



CHAPTER 10

Strengthen Others

CASEY MORK, SUPPLY CHAIN STRATEGY and transformation advisor with DSV-Global Transport and Logistics, has worked with a variety of organizations and witnessed many times how a leader's actions can make or break a team's effectiveness. He shared a transitional experience of a new manager who took over the reins from their previous one who believed he was smarter than everyone else was.

From the outset, when the new manager took over, he shared information with Casey's team, involved them in discussions and deliberations, allowed them discretion over their decisions, and provided sufficient latitude to create their own boundaries. As a result, Casey and his team began to realize that they were now accountable for their own success and failure. They became more self-determining, Casey said.

Our team suddenly felt much more powerful because of this transfer of decision making. When [the manager] told us the project looked fantastic, it made us feel like we created something, instead of executed on someone else's plan. He shared his power with us, which led to an increased ability and desire to execute. Given more opportunities to be self-directed and make real decisions, we began to gain this

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incredible new sense of competence and confidence—because we knew our success and failure was on us and us alone.

Looking back on this experience, Casey reflected on how "real latitude and not close supervision allowed for the most efficient means of collaboration." Transferring power to group members, he noted, "also conveys trust, which will almost always lead to a better work product." Casey realized that the most effective leaders help people both feel and be more powerful and capable of making things happen on their own.

Casey's experience illustrates how exemplary leaders make a commitment to *Strengthen Others*. They enable people to take ownership of and responsibility for their group's success by enhancing their competence and their confidence in their abilities, by listening to their ideas and acting on them, by involving them in important decisions, and by acknowledging and giving credit for their contributions.

Creating a climate in which people are fully engaged and feel in control of their own lives is at the heart of strengthening others. Exemplary leaders build an environment that develops people's abilities to perform a task and bolster their self-confidence. In a climate of competence and confidence, people don't hesitate to hold themselves personally accountable for results, feel profound ownership for their achievements, and do all they can to make extraordinary things happen.

To Strengthen Others, exemplary leaders engage in two essentials. They

- ▶ *Enhance self-determination*
- ▶ *Develop competence and confidence*

Leaders significantly increase people's belief in their ability to make a difference. They move from being *in control* to *giving over control* to others, becoming their coach. They help others learn new skills, develop existing talents, and provide the institutional supports required for ongoing growth and change. In the final analysis, leaders turn their constituents into leaders.

Enhance Self-Determination

Leaders accept and act on this paradox of power: you become more powerful when you give your power away. Long before *empowerment* entered the mainstream vocabulary, exemplary leaders understood how important it was for their constituents to feel strong, capable, and efficacious. People who feel weak, incompetent, and insignificant will consistently underperform; they are disengaged, hoping to flee the organization, and are ripe for disenchantment, even revolution.

Individuals who are not confident about their power, regardless of their organizational position or place, tend to hoard whatever shreds of influence they have. Powerless managers tend to adopt petty and dictatorial styles. Powerlessness also creates organizational systems in which political skills are essential, and "covering your backside" and "passing the buck" are the preferred modes of handling interdepartmental differences.¹

We've asked thousands of people over the past thirty years to tell us about their own experiences of feeling powerless as well as powerful. Think about actions or situations that have made you feel powerless, weak, or insignificant, like a pawn in someone else's chess game. Are they similar to what others have reported?

Representative Actions and Conditions That People Report Make Them Feel POWERLESS

"No one was interested in, listened to, or paid attention to my opinion or questions."

"I had no input into an important decision that affected the way I did my work."

(continued)

"My boss argued with me in front of my colleagues—even called me names."

"My decisions were not supported, even though my manager said he would back me up"

"Someone else took credit for my hard work and results."

"Information essential to my work was withheld, or I was excluded from the information loop."

"I was given responsibility but no authority to hold others accountable."

Now think about what it's like when you feel powerful—strong, efficacious, like the creator of your own experience. Are your recollections similar to what others recall?

**Representative Actions and Conditions
That People Report
Make Them Feel POWERFUL**

"All the important information and data were shared with me."

"I was able to exercise discretion about how we would handle a situation."

"I made decisions about key aspects of the project."

(continued)

"The organization invested resources in helping me to learn."

"Management publicly expressed great confidence in my ability."

"The supervisor told others about the great work I was doing."

"My manager took the time to let me know how I was doing and where I could be improving."

As you examine what people say about powerless and powerful times, there is one clear and consistent message: *feeling powerful—literally feeling "able"—comes from a profound sense of being in control of your life.* People everywhere share this fundamental need. When you feel able to determine your own destiny, when you believe you can mobilize the resources and support necessary to complete a task, then you will persist in your efforts to achieve. However, when you feel controlled by others, when you believe that you lack support or resources, you naturally show little commitment to excel. Even though you may comply, you still realize how much more you could contribute, if you wanted to.

