

The Empowerment Mindset

My no-nonsense manager surveyed the roomful of team leaders and commanded us, "Bring your three-year plans. Have them complete and on my desk in two weeks."

We were supposed to nod our heads in silent assent. But I had to say something. If I didn't, I knew my team would suffer.

"Catherine, we have so many priorities, and the team is under a lot of pressure to deliver on time. Can we delay the planning for a few weeks and allow them to remain focused on work that matters?"

I think those last three words made her face turn red. Noticeably agitated, she turned toward the other managers in the room, my peers, and rhetorically asked, "Do any of you have the same concerns?"

When all she received were shaking heads, she went around the horn and asked for verbal confirmation. Every manager said they'd be able to deliver on her request.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing and hearing. In the days leading up to that meeting, every manager had shared with me how much pressure they were under and how challenged they felt because of Catherine's demands. Yet there they were, throwing me under the bus.

Catherine turned toward me. "There you have it. No one else has a concern, and neither should you. Just go fill out one of your priority grids, and you'll figure it out." Her words dripped with sarcasm.

As I let the silence sit, my mind flashed back to a year earlier, when I'd been reluctant even to take this position.

During my interview, I was warned, "In the world of racks and point-of-sale material, everyone has an opinion on the

merchandising elements: design, construction, cost, and deployment. You'll have multiple masters and need to serve them all. It will be a tough role. Extremely stressful, demanding, and political." Fearing I didn't know what I was getting myself into, the interviewer asked, "Do you think you've got what it takes?"

Everything I knew about that division flashed to mind:

- Their team was dysfunctional.
- The supply chain was impotent.
- Just as my interviewer had said, there were too many chiefs.

Any amount of success appeared impossible.

"I have what it takes, but I'm not interested in the role. Could you remove my name from consideration?"

She nodded her head, but I could tell she was shocked by my reply.

However, other leaders kept suggesting I was the right fit in the coming days. Some even hinted that turning down this role could have future career implications. Hesitantly—and knowing what predicaments likely awaited me—I accepted the offer.

Throughout my first year in that new position, each of my fears came true. The team was overworked. They had low morale from feeling undervalued. Our suppliers always seemed to miss project deadlines. Designs weren't relevant. The procurement team seemed to have more control over our projects than our marketing team. Our internal key stakeholders, customers, and bottlers weren't satisfied with my team's performance. Those entities offered suggestions for how we—I—could do things differently.

Our work environment was chaotic. Extreme stress was the norm.

I felt anxious all the time, constantly worrying about what

would go wrong every day. When inevitable mistakes were made, I feared whiplash. I couldn't sleep. I stopped exercising regularly because I had no time for it. In the rare moments when I was home, I was distant and easily aggravated. I was running scared, running on empty, and ready to burn out. I never felt like I was making a difference—anywhere.

I told my manager that I felt like I was failing daily. She was unsympathetic to my plight. I don't know why I thought that would help. She'd seldom listened to my concerns before. If she had, I rarely saw the result.

So her singling me out during that manager's meeting shouldn't have surprised me. Her quick dismissal of my earnest request was status-quo leadership to her. It was nearly the last straw for me.

Being called out like that in front of my peers made me feel embarrassed, stunned, and flustered. Yet I knew I had an immediate decision on how I could respond. I didn't want to give up, but something had to change. I needed to raise my team's morale. I needed to empower them. I needed to increase our productivity. I needed to become a better leader. Rather than choose discouragement, I opted for perseverance.

If I couldn't accomplish any of those tasks, anyone on my team could be out of a job. And if I couldn't save my team—and complete my three-year plan—I wouldn't be the one under the bus.

I'd be driving it at my next job.

After that demeaning meeting and after praying regularly, I developed a vision of becoming our key stakeholders' most valuable partner and winning industry recognition. Then, I identified significant projects that would influence the company's performance. With these priorities in place, I intentionally began instilling confidence in my employees. I knew that if I believed in them, they'd believe in themselves.

I empowered the team to make decisions and enabled them to say no to irrelevant, unproductive work.

The team began to gel and became more productive. They remained focused on priorities and ignored distractions. Their morale improved, and their stress levels lessened. So did mine. Our internal and external customers moved from doubting our ability to trusting us to deliver. Together, we made a lot of progress. The tables were turning.

Nowhere was this more evident than during my annual review. My manager simply said, "You are a difference-maker, and thank you for all of your hard work." Though she used few words, the words she used mattered greatly to me. Her affirmation was gratifying and validating. My team members received the highest annual rating: exceeds performance, which, for our team, was unprecedented.

Looking back, I'm so thankful for the experience, even in having a bus driven over me. I learned and grew more than I imagined through all of the stress, emotions, and obstacles. I was stretched to the limit and increased my work capacity.

With help from above, I stayed true to my original goals, persevered with the team, and helped transform the business.

After "Prioritizing the Priorities," my charge to you is to empower your team. They will help you accomplish common goals and objectives with vigor. Do this, and you'll reduce anxiety because people will feel more control and can take ownership. People feel more committed to working if they know they can make decisions and impact projects. If you don't, people will disengage because of their perceived lack of influence.

Empowerment Mindset – A Self Evaluation

Empowerment is the transfer of your authority to individuals to help them reach their potential. Effective empowerment begins with the right attitude. Before you empower someone,

ask yourself the below questions to see if you have an "Empowerment Mindset." I recommend rating yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on each question, 10 being perfect.

#1 Do I believe in people and feel that they are my organization's most appreciable asset?

#2 Do I believe that empowering others can accomplish more than individual achievement?

#3 Do I actively search for potential leaders to empower?

#4 Would I be willing to raise others to a level higher than my own level of leadership?

#5 Would I be willing to invest time developing people who have leadership potential?

#6 Would I be willing to let others get credit for what I taught them?

#7 Do I allow others freedom of personality and process, or do I have to be in control?

#8 Would I be willing to publicly give my authority and influence to potential leaders?

#9 Would I be willing to let others work me out of a job?

#10 Would I be ready to hand the leadership baton to the people I empower and genuinely root for them?[1]

Now that you've rated yourself, what are your top three areas where you can improve your Empowerment Mindset? Now, what's your number one area? Put an action plan in place to improve the identified area, determine when you want to accomplish your action plan, and ask someone to hold you accountable. You'll improve your attitude toward empowering others and become an effective leader if you do.

Do you want to discover more about empowering others and

becoming a leader others will gladly follow? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston

^[1] Excerpt From: John C. Maxwell & Jim Dornan. "Becoming a Person of Influence." Apple Books. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/becoming-a-person-of-influence/id607555354>