

7 Discuss how managers can empower others.

empowerment
Sharing power within an organization.

Sharing Power: Empowerment

As modern organizations grow flatter, eliminating layers of management, empowerment becomes more and more important. Jay Conger defines **empowerment** as "creating conditions for heightened motivation through the development of a strong sense of personal self-efficacy."⁷⁶ Sharing power with others makes everyone in the organization more powerful. In the Real World 11.2, read about how the conductor of the New York Philharmonic empowers his orchestra.

Empowerment means sharing power in such a way that individuals learn to believe in their ability to do the job. The driving idea of empowerment is that the

The second step in managing this important relationship is to assess yourself and your own needs in the same way you analyzed your boss's. What are your strengths and weaknesses, and blind spots? What is your work style? How do you normally relate to authority figures? Some of us have tendencies toward counterdependence; that is, we rebel against the boss as an authority and view him or her as a hindrance to our performance. Or, by contrast, we might take an overdependent stance, passively accepting the employee-boss relationship and treating him or her as an all-wise, protective parent. What is your tendency? Knowing how you react to authority figures can help you understand your interactions with your boss.

Once you have done a careful self-analysis and tried to understand your boss, the next step is to work to develop an effective relationship. Both parties' needs and styles must be accommodated. A fund-raiser for a large volunteer organization related a story about her new boss, describing him as cold, aloof, unorganized, and inept. She made repeated attempts to meet with him and clarify expectations, and his usual reply was that he didn't have the time. Frustrated, she almost looked for a new job. "I just can't reach him!" was her refrain. Then she stepped back and considered her boss's style and her own. Being an intuitive-feeling type of person, she prefers constant feedback and reinforcement from others. Her boss, an intuitive thinker, works comfortably without feedback from others and has a tendency to fail to praise or reward others. She sat down with him and cautiously discussed the differences in their needs. This discussion became the basis for working out a comfortable relationship. "I still don't like him, but I understand him better," she said.

Another aspect of managing the relationship involves working out mutual expectations. One key activity is to develop a plan for work objectives and have the boss agree to it.⁷⁴ It is important to do things right, but it is also important to do the right things. Neither party to the relationship is a mind reader, and clarifying the goals is a crucial step.

Keeping the boss informed is also a priority. No one likes to be caught off guard, and there are several ways to keep the boss informed. Give the boss a weekly to-do list as a reminder of the progress toward goals. When you read something pertaining to your work, clip it out for the boss. Most busy executives appreciate being given material as they don't have time to find for themselves. Give the boss interim reports, and let the boss know if the work schedule is slipping. Don't wait until it's too late to take action. The employee-boss relationship must be based on dependability and honesty. This means giving and receiving positive and negative feedback. Most of us are reluctant to give any feedback to the boss, but positive feedback is welcomed at the top. Negative feedback, though tougher to initiate, can clear the air. If given in a problem-solving format, it can even bring about a closer relationship.⁷⁵

Finally, remember you and your boss are on the same team. Follow the golden rule; make your boss look good because you expect the boss to do the same for you.