In strengthening others, leaders show they believe that people are smart and capable of figuring things out. As Ritesh Mehta, product manager and enterprise architect at SAP Success Factors, recalls:

When I was given a leadership role for the first time, I just treated it as powerful position. I used to follow a dictatorial style, and found that I had a hard time winning my team's trust, and I saw resentment everywhere. I quickly realized my mistake and then started giving away my power to my team. As a result, my team started trusting my actions, the team's results provided us high visibility in the organization, and

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I got special appreciation for being the leader of this high-performing team.

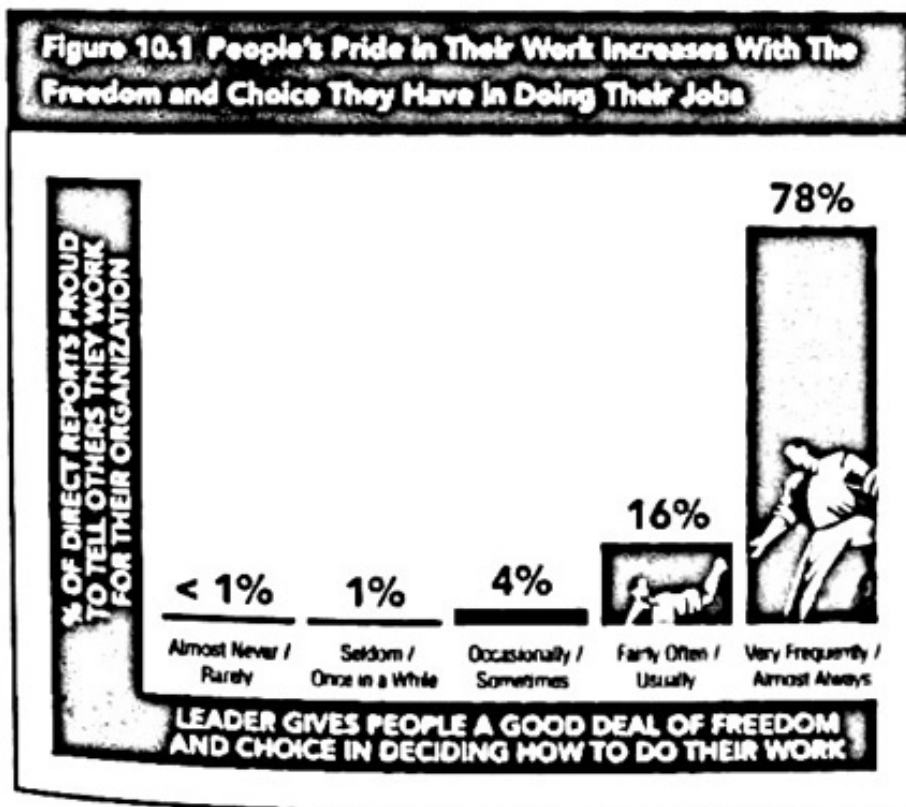
Similarly, Kinjal Shah, a software engineering leader with Quark, views leadership as "not about having more power," but, he says, "about empowering and enabling others around you to be leaders. People feel more empowered when they have decision-making power that could make real impact." In their development of new software designs, every member is expected to give their input, and if a team member has questions or concerns, they are fully addressed before moving forward with the development. According to Kinjal, this serves two purposes: "Because everyone's input is considered, they feel empowered, and everyone is aware of what is happening in other parts of the Quark system and they have a say in how it gets developed." As a result, he says, "team members feel more responsible for the system as a whole. And since people feel powerful, they are willing to take on leadership responsibilities in other parts of the organization as the opportunities present themselves."

Exemplary leaders, like Ritesh and Kinjal, give their power away by enhancing their constituents' self-determination, based on the core principles of choice, latitude, and personal accountability. They soon realize that leadership actions that increase others' sense of self-determination, self-confidence, and personal effectiveness make them more powerful and significantly enhance the energy and commitment they put forward.²

Provide Choices Freedom is the ability to make choices. People who perceive they don't have any choices feel trapped, and like rats in a maze, when left with no alternatives, they typically stop moving and eventually shut down. By giving employees genuine autonomy, leaders can reduce the sense of powerlessness and stress that people feel and increase their willingness to exercise more fully their capabilities. Researchers at the Delgado Lab for Social and Affective Neuroscience at Rutgers University report that the perception of increased choice in itself activates reward-related circuits in the brain, which makes people feel more at ease, enhancing their willingness to experiment and venture outside of their comfort zones.³ High-performing organizations result

from people willing to work beyond their job descriptions, and this is because they have the latitude and discretion to make choices about both the work they do and how they do it.

In our research, we ask people about the extent to which their leader "gives people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work," and we examine how this leadership behavior affects their attitudes about the workplace. Look at the results in Figure 10.1 in regard to how proud they feel to tell others they work for their organization. Notice that less than 1 percent of direct reports strongly agree that they feel proud to tell others they work for their organization when their leader "almost never or rarely" gives them much freedom and choice. This sentiment improves very little even when the leader "fairly often or usually" engages in this leadership behavior. The dramatic shift in pride occurs (rising to nearly 80 percent) when people report that their leader provides freedom and choice "very frequently"



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to "almost always." The shape of this curve is similar to that produced in regard to feelings of commitment, motivation, and productivity by direct reports as a function of feeling freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.

