



The Empowering Manager Is ...

“Then you should say what you mean,” the March Hare went on. “I do,” Alice hastily replied; “at least—at least I mean what I say—that’s the same thing, you know.”

“Not the same thing a bit!” said the Hatter. “Why, you might just as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see!’”

—Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

Think about how you give meaning to a word. Take “manager,” for example. A manager, by definition, is a leader, is an instructor, is a developer, is a coach, is a planner. So a manager is defined by what she or he *is*.

But a manager is also defined by what he or she *does*. A manager imparts knowledge or skill, shares the meaning of information, trains an employee to practice an occupation or profession, promotes learning by modeling certain behaviors, coaches employees toward understanding a system or structure.

So too we define the word “empowering” by what it *is* and by what it *does*. Empowering is mutual influence; it is the creative distribution of power; it is shared responsibility; it is vital and energetic, and it is inclusive, democratic, and long-lasting. Empowering

2 Empowering Employees

enables people to use their talents and capabilities, fosters accomplishment, invests in learning, finds the spirit in an organization and builds effective relationships, informs, leads, coaches, serves, creates, and liberates. Becoming an empowering manager, therefore, involves both who you *are* and what you *do*.

While we're on the subject of words, why did we choose "empowering" over "empowerment" for the title of this book? For one significant reason. Because "empowerment" implies constancy—a state of being, a finished product, the end result of a process. "Empowering," on the other hand, suggests action—enabling the growth of individuals and organizations as they add value to the products or services the organization delivers to its customers, and the promotion of continuous discovery and learning.



Empower Enables someone to assume greater responsibilities and authority through training, trust, and emotional support.

For this reason, we've titled our book *Empowering Employees*.

In an empowering organization, managers believe leadership derives

from all its employees—not a select few. Managers of an empowering organization know that the company is most likely to succeed when employees have the tools, training, and authority to do their best work. Managers of an empowering organization understand that information is power—and they share it with all employees. Managers of an empowering organization value employees enough to build a culture that values and supports individuals. They want to make sure that everyone feels an ownership of that culture and a responsibility for its perpetuation. Managers of an empowering organization create opportunities for finding solutions and for designing what-can-be—not searching for problems and what-should-have-been. In an empowering organization, managers understand that fostering empowerment is a continuing effort—not an endpoint to be checked off a list of objectives.

Empowering is Not ...

If you carry an old map, you might miss the adventure of taking a new road. Try to mark these old roads—or ways of thinking—off your new, empowering map:

- Empowering is not proclaiming that you're emancipating the people who work for or around you.
- Empowering is not delegating all the work you don't want to do.
- Empowering is not something you do *to* or *for* someone else.
- Empowering is not making changes for the sake of change.
- Empowering is not creating teams so you can justify downsizing.
- Empowering is not leaving workers to fend for themselves.
- Empowering is not something that applies to "them" but not to "us."

Empowering Is Mutual Influence

"When Tom, the new team leader for our assembly line, first suggested that we limit summer vacations to five days in order to meet our goals for the coming quarter, I was apprehensive," says Michelle, Tom's department manager. "I didn't think he'd considered things like union regulations, individual line workers' plans, and supply or inventory restraints.

"But what was I supposed to do?" Michelle continues. "I've been told that my new role as an empowering manager means that I shouldn't tell the team leaders what to do, that I should share responsibility with them, and that we should 'mutually influence' each other.

"When I let Tom go ahead with his plan, the reaction from the union reps and the line workers was swift—and negative. It's taken me weeks of negotiating and smoothing ruffled feathers to get us back on track. I know Tom feels like a failure, but I'm confused about what steps to take next. If he and I are equals, how can I give him the benefit of my experience without appearing to give him orders?"

Let's forget for the moment that Michelle pretty obviously hasn't received all the training she needs for her journey up the empowering highway. Instead, let's focus on her numerous—and valid—questions about what mutual influence is to an empowering manager.

4 Empowering Employees

In her pre-empowering life as a manager, Michelle understood her role completely. She answered to her boss for all the planning, scheduling, and implementing that went on in her department; her workers answered to her for their reactions to her actions. She understood influence, all right: she influenced the line workers by managing their work lives for them. Being influential was clearly a managerial role—and a big responsibility.

