employer, his behavior is significantly different. He no longer makes it difficult or impossible for his people to help the change effort. Just the opposite—he becomes an empowering change leader.

**Removing the “System” Barrier**

A second, very common source of disempowerment is the formal set of arrangements we often call the system. A decade or two ago, this would have mostly been overwhelming bureaucracy—layers in the hierarchy, rules, and procedures—which ties the hands of employees who want to help make a vision a reality. Generic bureaucracy is still an issue, especially in the public sector, but today the performance evaluation and rewards part of the system is often the stickiest problem.

Evaluation and rewards can disempower when they are at odds with the direction of needed change. The new vision and strategies say x, but the bureaucracy not only does little to identify and reward x, it helps block what is needed. “We want you to boldly leap into the future” is the communication, yet the system says “Boldly leap into the future and you will receive ten cents if you succeed and a hammer on the head if you fail.” Conversely, evaluation and rewards can empower people by identifying and compensating behavior that is required by the vision.

**The Worldwide Competition**

**From Louise Berringer**

We wanted to make big advances, real breakthroughs, not 20 percent but 50 percent better. We knew this was possible, but we also knew that, because of our history, most employees wouldn’t agree. They’d say “We have had trouble doing 10 percent.” We needed to show them that this was possible, to help them see that they were capable of greater achievements. That’s how the worldwide competition was invented.

We decided that if we wanted dramatic improvements we should have a dramatic recognition program, something very different than what we had been doing. This worldwide competition we created allows team entrants from any part of our operation, in any country. Once the team registers, they start working on their “improvement idea” and are judged against other teams at the local level. The winners move to the next stage and are compared to other teams at the regional level. Then they move on to a global competition.

The finals are always hosted somewhere special, not here at headquarters in Frankfurt. This year we did Bali. We were in a large conference room for a day and a half in a really nice hotel. There were ten teams from around the world. The judging was done by some of our top management along with representatives from a few of our customers. The overall attendance for the event was about a hundred people.

Each team had to do their presentation in English. That’s one of the rules. For some of these people it’s really hard. They don’t speak a lot of English and it might have been the first time they have ever traveled outside their country. We once had a team from India who had never even been outside their own village.

They each have twenty minutes. We are very strict about that. If a team goes over the twenty-minute slot, we sound a hooter and they have to stop. That way we can keep the presentations to a manageable amount of time, and the people in the audience can give their full attention to each one.

The teams this year were very innovative with how they used the twenty minutes. One group had a panel with characters from their home country and they made their presentation into a quiz show. The “host” would ask the questions. “Can one of the panel please tell me the name of the tool that reduced our cycle time by 50 percent?” Then the buzzers would go off and lights would be flashing and someone would answer. They were all dressed up, pretending to be panelists with their name tags hanging on the front of the podium. That might sound ridiculous, but it was a great way to present what they had done. Another team pretended they were in a normal meeting back at their home base, sitting around a table discussing the issue and coming up with the solution to the problem. As they talked about their solution the rest of the audience learned what they had done. Many teams brought samples of their product with them—anything from the tiniest CD player to a large electronic piano—just to show what they were talking about.

We gave all of the teams the afternoon to have fun. Then we all came together again in the evening for the final presentations and some serious celebration. We had local dancers, stalls with things people could buy, a sit-down dinner outside in the hotel’s gardens with traditional island food. I think everyone was wearing a grass skirt over their regular clothes! It built up to the end. The music started playing. I think it was “We Are the Champions.” The runners-up were announced. Each of them received a certificate. All the other teams clapped like mad! And then we announced the winners. “Simply the Best” was playing at full volume as they came up on stage.

The Spanish team’s project was judged to be the very best from a terrific group of entries. A trophy was presented to the team leader, and each of the six members received a medal. They were standing there in shirts made up of their national colors and all of these big guys were crying. It was incredibly moving.

We’ve been doing it for three years. The first year we had 300 teams with an average of seven people on each. About 2,000 people were involved. Last year we had 875 teams. We have just closed off registration for this year with 1,400 teams entered (representing about 9,000 people).