How direct reports evaluate the overall effectiveness of their leader is also strongly related to how frequently that leader gives people freedom and choice. Again, the increase in the slope of the curve is dramatic. Only 20 percent of direct reports agree or strongly agree that their leader is effective at the low end of the continuum and this increases to nearly 95 percent agreement when that leader very frequently or almost always uses this leadership behavior.

Tim Haun is a chiropractor and personal trainer, affiliated for over thirty years with the Bay Club Santa Clara (California). He's experienced numerous changes in senior management, and some have worked out better than others.* He recounted one restructuring that underscores the significance of providing choices when expecting high performance in return.

One of the first organizational changes was the establishment of monthly group goals for the number of hours worked, which gave trainers the freedom to both set individual goals for themselves and take responsibility for recruiting clients to fill that number of hours. The trainers' goals and the actual number of hours that each worked were announced at monthly meetings, and thus accountability made them all feel in charge of their own destiny. They felt as though each was running his or her own business within the larger business, which enhanced their sense of control and power. What's more, the company hosted continuing education workshops, free of charge, at various points during the year. Trainers could choose to attend these events or not, but most of them did.

The result, according to Tim, was not just an increase in their overall total number of billable hours (and thus salaries), greater freedom and choices about various aspects of the trainers' responsibilities built their commitment and fostered productivity. This example shows how leaders exercise guided autonomy: they set standards and hold everyone accountable for the shared values and vision while giving people the opportunity to make choices about how they will enact them.

You want people to take initiative and be self-directed. You want them to think for themselves and not continually ask someone else, "What should I do?" You can't develop this ability if you tell people what to do and how to do it. People can't learn to act independently unless they get to exercise some degree of choice. If they can act only in ways prescribed by the organization, then how can they respond when the customer or another employee behaves in ways that aren't in the script? If they have to ask the "boss" what to do—even if they think they know what needs to be done and feel they could do it—then they are going to be slowing down the entire organization. Moreover, if their boss doesn't know, then that person will have to ask his or her manager; and up the ladder it goes. The only way to create an efficient and effective organization is to give people the chance to use their best judgment in applying their knowledge and skills. This implies, of course, that you've prepared them to make these choices and that you've educated them in the guiding principles of the organization.

Give people choices, and let them make decisions on their own, and then it becomes quite difficult to blame "the company" (or management) when things don't go their way or when they don't like the way things are going. After all, if they don't like the way something is done, they can do something about it—and taking initiative is unerringly one of the things leaders do. By providing choices, you are enabling people to lead themselves.

Structure Jobs to Offer Latitude If you want higher levels of performance and greater initiative from your constituents, you must be proactive in designing work that allows them latitude, a close cousin of choice. To feel in control of their own work lives, people need to be able to take nonroutine action, exercise independent judgment, and make decisions that affect how they do their work, without having to check with someone else.³ It means being creative and flexible—liberated from a standard set of rules, procedures, or schedules—and the payoff can be enormous.

Integrating global operations is a challenge for many companies, and Gyan Patra's experience as a software development manager at Walmart

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.com was no exception. Gyan had learned early in his career that most issues "related to *offshore* team integration are hardly anything about technical competency." His own research revealed that the best practices of successful offshore teams were not different from those of any highly successful team, for example, making sure everyone has clarity about their roles and responsibilities and clearly defined deliverables, where contributors have end-to-end responsibility. As Gyan explained

In the design phase, the offshore team members were able to do end-to-end design and their own research instead of the onsite coordinator looking over everyone's shoulders all the time. The offshore team members felt they had the freedom to be creative and had ownership of the product they developed, good or bad. The offshore developers felt they had the latitude to develop the product and were able to use their skillsets at an optimum level. They stopped finger pointing, and the ensuing culture fostered a high degree of accountability. The offshore team members no longer felt bossed around. Now, they spent more time fixing real technical issues versus arguing with the home office.

Responsiveness emerges, along with additional discretionary efforts, when people have the necessary leeway to meet customer needs (whether internal or external) and sufficient authority to take action to meet customer wants.

There's a fundamental difference between being in an organization where people are trusted and given the latitude to use their judgment, and one where people are seen merely as cogs in some machine, neither trusted nor respected for their common sense. Of course, there may be a certain amount of risk in giving people the latitude to make important decisions, but with providing a greater degree of trust also comes a larger degree of accountability, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction and profitability. Researchers have shown, for example, that increasing

buyers' discretion on procurement decisions increases their effectiveness, as well as finding that managers who avoid making decisions have a negative impact on organizational performance.⁶

Only adaptive individuals and organizations will thrive in today's dynamic global environment. This means you need to support more and greater individual discretion to meet the changing demands of customers, clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders. With increased discretion comes an increased ability to use and expand one's talents, training, and experience. The payoff is improved performance.