When Michelle's boss announced that the company's management had decided that it made sense to empower employees in order to respond to competitive pressures, she thought it sounded like a good idea. The word on empowerment was that it helped employees feel more motivated and be more productive. Instead of carrying all the weight for decision making on her own shoulders, she'd be able to relinquish some of her considerable responsibilities, and she'd help the people who reported to her develop their skills. She'd delegate power to her employees, and as they took on more responsibility and made decisions affecting their work, a good feeling would percolate through the group, and performance would improve as they worked more closely together in an empowering environment. However, this hasn't exactly happened. The question you might ask is *why?*

Michelle thought that there was some automatic mechanism that would kick in as soon as she began giving her employees more responsibility and authority. There'd be measurable improvement almost immediately—both in attitude and in productivity. She would learn it doesn't quite work like that.

It's clear that Michelle doesn't fully understand what empowerment is about and how it works. So let's explore the roots of Michelle's misunderstanding a little more.

First of all, we can think of empowering as a journey the organization is on. We all know that even a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. You don't get to your destination without taking all the steps in between. The same is true in a metaphoric sense with regard to effectively creating an empowering and empowered work environment. But Michelle was trying her best to be what she understood an empowering

manager should be—a non-invasive, laissez-faire kind of manager, whose employees would quickly rise to new performance levels, becoming self-directed and self-sufficient.

If Michelle had understood that an empowering environment is mutual influence and must evolve and grow as empowering experiences increase in the workplace, she'd have seen Tom's proposal in shades of gray instead of black and white. She'd have understood that together she and Tom could have learned from a discussion of what *both* of them knew about the proposed changes instead of *each* of them suffering a setback. Moreover, they might have avoided the problems they encountered by letting Tom go ahead with his idea with little discussion of its consequences. Had she understood that being mutually influential includes healthy, honest, nonjudgmental give-and-take, Michelle would have felt comfortable sharing her experience and questions with Tom—and she'd have gained insight into Tom's ways of thinking and working. She might also have discovered that Tom knew things she didn't and that Tom was capable of using what she did know in a way that would have resulted in a better plan for the line.

It might have helped Michelle to add “facilitator” to her definition of an empowering manager. She might then have understood her role to include

Facilitator A person who removes obstacles and provides the support, information, feedback, and direction to help others succeed.



getting the right leadership to the right place, *not* failing to lead. And if Michelle had realized that participative planning is neither the easiest nor the fastest way for an organization to sort out its plans, she'd have allowed time for herself and Tom to practice working together. She'd have understood that mutual influence is the starting point for creating power.

Empowering Is the Creative Distribution of Power

There's potential for a healthy balance, or *creative distribution*, of power in Michelle's and Tom's relationship—but they're definitely not there yet. Just how can they arrive at a creative



Practicing Mutual Influence

What can you do initially to make sure your organization's goal of creating an empowering environment succeeds? Try taking these steps:

- Remember that empowering is a journey. Take one step at a time. Don't expect things to change overnight.
- Understand that mutual influence doesn't mean non-influence. It's more than OK to share your knowledge and experience as a manager; it's advisable. Mutual influence isn't either/or; it's both/together.
- Take time to listen, so you'll learn not only *what* but also *how* your employees think.
- Build honest, nonjudgmental give-and-take into manager–worker relationships. Doing so initiates respect, trust, understanding.

power distribution on their empowering journey? First, let's look at how we typically think of power. Isn't it usually a one-sided, one-person-over-another kind of concept? In our culture don't we most often think of power as being something that we must have and keep, something that we always must guard lest someone else wrest it from us? Isn't having power an issue of who's in control?

Traditionally, the answer to all those questions has been "yes." But we're not talking tradition here. We're talking evolution—*empowering* evolution. And that requires a change in the definition of power.

It might help to think about power from three perspectives (also see Figure 1-1):

- *Distribution*: Power is "given." This perspective implies that power is finite, that you lose power if you give it to someone else.
- *Creation*: Power is "made." This perspective implies that power is created when two or more individuals interact and share information, authority, and/or responsibility.
- *Creative distribution*: Power is "unlimited." This perspective implies that when people are mutually influential, power grows exponentially.


View of Power	What I Do	What You Do	Total Value
Distribution (lose/win)	I give the power to you. Value: -1	You take the power from me. Value: +1	-1 + 1 = 0
Creation (win/win)	I share information with you. Value: +1	You share information with me. Value: +1	+1 + 1 = 2
Creative Distribution (win/win/share)	We influence each other and others. Value: >1	We influence each other and others. Value: >1	>1 + >1 = infinity

Figure 1-1. The three evolutionary views of power

In an empowering organization, power becomes less about one person controlling another and more about the capacity within every person to create, develop, and distribute power to accomplish individual and shared goals.

