Empowerment: From Enablement To Execution

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.

Empowerment opposes marginalization. It is a social process enabling people to access power, in turn exert control over their lives. Empowerment necessitates prioritizing critical issues in order to overcoming obstacles associated with realizing a vision of the future.

Empowerment promotes thinking and acting in new ways. Frequently, we experience the essence of empowerment through a *call-to-recognition*. Our thinking is stimulated by a quotation or fragment from a conversation provoking our awareness to recognize mission. It is a *calling*; beckoning our attention; and compelling action. From *calling to a call-to-action*, a path toward empowerment is revealed

Empowerment requires becoming empowered. The road to empowerment is articulated by shifts in perception and meaning. It requires releasing existing belief systems and replacing them with new, transformative mental models enabling aligned action.

Releasing existing belief systems invites states of reflection and receptivity to new paradigms of empowerment. In his 1990 seminal work *The Fifth Discipline*, change author Peter Senge offers the concept of metanoia—*shift of mind*. Metanoia enables transformation, in turn empowerment through acquiring new beliefs or philosophies. Metanoia is fueled by generative learning; individuals working together integrating existing and new knowledge with past experience. The union of metanoia and generative learning yields meaningfulness; meaning catalyzed from an emergent idea or then experience of being a part of something larger than oneself such as a corporate rebranding or global movement. Meaningfulness promotes self-reliance, like-mindedness, and the energy to move forward toward empowerment.

So, is empowerment relevant to enabling professional growth, cultural engagement, and organizational sustainability? Let's explore empowerment relative to its association with modeling, execution, and coaching.

Empowerment as Model

Empowerment can be enabled through models. In their seminal book *The Leadership Challenge*, authors Kouzes and Posner present *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*. The first exemplary leadership practice is *Model the Way*. Leading towards empowerment focuses on establishing principles of thought, behavior, and performance associated with a vision of an empowered future. Models of empower present standards of excellence, guidelines for managing complex, long-term change, and prescriptions for achieving goals. Empowering leaders lead with ideas, images, and imagination. They eliminate conditions impeding action and create opportunities for metanoia and self actualization.

Consider the empowerment leadership and modeling created by Richard Dickson, President and Chief Executive Officer Branded Businesses of Jones Apparel Group, Inc. In 2010, Mr. Dickson launched the *Empower Your Confidence* initiative through the Jones New York brand. It is transformative model of empowerment for women on which they can reflect, rethink, and renew themselves within a context of strong female role models. These role models provide direction, guidance, and support toward beginning, becoming, and being empowered. This empowerment initiate delivers ideas of inspiration and images of transformation that stimulate the power of possibility and potential for realization. The *Empower Your Confidence* initiative enables empowerment. Weblink: *http://www.jny.com/Empowerment/JNY,default,pg.html.*

Empowerment as Execution

Again, authors Kouzes and Posner present a second principal of exemplary leadership applicable to empowerment; it is the fourth principal of *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership; Enabling Others To Act.*

Enabling others to act through being empowered requires clarity of purpose and commitment to a compelling vision of the future. Frequently, the future is articulated in a mission statement, its goals embedded in individual thinking and direction mapped through strategic and action plans. In organizations, achieving goals is fueled by the collective energy generated through the single-minded collaboration and tireless, execution inherent to working in teams. Participants become empowered through the execution of engagement. Empowered in this way, individuals and teams invest extraordinary effort in the service of achieving sustainable, long-term results. Through the execution of mission, empowerment is enabled. So too, each person strengthened, invigorated, and empowered to act.

Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese Taoist Philosopher reminds us that enabling others to act is the result of leading others to the realization that self leadership is empowering "…leaders are best when people barely know they exist… who talks little when their work is done, their aim fulfilled, [the people] will say, 'We did it ourselves.'"

Empowerment Through Coaching

Coaching enables empowerment. The coaching process promotes opportunities to experience shifts of mind, build models enabling high performance, and achieve productive excellence through mission and purposeful action. Hermann Hesse, the 1946 Nobel Laureate in literature wrote "The true profession of person is to find their way to themselves." Coaching promotes self discovery. Self discovery enables transformation. Coaching toward self discovery is empowering.

Empowerment is empowering.

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