Foster Accountability If you were to ask people the question, "Do you wash a rental car before returning it?" they would laugh and think you must be crazy for asking. "Of course not," they'll say. Why? Because they don't own that car, they're only renting it; they know the rental company will wash the car when they return it. Ask those same people if they wash their own car or take it to a local carwash and most everyone will say, "Yes." Why? Because it's their car; they own it. When people feel they own something, that it's theirs, they will take care of it. However, when they feel they're only renting it, they are much less likely to treat it with the same care as they would something they own. People just do not strive to maintain, protect, and take responsibility for things they feel they don't own or for which they have no accountability.

How many people in your organization would say they don't take responsibility for something because it's not theirs? Figuratively speaking, how many would say that they aren't accountable for "washing the car"—or for taking safety precautions, fixing software glitches, attending to someone else's customer, or the like? How many are just renting their workspaces? For those who feel that way, the effect on their engagement in the organization is quite negative. While people may not own their work in the formal or legal sense of the word, research indicates that when they feel psychological ownership of it, they are significantly more likely to be committed to their organizations.⁷ Exemplary leaders appreciate that they have to create this sense of psychological ownership if they are going to make extraordinary things happen.

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Justin Deperhart admitted that when he first became a manager, he didn't appreciate how important it was to foster accountability. He confessed:

I often would lead by telling my team what needed to be done and then essentially standing over their shoulder ensuring that it was being done correctly. I thought I was doing a great job providing support for my team and value for the company. Many of the members of my team were inexperienced and at first, they liked this style of leadership. However, after gaining some experience, they began to show their frustration with my style. I realized I was not allowing the team the freedom to perform their jobs and develop. After the first six or so months, I realized I needed to change my behavior.

As operations leader for Owens Corning's Santa Clara (California) plant and regional technical leader with their Toronto and Edmonton (Canada) plants, Justin realized he needed to behave differently. His experience taught him many things, "but one stands out above all," he said:

It is a statement that I make to the team: "The more a leader develops his or her team, the stronger the team members and the better the results will be." However, to develop a team, you have to allow them to take on new challenges and risks. If you only focus on today's result and pay no attention to the potential of tomorrow, you and your team will never grow.

When people take personal responsibility and are held accountable for their actions, their colleagues are much more inclined to want to work with them and are more motivated to cooperate in general. Individual accountability is a critical element of every collaborative effort. Everyone has to do his or her part for a group to function effectively.

While leading a process improvement initiative for Citibank Philippines, Ana Aboitiz Delgado realized that she would have to get many people involved and responsible for the project's success. However, dividing tasks and assigning responsibilities were difficult for her because, Ana explained, "I had full responsibility for the project's success, and I did not know how to pass on this sense of accountability to team members who did not report to me directly. I was afraid that they would fail, and this would reflect on me." She started by acknowledging to her team that she didn't have much knowledge about the particulars of the bank's statement rendition process and recognized that they had the technical expertise. As a result, she proposed that her role would be to provide guidance, Six Sigma training, and support for eliminating obstacles the team might encounter along the way. Just as she proposed her role, she decided to give team members a chance to identify responsibilities where each felt they could add the most value based on their expertise or interests. Given the opportunity to mold their role in the project, they became more engaged in the project. Right away, they began to brainstorm aloud and interact with each other.

Ana shared her power (in this case, her knowledge) with the team and validated them by highlighting that they were the experts. She provided choices and the latitude to take on responsibility because they were the stakeholders in this process. She made them powerful by following through on her promise to implement on the operations floor the ideas they came up with. "I learned," said Ana, "that to foster accountability, you need to delegate authority and give others a chance to take responsibility. By trusting others with responsibility, you are letting them know you believe in them and that you have confidence that they can achieve it."

Ana understood something very fundamental about strengthening others: the power to choose rests on the willingness to be held accountable. She learned that the more freedom of choice people have, the more personal responsibility they must accept. There's also a bonus: the more that people believe that everyone else is taking responsibility for his or her part of the project—and has the competence to do it—the more trusting and the more cooperative they're going to be. People will be more confident in doing their part when they believe others will do theirs. This interconnectedness between choice and accountability takes on increasing

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importance in virtually linked and global workplaces. Another benefit is that as others assume more responsibility, leaders can expend more energy in other areas, enhancing their spheres of influence, and bringing additional resources back to their units.

Some believe that teams and other cooperative endeavors minimize individual accountability. They argue that if people are encouraged to work collectively, somehow they'll take less responsibility for their actions than if they are encouraged to compete or to do things on their own. The evidence doesn't support this point of view.⁸ It's true that some people become social loafers when working in groups, slacking off while others do their jobs for them. However, this doesn't last for long, because their colleagues quickly tire of carrying the extra load. Either the slacker steps up to the responsibility, or the team wants that person removed—provided the team has shared goals and shared accountability.