Once we redefine power, we then can explore how power gets used in an empowering organization. Actually some pretty amazing things can happen.

Instead of going it “alone at the top,” managers find themselves buoyed by power that emanates from within *and* from without—from ideas, attitudes, and feelings of their own as well as from others. Instead of being burdened with the role of perpetual decision maker, the manager can be joined



Power Sometimes power is taken to mean the ability to exert force or to exercise authority, which implies that someone has control or advantage over someone else. When it comes to empowering organizations, however, power paints less the picture of individual might over individual might. It assumes more the vision that individual power + individual power > individual power x 2.

in leadership by others whose talents and skills are available when needed for a particular task. Instead of feeling that she or he must have all the answers all the time, the manager can be joined by others in a shared search for solutions. Instead of just ensuring that products get made and services provided, the

8 Empowering Employees

manager gains inspiration from the ideas of employees for how these products and services can be continuously improved.

Once Michelle understands mutual influence and redefines power, she's likely to feel more comfortable with her role and with Tom's. She's less likely to feel that their working relationship is all or nothing, total authority or none. She's more likely to realize that combining their ideas and creating power will produce a better result than either of them could produce alone.

You could liken an organization with an unhealthy distribution of power to an inexperienced sailor in rough seas. The boater stands at the helm with knees locked and body stiffened straight. When the boat rocks, the sailor rolls—constantly at odds with the boat, and feeling weaker every minute. The sailor feels the jolt of every wave, has a hard time keeping his or her footing, and aches for days afterward from the exhausting journey.

The empowering organization, one with a creative distribution of power, on the other hand, resembles the experienced sailor who rides rough seas with knees bent and body relaxed. When the boat rolls, this sailor rolls with it. This sailor's flexed knees cushion the blows from the waves, enabling her or him not only to maintain a balance but also to gain energy from the experience of dealing successfully with the rough sea. An organization like this welcomes competitive challenges, flexes according to fluctuating demands, and survives under any conditions—stormy or fair. Not surprisingly, organizations like this have loyal, involved, proactive crews.

One plus one no longer equals two. In an empowering organization, one plus one equals three or four or ten or . . . Figure 1-2 illustrates how everyone wins—in ways that matter.

Empowering Is Joint, Shared Responsibility

If individuals in a traditional organization were to do some brainstorming about what responsibility means, it might look like what's on Figure 1-3 (if you have some additional ideas, add them to the chart).

Before Michelle became an empowering manager (and we hope you know we use the term loosely here; the expectation

Unhealthy Distribution of Power	Healthy, Creative Distribution of Power
Manager is hero or villain.	Manager is facilitator or coach.
Leadership is static; manager is always in control.	Leadership changes, depending on skills and talents required by the task at hand.
The workers and the manager expect the manager to have all the answers.	The workers and manager expect answers to be created together.
One individual has power over another; the amount of power in the organization is finite.	Individuals each add power to the power of others; the amount of power in the organization is infinite.

Figure 1-2. The healthy and unhealthy distribution of power

that she “became” empowering overnight is, of course, totally unrealistic), how do you think she felt about responsibility? Probably, she envisioned responsibility something like what’s printed on the flipchart in Figure 1-3. Probably she sometimes

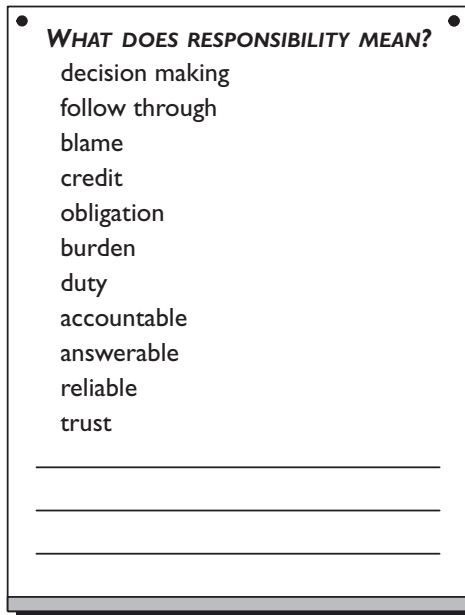


Figure 1-3. Brainstorming on the meaning of responsibility

10 Empowering Employees

found responsibility an unwanted burden. Probably she sometimes felt incapable of making a decision. Probably she sometimes felt blamed for things she couldn't control or credited with things she didn't deserve. Probably she sometimes felt obligated to shoulder responsibility, whether she felt up to it or not. But that's the role of a manager in a traditional organization. Whether it's the best way to accomplish goals, of course, is another issue. Our view is, and evidence bears this out, that it is not.