It is amazing what these groups have achieved and are achieving, and the influence they are having on nearly everyone in the company. We have concrete results from the teams in the competition. We have communication about the 50 percent breakthroughs and the effect they are having on the business. And not only that, but we see others in the organization who in the past would never have taken up an issue, now rising to the challenge. In some cases they violate a lot of the standard procedures we have in the company. They break the rules. We see people who work in manufacturing or production start developing new products. This is quite far removed from what they should be doing, but they see a fault, they see a way to make it better, and they get on and do it regardless of past practices or organization charts. People feel empowered to do this.

When we think of evaluation and rewards, most of us think of money. In this day and age, few people believe they have more cash than they need. Many, many households struggle, even with two incomes. Thus, when there are no economic rewards for transformation, you can have a barrier that can be very powerful. But the addition of bonuses and raises does not necessarily motivate a change in behavior, nor does it necessarily convince people that the downside of failure will go unpunished by the system.

In “Worldwide Competition,” we have a different sort of evaluation and reward. Evaluation is not done by a single boss or by some set of impersonal measures. Proof of performance is not supplied only by reports. Rewards are not cash in the pocket. Instead, once again, we have carefully staged dramas. There is the country-level drama, then one at the regional level, and the biggest one at the global level. Each is full of memorable sights—the city, the elaborate ceremony, the costumes, the visual and emotional presentations. The awards ceremony takes this all over the top. The dramas touch the feelings deeply, then become vivid stories that are told and retold to others not in attendance at the events. And the moral of the stories, at least in an organization not overwhelmed with cynics, is pretty clear: The company wants you to leap, will cheer when you leap, and cares deeply when you leap. As the stories are told and retold, they can hit a chord and behavior really changes.

Competitions can be cheap manipulations designed to avoid paying for performance. But people are not stupid. They can spot a cheap manipulation. Then cynicism and anger grow and grow. Sincerity is crucial and, in many ways, quite easy for a committed guiding team who believe in a vision.

**Removing Barriers in the Mind**

In “Worldwide Competition,” we also see one of the greatest disempowering barriers of all: the mind. After years of stability, incremental change, or failed attempts at change, people can internalize a deep belief that they are not capable of achieving a leap. They may not say out loud “I can’t do it,” but at some level they feel it, even when it is not true.

We’ve all seen this. “No,” thinks the sixty-year-old. “I’ll never be able to learn to use the computer.” Yet there is nothing about his or her IQ, manual skills, or ability to hold information in memory that blocks action. The problem is, as we say, “all in the head,” that is, psychological and irrational.

A good rule of thumb: Never underestimate the power of the mind to disempower. Another rule: Never underestimate the power of clever people to help others see the possibilities, to help them generate a feeling of faith, and to change behavior.

**I Survived, So You Can Too**

**From Greg Hughes and Dalene McCann**

I remember back in the early days, when we had just finished forming teams throughout the organization. We had created twenty-one of them in total—not a small task in itself—in order to look at how to improve service across our different departments. Well, whenever you form teams, especially many of them, there is all this turmoil. There is uncertainty about what is going on, uncertainty about the size of the task facing everyone, uncertainty about the overall direction. This discomfort started to coalesce into doubt that the vision could really be achieved. Maybe it was too grand, too much at once, not the right thing for our particular department, etc.

Ron, getting wind of this growing doubt and anxiety, hauls all 200 of us into a meeting. He pulls out chart after chart after chart of the process changes they made at Lexmark, his former employer. Changes to how they dealt with their customers. Changes to how they provided internal services such as HR. He went on and on. Pretty soon what we were undertaking started to look pretty easy compared to what they had done.

Then he hit us with the videos. At Lexmark, they had filmed the order-taking process before and after the change. Before, people were basically glorified message takers. Afterward, they were customer relationship managers. They had the tools and skills to provide product promises and delivery commitments right on the phone. They could deal with service problems themselves, directly. Both the level of service provided and the service providers themselves had been transformed. They also filmed people talking about their hopes and vision for the future before the change and then their exuberance actually living the vision in the new organization.

We watched and people believed. Ron’s previous experience, demonstrated so concretely, was a jolt of new energy. By the end of the meeting, people were buzzing again. “If Lexmark could cut the time it takes to finalize a contract from a month to three days, maybe we can do the same with the time it takes us to issue hunting permits or fishing permits or whatever other permits that currently take us two months to issue. It’s not too far-fetched. Ron did it, Lexmark did it; why can’t we do it?”