Enhancing self-determination means giving people control over their lives. It means you have to give them something of substance to control and for which they are accountable. Here are some examples on how to foster individual accountability:

- ▶ Make certain that everyone, no matter the task, has a customer.
- ▶ Substantially increase signature authority at all levels.
- ▶ Remove or reduce unnecessary approval steps.
- ▶ Broadly define jobs (e.g., as projects, not tasks).
- ▶ Provide greater freedom of access, vertically and horizontally, inside and outside the organization.

Remember to provide the necessary resources—for example, materials, money, time, people, and information—for people to perform autonomously. There's nothing more disempowering than to have lots of responsibility for doing something but nothing to do it with. People's increased sphere of influence should be relevant to the pressing concerns and core technology of the business. Choosing the color of the paint for the hallways may be a place to start, but you'd better give people influence over more substantive issues in time. For example, if quality is the top

priority, find ways to expand people's influence and discretion over issues of quality control and process improvements.

Develop Competence and Confidence

Choice, latitude, and accountability fuel people's sense of powerfulness and control over their lives. However, as necessary as enhancing self-determination is, it's insufficient. Without the knowledge, skills, information, and resources to do a job expertly, and without feeling competent to execute skillfully the choices required, people feel overwhelmed and disabled. Even if they have the resources and skills, there may be times when people don't have confidence that they're allowed to use them or that they'll be backed up if things don't go as well as expected. There may be times when they just lack the self-confidence to do what they know they need to do.

Developing competence and building confidence are essential to delivering on the organization's promises and maintaining the credibility of leaders and team members alike. To make extraordinary things happen, you must invest in strengthening the capacity and the resolve of everyone in the organization. This is especially important during times of great uncertainty and significant change.

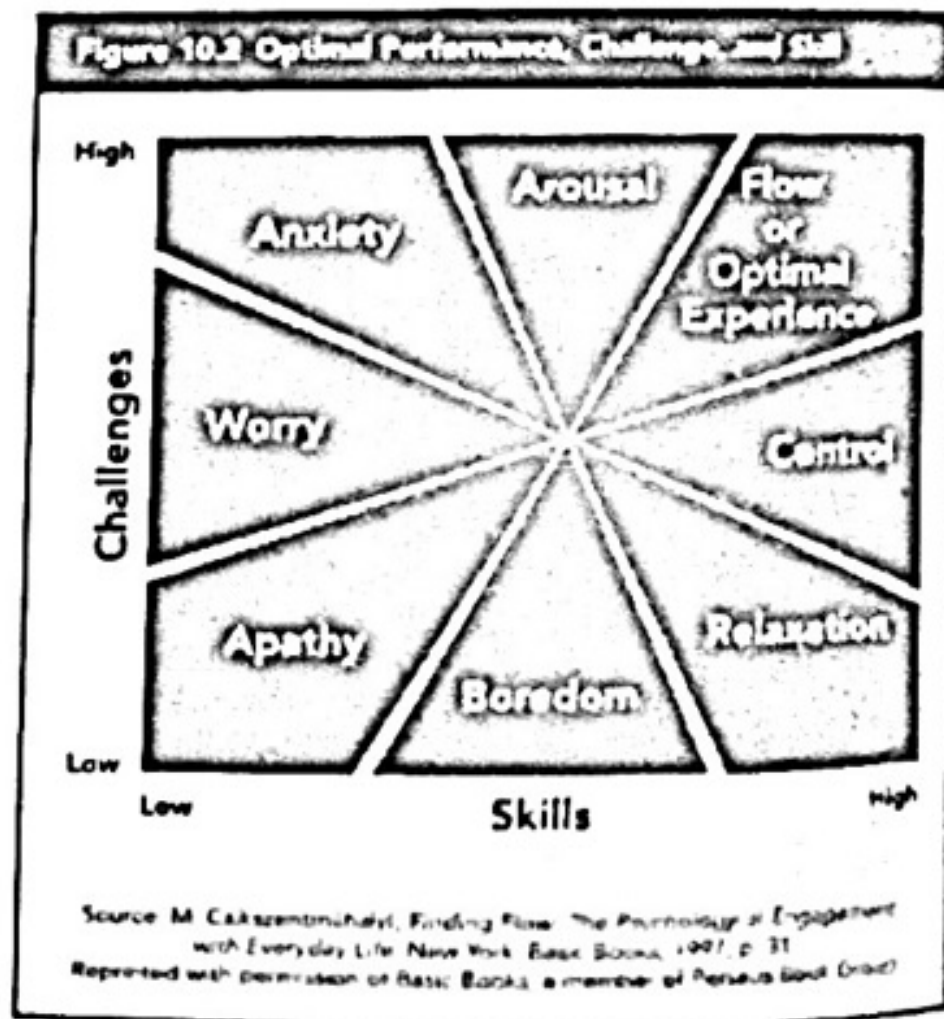
Think about a time when the challenge you faced was greater than the skills you had. How did you feel? If you're like most people, you felt anxious, nervous, scared, and the like. Now think of a time when your level of skill was greater than the level of challenge in the job. How did you feel? Bored and apathetic is most likely. Do you do your best work when you're anxious or bored? Of course you don't. You do it when the challenge you face is just slightly greater than your current level of skill. That's when you feel stretched but not stressed out.

