Stop solving your employees' problems

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on July 15th, 2013 | [Comments(15)](#)
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A senior business development manager who worked for Cisco Systems for 11 years contacted me for coaching. On the first coaching session, the client stated:

*My **schedule is out of control**. I've got projects to complete, proposals to get out and I can't get anything done. I'm spending 80% of my time handholding with my people, showing them how to do their jobs. There's someone at my office door every five minutes. People say they want to "keep me informed." But in reality they are expecting me to solve all their problems for them. I don't have even half an hour to focus on my own work. And then I look at my boss's calendar and it's completely clear. What am I doing wrong?*

Not only are you doing your peoples' jobs for them, you're not empowering them to become self-sufficient. Here's a three-step process that will teach your people to **take ownership of their jobs** and help you get back on track with yours.

1. Set the stage. First, you need to get your people enrolled in the process. Start with an open conversation. Don't make it about you, about how you need to get stuff done. You can say a bit of that, but then introduce the concept of change. Explain the whole issue, outline what's going to be happening.

Here's your script: "I need you to start being independent thinkers, to take ownership of your jobs, to use the knowledge and skills that I know you have. Be creative problem solvers. Sometimes you need to include me so I won't be surprised, but 80% of the time, you don't need to share the details with me."

Set them up for success. Ask what kind of support they need in order to make this change. Let them know it's OK to fail when they are trying out new behaviors. Manage their expectations by letting them know you'll be revisiting this issue in your weekly one-on-ones.

2. Model the behavior. You need to remember how you learned to take ownership. Did someone teach you? Maybe you learned over time, but you don't have that luxury — you want your people to learn it now. They won't just get it, you'll have to teach it by example. You have to change the rules.

Start by blocking out an hour or two of closed-door time every day. During that time, people don't come to you unless it's an emergency. From now on, everything you do is a model your people can learn from.

Your objective is to take your C- and B-level people and move them to A level. Ask yourself these questions:

- What does ownership as a character trait look like?
- How do I break it down and create a job description?

- What the steps are involved to move people from where they are now to where I want them to be?

Right now, all you need is for them to get the concept. They have to want it. They have to want to move to the next level.

3. Create continuous improvement. Once you've started the process, keep reinforcing it in your weekly one-on-ones. Ask each person: How's it going? Where are you succeeding, failing, needing more support? Where did you take ownership this week instead of coming to me?

If you hear a good answer once, you'll know you are succeeding. The time you've invested will get paid back when they start doing on their own what you used to do for or with them. Your boss has an open calendar because he has taught you and all his direct reports how to use him. Now it's your turn to teach your people the same thing. Lead by example. **Time is a precious commodity**. Think beyond today's schedule and show them the big picture. When they see you with an open calendar and time to spend on high-impact projects, they are going to want what you have. And that's a win for everybody.

How have you empowered your employees to succeed? Share your thoughts and stories in the comments.

Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 leadership coaches in the U.S. As an **executive coach***, he has 17 years of executive-coaching experience working with companies such as Google, Amazon, Starbucks, Deloitte, Cisco Systems, and Ritz-Carlton. He is the author of seven books, including* **"Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level."** *More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter.* **If you sign up***, you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*