At other times, Michelle probably feels that responsibility is a good thing and that feeling trustworthy, reliable, and duty-bound makes each of us stronger and worthy of the credit we receive.

Still, as Michelle learns more about what an empowering organization is about and the value of the creative distribution of power, she's ready for the shift from lone to shared responsibility.

Why would she want to make that shift? For that matter, why would you? Let's look at some before and after illustrations.

Before shared responsibility: Decision making rests on the manager's shoulders. Credit and blame, deserved or not, arrive squarely at the manager's doorstep.

After shared responsibility: Decision making is shared with workers whose expertise fits the current need. Credit is celebrated and mistakes become opportunities for learning and improvement, not blame.

Before shared responsibility: Information "belongs" to the manager. The accountability buck stops here.

After shared responsibility: Information flows among all workers, including the manager. The accountability buck moves with it. Everyone understands that the best decisions and actions come when everyone has access to the information they need.

Before shared responsibility: The manager is burdened, weighed down by being the only person his or her boss deems trustworthy.

After shared responsibility: The load on the manager is lightened; the trust between manager and employees grows.

Before shared responsibility: The manager is forced always to be on the spot, available for trouble-shooting, ready with an answer at any time. (How can you take any time off under such circumstances?)

After shared responsibility: The manager is confident of the capabilities of the employees, available for consultation, a partner in finding answers.

OK, OK. This all sounds well and good. The picture's a pretty one. But how does anyone—Michelle, for example, or you—take the empowering journey to shared responsibility? Here's the route, in eight steps.

1. **Start small.** Choose one task in which to share responsibility, then choose an individual whose skills—combined with yours—match the demands of the task.
2. **Ensure understanding.** With the selected individual, discuss the task, the information needed to accomplish it, and the resources to be used.
3. **Decide who will do what and when.** Map the task, information, and resources—and the skills each of you brings to the task. If one thing must occur before another, agree on who (either or both of you) will make it happen and when.
4. **Write it down.** Put your “understandings” in writing, including the desired outcome (nothing lengthy, but clear and complete). Make a contract.
5. **Establish milestones.** Agree on times or events that will require each of you to make contact with the other, to guarantee that your task is on a steady course, not unnecessarily detoured.
6. **Don't be afraid to revise your plan.** As you share information and duties, you may make discoveries that give your project a new twist or that present new opportunities. Use your combined strengths to venture down some uncharted paths, if that seems appropriate or advantageous.

12 Empowering Employees

7. **Don't be afraid *not* to revise your plan.** If you can accomplish your task satisfactorily (albeit a little less inventively) without changing your original plan, and this shared responsibility stuff is still a little scary, stick with your original plan. You can be adventurous next time.
8. **When it's over, recap.** Once the task is complete, revisit what you did, why you did it, and how it turned out—not just the task itself, but your shared roles and responsibilities. Share with each other what you learned, what worked especially well, what you might change next time. Then, celebrate!

Why take all these steps? Maybe Michelle and Tom can illustrate it best.

To their credit, Tom and Michelle acknowledged that on their first steps on the empowering journey, they encountered some obstacles—but they didn't let these discourage them. They picked another task and used the eight-step process.



Smart
Managing

The Eight Steps to Shared Responsibility

1. Start small.
2. Ensure understanding.
3. Decide who will do what and when.
4. Write it down.
5. Establish milestones.
6. Don't be afraid to revise your plan.
7. Don't be afraid *not* to revise your plan.
8. When it's over, recap—and celebrate!

The result was decidedly different this time. They completed their task easily, ahead of schedule, and they generated one new idea that would have a healthy impact on another task they want to try.

When they recapped the experience, they began to realize that some “un-tasklike” things had happened too. They knew much more about each other, who was good at

one thing, who at another. They increased the quantity of information that flowed between them. They could easily account to each other—and anyone else who wanted to know—for just what they'd accomplished. Michelle and Tom were starting to


feel more comfortable with the idea of an empowering organization and the changes it suggested for them. They didn't expect everything to go smoothly, but they had shared responsibility and were beginning to trust one another.