People often refer to being "in the flow" when they feel that they are performing effortlessly and expertly despite the difficulty of the experience. They are confident that their skills match the level of challenge in the experience, even though it might be a bit of a stretch. Claremont

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Graduate University professor of psychology, founder and co-director of the Quality of Life Research Center. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has spent his entire academic career studying the relationship of challenge and skill to optimal performance. He finds that "when high challenges are matched with high skills, then the deep involvement that sets flow apart from ordinary life is likely to occur." Figure 10.2 shows a graphic illustration of this relationship.

Although flow is not possible with every single task in every situation, it characterizes peak performances. Exemplary leaders strive to create the conditions that make flow possible. That means you need to assess continuously your constituents' capacity to perform in the context of the



challenges they face. Such assessment requires attention to the willpower and the skills of each person they lead. Jeff Allison, director of operations for PW Enterprises, confronted precisely this situation when he relocated the company's operations center in Fargo, North Dakota, to the research and development center in Santa Cruz, California. This change meant the Fargo operations staff no longer had daily interactions with him, and as Jeff explained, "they had to learn to trust themselves and each other, and become more independent in solving problems on their own." He realized, "that if I built up their competencies and had them take ownership of operations, their confidence would increase and that they would do a great job." In taking these actions, Jeff was intuitively making use of the "flow" paradigm.

Educate and Share Information People can't do what they don't know how to do. Therefore, when you increase the latitude and discretion of your constituents, you also have to increase expenditures on training and development. When people aren't sure about how to perform critical tasks or are fearful of making mistakes, they may be reluctant to exercise their judgment. "Ensuring that employees are given the training they need and involving them in decisions that impact their work creates both competence and commitment," observe researchers Michael Burchell and Jennifer Robin from their studies of "great workplace" companies. Those organizations "understand that as the business continues to grow, they will need employees who can readily step into tomorrow's jobs rather than having them develop necessary skills on the fly, hiring from the outside, or simply losing market opportunity."¹⁰

In Jeff Allison's situation, he took about a month with the Fargo staff to walk through a list of twenty to thirty problems he had addressed over the past year, thereby, in his words, "ensuring that they had the core competencies to solve these or similar situations in the future." For example, Jeff asked them if they could think of better ways to solve the problem, or better yet, think of ways to prevent these problems from happening.

My goal was to get them actively involved in solving issues and proposing ideas. My hope was that the

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more they thought through the process, the more they would understand the process. Operations are the heart of the company, and I wanted the group to trust themselves and believe with confidence that they were capable of anything. They needed to know that any ideas they had were valuable to the company and that we wanted to hear them.

Once Jeff could see them developing the core competencies and the confidence that comes with knowledge, he took the training a step further. He gave each employee a set of hypothetical problems and put them in charge of figuring out how to solve them. He wanted them to use their competencies built up from the training to help instill confidence, he told us.

By problem solving, they could use their skills and develop new ideas on how to make operations better. Once they were confident and had solved a problem, I had them teach the entire team how to solve that problem. This training exercise turned out to be the best activity I could have done and did much more for the team than I ever imagined. While walking through the problems with the team, other team members were very engaged, and you could see their confidence rise. They knew that they could rely on each other, and they knew that they were capable of solving any problem thrown their way.

Strengthening others, as Jeff's experience demonstrates, requires up-front investments in initiatives that develop people's competencies and foster their confidence. Such investments produce profits. Studies find that those companies that spend above-average amounts on training have a higher return on their investment than companies that are below-average spenders. The former also enjoy higher levels of employee

involvement and commitment, better standards of customer service, along with greater understanding of, and alignment with, company visions and values.¹¹ Furthermore, studies report that 40 percent of employees who report receiving poor training leave their positions within the first year. The lack of skills training and development was the determining factor cited in their leaving.¹²

Sharing information is another important educational tactic, and recall that this factor showed up prominently on the list of what made people feel powerful, and when absent made them feel powerless. Silicon Valley author and global strategist Nilofer Merchant echoes this observation: "Everyone is better off when they know why decisions are made with as much accuracy as possible. It gives them an understanding of what matters and provides information on which to base the trade-offs being made constantly at every level. When reasons behind decisions are not shared, the decisions seem arbitrary and possibly self-serving."¹³

For leaders, developing the competence and confidence of their constituents so that they are more qualified, more capable, and more effective, and so that they are leaders in their own right, reflects their appreciation of the truth that they can't get anything extraordinary accomplished all by themselves. Making people smarter is the job of every leader. In today's world, if your constituents aren't growing and learning in their jobs, they're highly likely to leave and find better opportunities.