That was the beginning. A rocky start, but hey, we’re sailing now, right? Well, not quite. I was sitting in on a meeting with the warehouse people and this raging debate breaks out that looks destined to end in an all-out, knock ‘em dead brawl. The team was kind of segregated between old and new. There were employees who had been with the organization about two years and there was another group that had been with the organization about thirty years. They were like oil and water. The young guys had totally bought into the vision. They were saying that we need to tear down everything we are doing today and build a greenfield site. We need to clean-sheet everything. We need to close down warehouses. Change is great; let’s go. Now on the other side of the table are sitting our thirty-year veterans who were integral in building what these young folks were proposing to tear down, and they were saying, “The hell you will.” Tempers were rising fast and it was getting ugly.

The young consultant who was on the team and trying to manage this meeting went high-tailing it out of the room and did what was probably the smartest move of his career. He got Ron. So Ron enters the room and the furor subsides slightly. And he says, “We are going to change the process fundamentally”—and all the young guys are nodding—“but we’re not going to close twenty-two district warehouses. We’re not going to fire 6,000 people. We’re going to find another way.” Now this had been said before, but the old guard weren’t feeling like this was possible. Ron says, “At Lexmark, through our reengineering effort, we were able to reduce our working capital. We were able to reduce the amount of inventory we kept. But we didn’t close the warehouse; we reduced the cost of carrying the inventory. For example, we got our auto parts supplier to deliver the parts on demand so we didn’t have to keep our own store of them. We freed up a lot of space in our warehouses, but we didn’t go and close them all. We didn’t fire a bunch of people, but we did save a good deal of money. You can do the same types of things here.” That kind of calmed them down. But there was nothing I could have said that would have helped. I hadn’t been through it before. He had. The number of times he saved us, I can only guess.

I think you need to understand that you are not first, that others have survived these changes. It gives you more confidence. Even after you have agreed with the overall idea, it helps you get past the little voices in your head that get in the way. It gets you beyond “Yeah, but this can’t possibly work” or “This will only work if I die in the process.” Seeing someone else’s survival makes you feel stronger.

I suppose if you have gone through successful change of some magnitude, you will have people who know what is possible and have self-confidence. This was not our case. External resources brought us hope, experience, and the utter conviction that we could make a difference. Whether by design or pure chance, outsiders were interspersed throughout the organization, maybe creating some resentment at first but overcoming that with all they added. Not just Ron. Aldona Valicenti came from Amoco. Patrice Carroll was a newcomer to our part of the organization. These people, in addition to the outside consultants, helped add something important. Again and again when things seemed to be descending into chaos and the brink of collapse, they added stability. They reassured us and kept us on course. They were our rock of Gibraltar—our prophets of things to come. Each of the newcomers brought with them a wealth of experience and reassurances that change of this magnitude had happened before and succeeded. Their perspective was really critical.

Without conviction that you can make change happen, you will not act, even if you see the vision. Your feelings will hold you back.

At one level, this story offers a simple, yet powerful tactic. If your people do not have experience with significant successful change, make sure you find credible sources and have them constantly available. Some consultants make a living from this. Of course, there is the risk that if you do it poorly, the newcomers will be squashed by the culture, and the consultants will be ignored. But that need not happen.

Credible sources can help in a number of ways. They can present data. “We have found in seven cases in the past four years that $235,000 was saved, on average, and the firms without change experience saved nearly as much as the others.” Done well, this can help. Solid logic can also help. “The method by which we saved the money is based on the theory that. . . .” But look at the core of what happened in “I Survived.” You had “turmoil,” “anxiety,” “discomfort,” “rage,” and “tempers.” You had “feelings” that the changes were not possible. People dealt successfully with these emotions by telling many vivid stories and playing many videos about actual events. The key content was rather simple: “This is possible; you won’t die in the process; the end result can be very important.” And what happened? The negative feelings shrunk, and the positives grew. “We watched and we believed.” We received “a jolt of new energy.” The disempowering mind barriers were reduced, and they moved on with the changes.

**Removing Information Barriers**

Information is a source of power, and a lack of information disempowers. That was a part of the problem in “Retooling” (a lack of information on customer needs), “Worldwide Competition” (information on how 50 percent improvements are possible), and “I Survived” (information on successful change efforts).