Empowering Is Vital and Energetic

Thus far, we've described the act of empowering as starting small and growing, as being at first additive then exponential, as beginning with one or two individuals then spreading throughout an organization. Sounds like a pretty vital and energetic way to operate, don't you think? You'll want to know some ways to keep those levels up, won't you?

Here are some ideas for infusing yourself and your workplace with vitality and energy. First you lay the foundation for this empowering journey as you begin to create power and share responsibility. And then build on the foundation with actions like these:

- **Encourage health.** Whether it's that your cafeteria serves fresh vegetables and fruits instead of canned, or that your budget allows for upgrading to more ergonomic equipment and furnishings, or that you encourage workers to move away from their computers for five minutes every hour, act in ways that show how you value health.
- **Promote community involvement.** A company that shares its time and talent with the community becomes more of a community itself—and a more satisfying place for valuable workers and managers to spend their time and talent.
- **Model a sense of humor.** We don't mean that you have to be a good joke-teller. We mean that laughter is good



Working Together

Whenever two or more people work together to accomplish goals in a trusting and open-minded way, they'll find that they learn from one another and build on each other's strengths. This is part of the reason creating an empowering environment makes sense. It helps the organization better achieve goals and objectives.

Smart Managing



Keep 'Em Healthy

A healthy workforce is a more productive workforce. And when employees understand that you care about their health, you enhance their commitment to the company and to their work.

for us all, physically and emotionally. So recognize that not all business is serious business, and employ humor to make yourself and those around you feel better.

- **Daydream a little—and allow it in others.** If you're constantly blinded by the headlights of today's crisis, you may never see the glow of a revolutionary idea. Give your mind a rest, and it's more likely to give you a fresh outlook.
- **Play a game every now and then.** Whether it's Scrabble in the break room, checkers on the lawn, or a vigorous game of basketball in the lot across the street, playing together means seeing a different side of the people you work with. You may discover hidden skills or knowledge. You may uncover qualities that a shy or boisterous facade otherwise masks.
- **Learn one new thing.** The new thing doesn't have to be intellectual or skillful or useful. You could learn to pronounce five words in the language of one of your customers, you could ask a coworker to teach you that new dance step he's been raving about, you could bone up on the history of a famous local resident. We're betting you'll want to learn one more new thing, and another, and
- **Introduce yourself to someone you pass in the hall every day but don't know**—someone outside your department or on another floor or in the next office suite. That person might just be someone who can give you advice, a new perspective, or maybe even change your worldview.
- **Break one old habit.** If you drive to work the same way every day, take a different route. If you return phone calls every day at 1:00, do it at 9:00 instead. Do one task differently; break out of that rut.

Taken together, activities like these energize you and those who work with you by making everyone feel better and think

more clearly, expanding your knowledge, revitalizing your curiosity, extending the sphere of people who influence you. Be aware, though, that these actions may have unexpected side effects. You may find yourself devoting less time and energy to stress, conflict, and mind-deadening routine. But that's the idea.

Energize and Revitalize



- Encourage health.
- Reach out.
- Model a sense of humor.
- Daydream a little.
- Play a game.
- Learn one new thing.
- Introduce yourself to someone new.
- Break one old habit.

Empowering Is Inclusive, Democratic, and Long-Lasting

For 30 years now, one organization we know of has “reorganized” or “restructured” or “reengineered”—or just changed its name—with discouraging regularity. It has trained, retrained, and trained again, sometimes the same workforce, sometimes a new one. All this change has come from the top of the organization, the announcement of each change held captive until a legislative mandate or court order or piece of bad publicity forced its release.

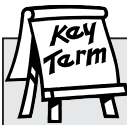
Having once been part of this organization, we have little reason to hope that the next 30 years will be any better. But we're virtually certain they'll be worse, that is, if the organization is still around. The likelihood is it will not be.

We don't mean to say that there aren't good people in this organization, good support staff, good-communicating managers, good-hearted folks, good-thinking workers. We do mean to say that there are secrets in this organization, held by upper management but not by those who need the information. There's an entrenched hierarchy in this organization, with few channels of communication for sharing ideas with those at the top. Performance is rewarded by a change in title or a slight boost in pay; it's sometimes punished in the same ways.