Organize Work to Build Competence and Ownership

People confronted critical organizational issues in their Personal-Best Leadership case studies. Although it may seem obvious that people do their best when the work is essential to success, this principle is often lost in the day-to-day design of work. Do as exemplary leaders do and organize assignments so that people feel that their work is relevant to the pressing concerns of the business. Moreover, ensure that people experience variety in their tasks and have opportunities to make meaningful decisions about how their work gets accomplished. Find opportunities

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to involve your team on the task forces, committees, teams, and problem-solving groups dealing with the critical functions and issues. Engage them in programs, meetings, and decisions that have a direct impact on their job performance. Actions like these build competence and promote a sense of ownership and accountability.

Remember that your constituents can't act like owners and provide leadership if they lack a fundamental understanding of how the organization operates. To fully comprehend critical organizational issues and tasks, they need to be able to answer such questions as "Who are our most valuable customers, clients, suppliers, and stakeholders? How do they perceive us?" "How do we measure success?" "What has our track record been over the past five years?" "What new products or services will we initiate in the next six months?" If your constituents can't answer critical questions like these, how can they work together to transform shared values and common purposes into reality? How can they know how their performance affects other teams, units, divisions, and ultimately the success of the entire enterprise or endeavor? How can they feel very strong or capable if they don't know the answers to the same questions every "owner" or CEO would know?"

Penny Mayo is the accounting supervisor of a local government agency that has been consolidating services. As a result, Penny had to take on more responsibility, and found herself struggling to let go of some of her payroll duties. While she was committed to ensuring that no payroll mistakes were made, she also recognized that it was a time-consuming task that other people could learn to do. "The problem was me, not the team," she said. "Several people were good candidates to take on these responsibilities. It occurred to me that by not letting go, I wasn't demonstrating the trust I truly had for my team." She finally realized that this was an opportunity to collaborate and strengthen others, and she built ownership in stages. First, she asked for a volunteer who'd be willing to learn payroll, then she offered training and coaching opportunities for that individual to learn and improve. It didn't take too long before that new person was up and running on her own, taking responsibility and assuming ownership of the payroll function."

Like Penny, exemplary leaders carefully look at what constituents are doing in their jobs and figure out where and how to enrich their tasks and positions. They provide sufficient information so that people feel that they have the perspective of owners in making decisions, which fosters greater competence and enhances their self-confidence.

Foster Self-Confidence Even if people know how to do something, a lack of confidence may stop them from doing it. Strengthening others is an essential step in a psychological process that affects the intrinsic need for self-determination. People have an internal need to influence other people and life's events to experience some sense of order and stability in their lives. Feeling confident that they can adequately cope with events, situations, and people prepares them to exercise leadership. Without sufficient self-confidence, people lack the conviction to take on tough challenges. The lack of self-confidence manifests itself in feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and crippling self-doubt. By building people's belief in themselves, you are bolstering their inner strength to forge ahead in uncharted terrain, to make tough choices, to face opposition and the like because they believe in their skills and decision-making abilities.

Self-confidence affects people's performance. In a classic study, researchers told one group of managers that decision-making was a skill developed through practice: the more one worked at it, the more capable one became. In the other group, they told the managers that decision-making reflected their basic intellectual aptitude: the greater one's underlying cognitive capacities, the better his or her decision-making ability. Working with a simulated organization, both groups of managers dealt with a series of production orders requiring various staffing decisions and the establishment of different performance targets. When faced with demanding performance standards, those managers who believed that decision-making was an acquirable skill continued to set challenging goals for themselves, used good problem-solving strategies, and fostered organizational productivity. Their counterparts, who thought that decision-making ability was latent (that is, you either have it or you don't), lost confidence in themselves over time as they

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encountered difficulties. They lowered their aspirations for the organization, their problem solving deteriorated, and organizational productivity declined.¹⁶

In a related set of studies, researchers told managers either that people are easily changeable, or that "work habits of employees are not that easily changeable, even by good guidance. Small changes do not necessarily improve overall outcomes." Those managers with the confidence that they could influence organizational outcomes through their actions maintained a higher level of performance than those who felt that they could do little to change things.¹⁷ Still another study, involving entry-level accountants, found that those with the highest self-confidence were rated ten months later by their supervisors as having the best job performance. Their level of self-confidence was a stronger predictor of job performance than the actual level of skill or training they had received before being hired.¹⁸ In applying these same concepts to teenagers, researchers found that in national field hockey championship competition in Turkey, those with the strongest self-confidence were the most highly motivated, as evidenced, for example, by their intensive practice routines.¹⁹

These studies document what experience underscores: having confidence and believing in your ability to handle the job, no matter how difficult, are essential to promoting and sustaining consistent effort. By communicating to constituents that you also believe that they can be successful, you help them extend themselves and persevere through challenging circumstances.