One of the most powerful forms of information is feedback on our own actions. We are often remarkably unaware of how we spend our time, how we interact with others, and how we physically move about. When we do get feedback, it comes from another person, often sounding and feeling subjective, biased, or like a precursor to sanctions. So we end up with little valid information, or information that seems suspect. In either case, we have more difficulty achieving a vision. It need not be that way.

**Making Movies on the Factory Floor**

**From Rick Simmons**

For years, senior management came and “inspected things” at the plant. The plant manager only received instructions about what needed to be improved. “Fix that. This is no good. Don’t do that.” It was never anything positive, just what we needed to fix. Well, on one of these visits, Tim, our division executive, said that because of our new change effort, there would be no more plant inspections. He said we had to “empower” the workforce. That’s how we were going to really get better. It couldn’t be done by senior management because they didn’t have the time or the information.

We tried to work it out. But it was like “ready, fire, aim” in the worst sense. It was chaos. Empowerment meant involvement, so we instituted employee improvement meetings, and for six months we had meeting after meeting. But people really didn’t know what to do. After a while, the meetings started to deteriorate into bitching sessions. “We can’t get the right inventory numbers because the reports are always one month behind, so what’s the use of these reports? They’re just no good.” “Why are we always having breakdowns in our welding equipment? If we had more equipment we wouldn’t have this problem.” “If corporate would just provide more direction, we wouldn’t be mired in this mess.” “Do you realize how much time we are putting into these meetings?” Fewer people turned up to the team meetings, and the ones who came started saying, “What’s the point, it’s not going to make any difference anyway.” The meetings became really unpleasant to attend. We finally realized that they were doing no good, so we decided to try something completely different. But our overall empowerment goal remained unchanged.

We took two of the teams who we knew were fairly open to trying new things, and we started to film them at work. They agreed with this—it wasn’t anything sneaky. It just seemed like a better way of understanding how we currently operated. Tim had provided us with a handheld camcorder and video equipment, but until that point the teams hadn’t done anything with them.

We started off by just following how one product was manufactured. It was a really lengthy process. We captured on film everything from the guy grabbing the raw material off a shelf to the last person taking the finished product off the line and preparing to ship it. There were pictures of Tyron setting up the tanker skin for welding, Claude doing the actual welding, and then Sam pressure testing the strength of the welds. There was some awkwardness and jokes at first. “I hear the camera adds twenty pounds.” For a while people were more careful and unnatural about what they were doing than usual. But after we filmed someone doing the same activities several times, they tended to go about their tasks oblivious to our presence. It probably took us about a day of filming to get one stage of production really nailed down. The outcome was amazing.

When we sat down and watched the tape, you could see that people were having to walk literally miles around the plant to get this one piece of equipment finished. When we brought in the team that we had filmed and they viewed the tape, the ideas started flowing automatically. They talked about how we could reorganize where the machines were so that we could cut down how far people had to walk. They looked at themselves on tape and saw that they were having to go to a store cupboard every time they needed a new tool to use. Just watching the tape, you would hear people saying to themselves, “Now why don’t I just have a rack with all the tools I need next to me?” “Look at how many times I’m bending over to pick up the ratchet wrench to tighten a bolt.” “Maybe if we had someone sort out the repair equipment and materials we use to complete a machine repair, we could pick the stuff up at the loading dock rather than coming to the supply room and pick it up ourselves. If we did this, I bet we could do the job faster.”

The teams started to rethink options that would make the work easier and safer. One of the team members even hand whittled out of wood two sets of our machinery. He then arranged them to show how the machines had been set up before and then how they had been reorganized to reduce walking time. It really gave us a three-dimensional picture of the change. This helped us explain the concept to other teams and to customers who were brought to the plant by Tim and the sales people. Nobody asked this guy to create these models of the plant. He just thought it would help.

All of the improvements that people came up with had to be evaluated through a typical business case exercise before the OK was given, so people couldn’t just do anything they wanted. But the filming became a very important tool for the workforce. It helped to spawn good ideas that they could put forward.

The videos themselves have continued to be used. We have kept them as a historical archive of the types of changes we have put in place. After the first round of filming, we started to make the videos more professional. We now have literally hundreds of taped examples of how we used to do a certain part of the job and then what we did to improve it. We keep track of the cost savings or safety and quality improvements this has brought about. We now show new employees and visitors these tapes. That helps us get people on board and helps us improve our relationships with customers. And you definitely get a sense of the pride the teams have when they present their improvements.