So what can this organization do in the face of changing times except to superficially reorganize itself once again? It's

what they've always done. Not having an awareness of the benefits of real change—the creation of an empowering culture—they have no way of knowing that an old map with a new name is still an old map. They have no way of realizing that their watchdogs and competitors are empowering themselves in a new century. They have no inkling that they may not survive beyond the beginning of the new century.

They're victims of the change-me/fix-me syndrome. A project falls on its face, a budget is cut, a department experiences massive resignations: they call a consultant, hire a change agent, bring in the latest, greatest training program. All in hopes



Change-me/fix-me syndrome A wrong-headed approach to problem solving where managers make changes to supposedly solve problems without really understanding the true nature of the problem or what actions they can take to truly prevent such problems from occurring in the future. It is a quick-fix approach that never really fixes anything.

that someone else will “fix” them. All efforts and saviors are doomed before they start.

Don't misunderstand: we're not knocking reorganization, the use of consultants, or training. We're knocking how they're misused.

When you hear “inclusive, democratic, long-lasting,” what images do

you conjure up? Probably not an organization like the one we've just described. Maybe we can get some ideas from revisiting Tom and Michelle.

“I've been reading up on this ‘empowering’ stuff, Michelle,” Tom says at the start of their next meeting. “Empowering organizations really aren't anything new. Some organizations were behaving in empowering ways long before someone coined the phrase. From what I can tell, empowering organizations—no matter whether they've been ‘practicing’ for decades or for weeks—are committed to including their workforces in decision making and planning. They continuously move toward more participation in envisioning the company's goals and reinforcing

Change Isn't Always Good



Change is a constant in our lives, and it's often a good thing. In fact, it's a vital part of an empowering journey. Change is usually not a good thing if it's done just for the sake of change, however. Don't fall victim to the change-me/fix-me syndrome. Empowering organizations realize that mutual influence, the creative distribution of power, shared responsibility, vitality and energy, and inclusive, democratic systems are critical to their survival, health, and growth. And all of these things take time to develop. So be suspicious of "overnight cures." They're tempting, but they just may lead you down an old road with a new name.

its ideals. And they end up being more productive for longer periods of time. Pretty impressive stuff."

Michelle thinks for a moment, then responds. "Remember that first 'empowering' experience we thought we had—where we both fell on our faces because we didn't really understand what empowering was? I thought we were supposed to change the way we operated overnight. Boy, was I off target! No wonder you didn't exactly trust my judgment. Now I'm beginning to realize that empowering is understanding where you're headed and why, it's accepting that it's a process, and it's based on solid values like the ones you just mentioned."

What can we learn from Michelle's and Tom's experiences? Here's one valuable lesson: If empowering is something you see as flipping a switch, changing your bottom line overnight, miraculously transforming your workforce into a participatory one just because you declare it so—well, you're bound for disappointment. And this is not to mention generating or reinforcing a lot of cynicism and distrust in workers who've already seen one too many flavor-of-the-month changes.

If, instead, you picture empowering as an ongoing process that ultimately includes all members of the organization and is founded less on the vision of one and more on the participation of many, you're more likely to produce longer-lasting results that are based on strong, unchanging values. And you'll be working with workers who can change their methods as necessary to

meet the challenges of competition or expanding markets or new technology, because their values remain unchanged.

Now that we've confirmed what empowering *is*, we'll uncover what it *does* in Chapter 2.

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 1

- Remember that an empowering organization sees achieving empowerment as a lifelong effort, not an endpoint to be checked off a list of objectives. Empowering an organization is an active journey, not a static destination.
- Recognize that empowering is not something you do to or for someone else, it is not making changes for the sake of change, and it is not something that applies to “them” and not to “us.”
- Mutual influence, as practiced by an empowering manager, affects, supports, weighs, and impresses others—and accepts the same from them. The result? Shared information, knowledge, and feelings.
- A creative distribution of power reduces control, force, and advantage of one person over another. Instead, power is generated by and expands from each individual. When two people combine their power, the result is often greater than the sum.
- Shared responsibility boosts the flow of information, spreads accountability, and fosters partnerships that free managers from lone decision making and trouble-shooting.
- Infusing your workplace with vitality and energy—by modeling a sense of humor, encouraging health, introducing yourself to someone new, for example—reduces stress, conflict, and mind-deadening routine.
- Inclusion, democratic participation, and long-lasting effects strengthen empowering organizations. Such organizations rarely fall victim to the change-me/fix-me syndrome or flavor-of-the-month “cures.”