Coach Although it's true that exemplary leaders communicate their confidence in others, you can't just tell people they can do something if they actually can't. Leaders need to provide coaching, because no one ever got to be the best without the constructive feedback, probing questions, and active teaching by respected coaches.²⁰ Among sales managers, for example, developing their staff is the competency most frequently found among those at the top of their field. In a three-year study of the impact of training, high-improvement learners were four times more likely to have had coaching conversations with their managers than individuals who

showed little or no improvement.²¹ In other words, improvement isn't merely about the training; it's the coaching associated with it. You have to make yourself available to offer advice and counsel as people apply what they have learned in real-time situations.

Mark Soden, the lead performance coach for the Harlequins, a Premiership Rugby Union team in the United Kingdom, and a senior facilitator with a management consultancy firm, Mission Performance, takes the viewpoint that "coaches have to empower each player's dream." He views the coach's role—whether working with athletes or would-be leaders—as needing to move from pushing (the coach's agenda), which operates from a fixed mindset, to pulling (the player's agenda), which generates a growth mindset.²² The Travelers Companies have found that their employees are eight times more engaged when their leaders are evaluated as effective coaches. These employees demonstrate improved capacity, efficiency, and commitment, and they feel most strongly supported by the company.²³

Abhijit Chitnis, the manager for business excellence with India-based Tata Consultancy Services, experienced effective coaching and benefitted from the difference it made in his development. He was just starting out in the corporate world when he was facing his first "really tough" consulting assignment. The pressure only increased when he was chosen to make the solution proposal presentation to their client. Since this was his first client presentation in front of a sizable and senior audience, he was understandably tense and anxious. Abhijit said that his manager, however, took him aside, told him that he was fully confident in his ability and the proposal, and coached Abhijit to take advantage of this opportunity. At delivery time, he told Abhijit during a short break that it was going great, not to worry, and the client loved the proposal. These actions, Abhijit said, boosted "my confidence, and I finished the presentation to great applause." Reflecting on this experience, Abhijit appreciated how "leaders have to coach their teams and keep the motivation and energy flowing so that people can reach their full potential."

When at their best, leaders never take control away from others. They leave it to their constituents to make decisions and assume

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responsibility for them. When leaders coach, educate, enhance self-determination, and otherwise share power, they're demonstrating deep trust in and respect for others' abilities. When leaders help others grow and develop, that assistance is reciprocated. People who feel capable of influencing their leaders are more strongly attached to those leaders and more committed to effectively carrying out their responsibilities. They own their jobs. Good coaches understand that strengthening others requires paying attention and believing that people are smart enough to figure things out for themselves when given the opportunity to make choices, provided with support, and offered feedback. Coaching stretches people to grow and develop their capabilities, and it provides them with opportunities to both hone and enhance their skills in challenging assignments.

Good coaches also ask good questions. This practice is summed up in the motto of Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and the founding president and CEO of the Francis Hesselbein Leadership Institute: "Ask, don't tell." She learned this from renowned management guru Peter Drucker, who noted, "The leader of the future asks; the leader of the past tells."²⁴ The benefits of asking questions are numerous. For one, it gives others the room to think and to frame issues from their perspective. Second, asking questions indicates an underlying trust in people's abilities by shifting accountability, and it has the benefit of creating almost immediate buy-in for the solution. (After all, it's their idea.) Asking questions also puts leaders in a coaching position, more of a guiding role, which frees them up to think more freely and strategically.

The success of every organization is a shared responsibility. As we said in Chapter Nine, you can't do it alone. You need a competent and confident team, and the team needs a competent and confident coach. While you're at it, think about getting a coach yourself. There's no better way to model the behavior you expect from others than by doing it yourself.



TAKE ACTION

Strengthen Others

Strengthening others is essentially the process of turning them into leaders—making people capable of acting on their own initiative. Create a virtuous cycle by extending more power and responsibility to others as they respond successfully. Leaders strengthen others when they make it possible to exercise choice and discretion, when they design options and alternatives to the ways that work and service are conducted, and when they foster accountability and responsibility that compel action.

Leaders develop in others the competence, as well as the confidence, to act and to excel. They make certain that constituents have the necessary data and information to understand how the organization operates, gets results, makes money, and does good work. They invest in people's continuing competence, and they coach them on how to put what they know into practice, stretching and supporting them to do more than they might have imagined possible. Exemplary leaders use questions to help people think on their own, and actively coach people on how to be at their best.

To Enable Others to Act, you must strengthen others by increasing their self-determination and developing competence. This means you must:

1. Take actions that make people feel powerful and in control of their circumstances.
2. Provide people opportunities to make choices about how they do their work and serve their customers.

(continued)

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- 3 Structure jobs so that people have opportunities to use their judgment, developing both greater competence and self-confidence.
4. Find a balance between people's skills and the challenges associated with their work.
- 5 Demonstrate your confidence in the capabilities of constituents and colleagues.
6. Ask questions, stop giving answers.