We also refashioned the site meeting room so that more people could fit into it to watch the tapes and discuss ideas for improvement. That meeting room has become a bit of a showpiece and a focal point for people to get together. All the tapes documenting the changes that the plant has been through are stored in there. And it started with a camcorder that cost less than 1 percent of some of the machines in the plant.

Their first attempt to empower the workforce failed, and failed in a very common way: Employees were given more decision-making power; they were put in meetings in order to exercise that power; but they were given few guidelines, and few tools for eliminating real barriers. The mess that follows is predictable.

In their second attempt, they used a camera to help empower a work group with feedback. The movies surprised people, so they paid attention. They saw, for the first time, aspects of their actions of which they were unaware. And so the possibilities for making their work lives better jumped out, creating for many an excitement and a we-can-do-better optimism. Those feelings led to more useful changes, including the carving of the wooden models. The models then became another visual mechanism to help alter still more behavior. When the changes worked well, people saw this, pride blossomed, and the virtuous cycle continued.

**Not Doing Everything at Once**

People successfully empower others when they understand the idea. They empower because they correctly see what the key obstacles are and what is keeping them in place. They empower by mustering courage and self-confidence within themselves.

People act cowardly, or at least seem to, for many reasons. Perhaps most of all, they hold back because the obstacles blocking action can seem gargantuan. They have a boss problem, an entire middle management problem, a reward system problem, an information system problem, a mind problem, and more. All these challenges can seem overwhelming because, in total, they are overwhelming.

You don’t have to be crushed, no matter how complex the situation. There is a solution, and it’s simple: Don’t try to do everything at once.

**Harold and Lidia**

**From Jeff Collins**

We have two people in our San Francisco office, Harold and Lidia, who sat down with me last year (I’m in corporate HR) to look at barriers in their department to a big new-product development concept they have. We had flip chart paper all over the walls. Many of the problems, like the corporate compensation system, were totally out of their control. So we crossed those off. From the rest, they chose two issues to work on. The first related to engineering team leaders, people in their own department, who brutally beat on new ideas. The second was a lack of any formal process for capturing new-product brainstorms.

They hauled ten people from the department off-site (the group has about twenty or thirty people in total). At the meeting, they talked about what they were collectively doing to stomp on new ideas and they agreed to help each other stop this. They didn’t try to work on their bosses; they focused on themselves. They also outlined a mechanism that could allow people to speak up more and offer product ideas. It isn’t much more sophisticated than a suggestion box system. But it’s a system.

When they returned from their meeting, the ten of them continued to work on the two issues. Changing their own style was a challenge, especially for four members of the group. Some of those not at the meeting reacted with suspicion or total disinterest in the suggestion system. Nevertheless, over the following two or three months, ten new ideas were generated, one of which was very promising. So they were off and running.

I think this simple story is so important because of what they didn’t do. They didn’t choose fifteen issues to work on. I don’t know if I were in their place that I wouldn’t have done fifteen. They played it much more pragmatically, and more focused. So far, that has worked extremely well. They are creating a radically different new-product development process out on the West Coast, and all indications are that it will soon give birth to a big product prototype. Given our track record over the last decade, that’s a big deal for us.

Step 5

Empower Action

Deal effectively with obstacles that block action, especially disempowering bosses, lack of information, the wrong performance measurement and reward systems, and lack of self-confidence.

What Works

• Finding individuals with change experience who can bolster people’s self-confidence with we-won-you-can-too anecdotes

• Recognition and reward systems that inspire, promote optimism, and build self-confidence

• Feedback that can help people make better vision-related decisions

• “Retooling” disempowering managers by giving them new jobs that clearly show the need for change.

What Does Not Work

• Ignoring bosses who seriously disempower their subordinates

• Solving the boss problem by taking away their power (making them mad and scared) and giving it to their subordinates

 Trying to remove all the barriers at once

• Giving in to your own pessimism and fears

Stories to Remember

• Retooling the Boss

• The Worldwide Competition

• I Survived, So You Can Too

• Making Movies on the Factory Floor

• Harold and Lidia

References

Kotter, J. P., & Cohen, D. S. (2012). The Heart of Change. Harvard Business Review Press. https://ambassadored.vitalsource.com/books/9781422187340