<span style="background:#1a9fd6;color:white;">LEAD</span>

# Empowerment through Free Will: Building a Team with the Freedom to Shine

Learn how the best companies cultivate a culture of empowerment, where an individual's free will to succeed can be exercised to achieve outstanding results.

BY JAMES KERR    @James_M_Kerr



CREDIT: Getty Images

There is recent research that points to the notion that the belief in *free will* is a significant predictor to personal achievement.  It is suggested through this work that one's motivation is often accelerated when they believe that their effort can determine results - and, that their progress will not be slowed or redirected by outside *influencers* that exist beyond their control.

That said, leaders would be well-served to establish work environments that promote the freedom to excel among their staff?  By empowering team members to self-govern and make decisions, you just may create the type of responsible and accomplishment-focused workforce needed to achieve great things for your business.

But, before you toss all leadership duties to your team, there are a few things to consider, including:

1.    *Are your people ready to be empowered?*  Staff members need the proper training and experience in order to be endowed with the responsibility to make the call.  Be sure that your team has the appropriate skills and knowledge to be empowered - then give them the free will to drive decision-making to lower levels of the organization, where their free will can be leveraged.

2.    *Do you trust their decisions?*  Be sure to help everyone know what your expectations are and how you're expecting them to operate.  With those basic parameters, an empowered team can be trusted to make the "right" call, at least, most of the time.

3.    *Do you have the necessary "checks and balances" in place to monitor progress?*  "Trust, but verify" is a good rule to thumb when transitioning to an empowered workforce. You'll want to be sure that there are appropriate measures and controls in place to verify the quality of the work as its performed.

4.    *Do you know when to intervene?*  Just like a teenager doesn't like it when their parents intercede in "their" business, a workforce may not appreciate it much when a leader limits a team member's ability to exercise their own free will.   It's a good idea to establish norms around how you, as leader, will get involved in the work of the unit.  This way, they'll be no hard feelings when you have to do our job.

5.    *How do you play on the team?*  Similarly, you'll need to carve out your role in the everyday interactions and operations of the team. You'll still need to set direction and manage change, be a point of escalation and provide advice and coaching as the team matures and evolves.  A leader of an empowered team still needs to be involved and present.

To close, the research points to the fact that people perform better when they believe that they have the free will to choose among options and that they will assume the responsibilities for their actions.  It's up to us to create and cultivate the work settings required to let them achieve.

The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.

PUBLISHED ON: JUL 25, 2016