

# SmartBlog on Leadership

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## [Trademarks of a great boss: Empower your people](#)

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on March 17th, 2014 | [Comments \(0\)](#)

“Empowerment” is one of those buzzwords that has almost lost its impact through years of indiscriminate use. It is, however, a valid management strategy. Let’s take a new look at this old, tried-and-true concept and see how you can make this the year you use empowerment to create a **high-performance team**.

At the core of empowerment is your willingness to trust your people to make the right decisions without running to you for permission. A more sophisticated definition is: “sharing degrees of power with lower level employees to better serve the customer.” (Knicki and Kreitner, 2008)

Looking for examples? Think Xerox, Southwest Airlines, 3M, Amazon. **These companies are all about innovation**, especially as it relates to great customer service. Taking the broader view, empowerment can improve business performance in every area of a company’s operations, from sales and new product development to the way the phone is answered or the trash is picked up. Here are three things you can do immediately to empower your team.

- Keep them informed
- Celebrate mistakes
- Put them in charge

**1. Keep them informed.** Some managers believe that power lies in controlling information. No so. **The great boss** is self-confident enough to let people know what’s going on at all levels of the company. Sharing information with your people builds trust. It lets them know that you believe they are important. It gives them the information they need to make their own decisions effectively in that will critical situations. Don’t limit your sharing to updates on current operations. Keep them in the loop on the **company’s long-term plans, its vision, goals and objectives**. Show them where they fit into the big picture. Having a big-picture mindset gives them the confidence to take risks and make decisions that will keep customers and top management happy.

**What to do now:** Set up a meeting this week to outline long term goals for both your company and your team. Brainstorm ways each person can take action to move projects ahead.

**2, Celebrate mistakes.** When you empower your people to make decisions, mistakes will happen. You need to create an environment where people can make mistakes and learn from them rather than be punished. Reprimanding an employee who tried something new that didn’t work out will stifle innovation and put a downer on anyone else who might take a similar risk. Instead, celebrate with people who take a chance on a new idea. Even if they didn’t score a win on their first try, they probably learned valuable lessons that will benefit themselves and the company.

**What to do now:** The next time someone makes a mistake, get the team together. Don't gloss — acknowledge the reality of what happened. Inject a little humor if that's appropriate and then make a list of what you've learned that can be applied to current and future projects.

**3. Put them in charge.** When you are regularly practicing the first two ideas, you're creating an environment where you can begin to shift responsibility to your team and individual team members. Outline a step-by-step process to make this happen and share the plan with your people. To make this move successfully, your team members will need plenty of coaching and positive reinforcement. It takes practice for them to go from depending on you to a place of making their own decisions and taking responsibility for the results.

**What to do now:** Pick one near-term initiative or project and write down a strategy for shifting part or all of it to your team. Be available but stay hands-off. Set up a schedule for regular reviews and progress reports.

An environment that empowers individual employees will increase client and customer satisfaction — that's almost guaranteed. An additional benefit, however, is that it will also **improve employee morale, performance, and productivity**. It's risky business from your point of view as a manager. But if you give your people the freedom both to succeed and to fail, they will surprise you with the results.

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